



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Cantonese/Mandarin
Level(s)	Intermediate 2

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

2013 was the fifth year of presentation of candidates at this level. It is very encouraging to note that there was a 153% increase in the number of candidates. This set of question papers contained a range of well-selected texts, and related clearly to the Themes and Topics for Intermediate 2.

The difficulty of the examination was to standard, and the content was clearly related to the Modern Languages Arrangements. Candidates had been again well prepared by centres for each component. This year, there was an increase in the number of candidates awarded an Upper A.

Centres are to be commended, as the performance of candidates on the whole was highly pleasing. Examiners are particularly delighted to see some solid and very confident responses from centres who entered candidates for the first time this year.

Areas in which candidates performed well

The great majority of candidates seemed well prepared for the examination and had been presented at the level appropriate to their ability.

Reading

It is very pleasing to note a strong performance across all four texts. Candidates dealt competently with the shorter texts, and most handled the longer fourth text well. Centres are to be congratulated for preparing their candidates well.

The topics of 'jobs' and 'lifestyles' were very well received. Candidates seemed to engage fully with the content of the longer texts in particular, and it was encouraging to see the emphasis that had been placed on preparing candidates to tackle the longer texts.

Listening

Once again, candidates are to be congratulated for their impressive performance in this paper overall. It was handled well and with confidence. Candidates seemed particularly strong in the topics of 'hobbies' and 'weather'.

Writing

There is clear evidence that year by year candidates are increasingly well prepared by centres. Many centres had clearly taken on board recommendations on best practice, and this was reflected in the candidates' performance. Many wrote with flair, and with the use of a wider range of vocabulary and expressions. They produced some very convincing job applications.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Reading

Although this paper was tackled with confidence, some candidates unfortunately lost marks needlessly by failing in multiple choice questions to select the correct number of answers. This was unfortunate since this basic error often detracted from the clear knowledge the candidate had demonstrated elsewhere in the paper.

Another area of concern relates to providing insufficient information. At Intermediate 2, candidates are expected to provide fuller responses, and a lack of detail will not attract marks. For example, for question 4d), a suitable answer would have been 'many university graduates cannot find (good) jobs'; whereas some candidates answered 'some students cannot find jobs'. Elsewhere, a specific response was required in 4k). The answer required was 'their entire savings/all their savings' rather than simple 'saving'.

Listening

Overall, Examiners noted pleasing performances from this cohort. However, candidates are reminded to listen carefully and not to prejudge the content.

Writing

There were some highly pleasing performances again in writing. This year, however, it was observed that there was an increase in the number of writings containing persistent errors, eg missing strokes/radicals, which had a significant impact on the overall performance.

Further, it was noted that some candidates squashed entire items of vocabulary into one grid box rather than just a single character, for example 喜欢 (to like) should be fitted into two separate grids rather than into one. Similarly, some candidates split radicals, or confused their order: the character most noted by examiners was 和 (and) — there were quite a few candidates who wrote 口禾.

There were a few instances in which candidates failed to address some compulsory bullet point questions. This was noted even among high-performing candidates. Centres need to be aware of this to ensure their candidates do not lose marks needlessly.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Centres are strongly encouraged to make full use of current resources available such as Hanban and SQA's support materials, as well as resources from SQA's Support Event. The availability of marking instructions is also useful, and can assist with future preparation of candidates.

The following advice should help candidates cope with the demands of the external assessment:

- ◆ Ensure that written responses are constructed in a way that displays a good range of vocabulary and is in line with demands of the Course.

- ◆ Make sure candidates have the necessary dictionary skills, so that they can make effective use of this resource under exam conditions.
- ◆ Remind candidates to maintain a balance between content and accuracy in the Writing paper. Most importantly, they should not leave sections of the paper unattempted.
- ◆ Guide candidates in exam technique — for example, to address multiple choice questions properly by ensuring they select the correct number of responses.
- ◆ In the Writing paper, candidates must realise that each character should be written in a separate grid.
- ◆ In Listening and Reading papers, centres should remind candidates that responses should always be sufficiently detailed.

**Statistical information: update on Courses
Intermediate 2**

Number of resulted entries in 2012	34
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	84
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	78.6%	78.6%	66	70
B	9.5%	88.1%	8	60
C	4.8%	92.9%	4	50
D	3.6%	96.4%	3	45
No award	3.6%	100.0%	3	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.