



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) & Cantonese
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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

2014 was the fifth year of presentation at Advanced Higher level in Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese. The entries this year were stable and similar to last year.

The examination was of an appropriate level of difficulty and in line with Modern Languages Arrangements. Evidently, candidates had been well prepared by centres for each component. The overall level of performance was very strong, with some excellent performances.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the examination. There were some outstanding performances. Most candidates were clearly well prepared for the examination, and familiar with the format.

Performance in Discursive Writing continues to be good, with many excellent performances.

In the Speaking test, centres are to be commended again, as the performance of candidates in this component was highly pleasing.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper I Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to the reading comprehension questions, but again the inferential question was the most challenging part of Paper I. Some candidates wrote unnecessarily long answers in which they repeated most of the information they had given in answer to the comprehension questions rather than addressing the actual question and highlighting the key aspects of the text and any stylistic techniques used by the author. Many candidates mostly provided information from the text rather than attempting to draw inferences. Some included quotes from the text in their answer but just repeated these in English instead of using them to develop their argument.

Translation is another challenging part of this paper, though there was some evidence of improved performance. Grammatical mistakes still appeared in candidates' responses. They often lacked the precision and details required for a fully accurate translation. Many candidates lost marks through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles ('a' and 'the') and verb tenses.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

There was a wide range of performance in the Listening Comprehension. Many candidates were unable to retain sufficient of the details required to answer the more demanding questions accurately, often understanding only part of the information. Many questions

required three points to be stated, but some candidates were only able to give two points or one.

Folio

The Folio was again the least well done of the components of the examination. The range of literary texts and background topics studied was not wide. The weaker performances were those in which candidates were descriptive, rather than critical and analytical, in their discussion. This was often the result of a poor choice of essay title. Often, there was too much of a 'story-telling' approach and insufficient critical analysis, reflection or evaluation. Some offered little analysis or critical reflection in the folio.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Encourage candidates to make full use of the SQA Modern Languages website, especially by referring to External Assessment reports for AH Chinese from previous years as well as the Marking Instructions.

Centres should encourage Chinese teachers/practitioners to work with the Modern Languages department to learn best practice from other colleagues.

Reading and Translation

- ◆ In preparing candidates for the Reading, centres should encourage candidates to read the passage globally to gain overall understanding, so that candidates will be able to answer the questions accurately. Answers to the comprehension questions should contain as much relevant detail as possible.
- ◆ To achieve good marks in Translation, candidates are required to demonstrate both good understanding of Chinese and reasonable expression in English. More attention should be given to the development of translation skills and, in particular, care should be taken with recognising and accurately translating tenses.
- ◆ For the Inferential question, centres should encourage candidates to draw inferences from the passage and not just provide factual information or repeat their answers to the comprehension questions when doing this task. SQA's exemplification of performance in this question, which can be found on the SQA secure website, should be used by teachers to assist candidates in developing inferencing skills.

Listening and Discursive Writing

- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible. Candidates should try to avoid prejudging the content.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to read the essay title carefully and to construct a relevant and personal response in which they may draw upon learned material — but this must be relevant to the essay title.

Folio

- ◆ Read the folio guidelines carefully. The selection of texts could be wider, and a title or essay question that generates debate or critical analysis is crucial.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to choose more varied topics. Try to make the title as specific as possible, and research the area as thoroughly as possible.
- ◆ Share with candidates the assessment criteria for Folio Writing so that they know what is expected in terms of content, analytical approach and structure.
- ◆ It would be advisable to negotiate a choice of essay titles with candidates to ensure more individual responses if they are all studying the same text or background topic.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	23
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	26
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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				
A	92%	92%	24	140
B	8%	100%	2	120
C	0%	0%	0	100
D	0%	0%	0	90
No award	0%		0	-

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.