



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) & Cantonese
Level(s)	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 Higher level in Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese. The number of new centres presenting candidates continues to grow; there are also increasing numbers of candidates from non-native speaker backgrounds. The content of the examination related clearly to the teaching syllabus as indicated by the prescribed Themes and Topics for Higher level, and was of an appropriate level of difficulty.

On the whole, performance was good, and candidates were well prepared for each component.

Areas in which candidates performed well

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

Reading and Translation were again done well, with many excellent performances. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the reading passage accessible.

Candidates again performed very well in both Writing pieces and Speaking. There were many outstanding short essays, in which learned language was successfully adapted to suit the context. Particularly in Directed Writing, many candidates fully engaged with the topic; some very able candidates produced a well-structured and accurate piece of writing containing an excellent range and variety of language structures.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In the **Reading** passage, performance was generally highly satisfactory, though some candidates failed to identify accurate key information, eg Q4(a) 'What does he write songs about?' some candidates answered 'his life' rather than specifying 'life **in Beijing**'. There was still poor use of dictionary in some attempts.

Translation was again challenging. Some candidates lost marks needlessly through lack of precision and accuracy. Many candidates continue to lose marks through a basic lack of accuracy in the appropriate inclusion of articles ('a' and 'the'), in the translation of conjunction words and through misusing tenses (妻子做饭, 女儿学习 as his wife does the cooking, and his daughter **is studying** English) .

Although there were some excellent performance in **Listening**, it is notable that the Listening passage was again seen as the most challenging component of the examination. Candidates found the content and vocabulary of the Listening passage '交通, 污染' ('traffic and pollution') less familiar than last year's topic. Many candidates were unable to retain sufficient details to answer the questions accurately, often understanding part of the

information but not giving sufficient details, eg Question 5(b) 'parking fee' without mentioning 'high/expensive'. Some candidates answered the questions by guessing and taking things for granted without listening to the details of the conversation, eg Question 2, 'the buses are very busy/crowded' not 'public transport is very busy'.

In **Directed Writing**, a number of candidates failed to address all bullet points as required, and they were penalised for this. In particular, many candidates failed to address both parts of the first 'double question' bullet point — 'how you travelled **and what you thought** of the journey'. This issue has been mentioned in PA reports in past years; it still remains, however.

In **Listening/Writing**, overall performance improved, though some candidates copied what they found in the dictionary without checking its accuracy and how to fit it into the whole sentence. There were instances of literal translation from English to Chinese, with over-reliance on the dictionary leading to the creation of wholly new sentences. This issue again has been mentioned in PA reports in the past few years.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

- ◆ It is recommended that centres share this Report with candidates, along with the Marking Instructions for the 2014 paper, to demonstrate to them the correct amount of detail required for a mark at Higher level in both Reading and Listening, as well as the precision required for Translation.
- ◆ Writing Criteria for both Directed Writing and the Short Essay should, likewise, be shared and discussed with candidates.

Reading and Translation

- ◆ Centres should continue with established good practice in preparing candidates for reading questions.
- ◆ Continue to highlight to candidates the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate translation.
- ◆ Centres also should encourage candidates to read the passage globally rather than sentence by sentence, in order to gain full understanding of the whole passage.
- ◆ In the translation section, encourage candidates to pay particular attention to the articles and tenses used. Candidates should also be told not to include information from the translation section in their comprehension answers.

Listening

- ◆ In the Listening passage, encourage candidates to make use of the questions as a means of anticipating the sort of information they will need to extract from the text.

- ◆ Before candidates listen to the recording, they should study the questions and the marks allocated to them. This will help them anticipate the type of information that will be required.
- ◆ It is important that candidates do not presume the context of what they hear and avoid guesswork.
- ◆ Candidates should put a line through any notes that they do not wish to be marked.

Writing

- ◆ Centres should continue with established good practice in preparing candidates for writing.
- ◆ In Directed Writing, writing a long passage but missing out bullet points will not result in a high mark. Advise candidates: to read carefully each bullet point; to ensure that they do not miss any bullet point; and also to ensure that learned material is both relevant and appropriate to the bullet point.
- ◆ Centres should be reminded that writing tasks required the candidates to select, manipulate and recombine learned material appropriate to the specific tasks, not rely on the dictionary to help them to create and invent new sentences.
- ◆ In Directed Writing, if pre-learned material is used, it should be incorporated intelligently and logically into the scenario, making any necessary textual and grammatical adjustments. It is disappointing to note that in some centres candidates write almost identical essays or almost identical paragraphs to specific bullet points.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	66
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	100
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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	91%	91%	91	70
B	1%	92%	1	60
C	5%	97%	5	50
D	1%	98%	1	45
No award	2%		2	-

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.