



External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Mandarin / Cantonese
Level(s)	Intermediate 1

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

The demand of the examination was at a similar level to the previous year's. Question papers presented this year offered a wide range of themes and topics.

Feedback from Markers was very positive. The Reading and Listening papers were deemed to be appropriate in terms of content and level of difficulty, and they clearly related to the prescribed themes and topics for this level. The wording of questions was considered to be clear and fair. Most candidates were presented at the appropriate level, with results indicating a similar performance compared to the previous year's.

There was a considerable decrease in the number of candidates, all of which were entered into the Mandarin (Simplified) qualification. This was to be expected, with most centres delivering the new National 3, 4, and 5 qualifications.

Markers commented that all Marking Instructions worked well, and were clear and straightforward.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Candidates were suitably prepared for the examination, and had been presented at the level appropriate to their ability.

Reading

All questions were completed by all candidates, indicating that lack of time was not an issue. Markers commented that candidates showed a better understanding of basic vocabulary, such as number, days of the week, personal information, hobbies, food and drink. All four questions were well done, although there were some sections in questions 2–4 that proved problematic for some.

Passage 1: An article about the smallest person in China — the topics of vocabulary required were 'number' and 'personal information'. All questions (a–d) were handled well by most candidates.

Passage 2: A menu in a café — the topics of vocabulary required were 'food/drink', 'town and places', 'days of the week'. Questions (a) and (c) answered well by the majority of the candidates, while question (b) on 'town and places' provided a challenge for some.

Passage 3: A Chinese student's life in Scotland — the topics of vocabulary required were 'jobs', 'school life' and 'leisure activities'. Candidates answered well on 'school life' and 'leisure activities'.

Passage 4: An exchange experience in America — the topics of vocabulary required were ‘weather’, ‘food’, ‘leisure’, ‘school life’, ‘town and places’, ‘transport’. Most did well on ‘weather’, ‘food’, ‘leisure’ and ‘transport’.

Listening

There was a mixed performance on the paper. The candidates were particularly assured in tackling the following questions.

- ◆ Question 1 (a)
- ◆ Question 3
- ◆ Question 5 Question 6 Question 8 (b)
- ◆ Question 10

Writing

All candidates were able to fulfil the first two tasks. There were some extended responses that were well-thought through, and which clearly exceeded the requirements of the task.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Reading

In general, candidates found passage 4 the most difficult. In this passage, some candidates found some of the ‘open’ questions challenging.

The topics that appeared to be demanding were occupations/jobs, town and places — for example, question 2 (b) (city centre and library), 3 (b) (nurse), and question 4 (d) (visiting museum and zoo). In addition, some candidates found question 4 (e) (to experience American lifestyle) hard to answer fully. Furthermore, for question 2 (c), some candidates didn’t understand ‘to’ from the text ‘Tuesday to Sunday’, and answered ‘weekend’ or simply ‘Sunday’.

Listening

Listening remains the most difficult component for many candidates. In general, candidates found ‘open’ questions more demanding, for example, Question 1 (b) (zoo), Question 3 (tidy).

Writing

There was a range of performances in this element.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Despite being the last year of the examination for this level, the following suggestions can still be applied to the future learning and teaching in classroom.

- ◆ Assessors are encouraged to broaden candidates' vocabulary by focusing on learning words from contexts. In addition, teachers are encouraged to collect more interesting short stories/texts for class reading, and not just learning words in a dialogue form.
- ◆ Assessors should also try to be familiar with the curriculum guide, especially the part referring to 'the assessment details'.
- ◆ For text-handling questions, teachers should try to supplement some authentic material to get candidates used to it. It is also helpful if candidates could practise the different types of questions prior to the exam.
- ◆ It would be advisable for centres and candidates to make greater use of SQA past papers and marking instructions as part of their exam preparation. This will help ensure candidates are familiar with task requirements and respond accordingly.
- ◆ Candidates should develop the necessary dictionary skills, so that they can make effective use of this resource under exam conditions.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to pay attention to detail and accuracy. Marking Instructions for Reading and Listening, and the Writing Pegged Mark Criteria, are available on the SQA website and show the type of detail required for answers. It is recommended to share these with candidates to show them why particular answers are acceptable or unacceptable.

Reading and Listening

- ◆ Candidates should carefully read the introductions and the key question words for each question such as 'Who', 'What', 'When' or 'Why' etc. They should always be careful and take their time with supported questions, which are not necessarily easier.
- ◆ Centres should ensure, particularly for Listening, that candidates have a sound knowledge of the vocabulary indicated in the prescribed themes and topics. Candidates should learn vocabulary for the common areas, such as time, daily routine, numbers, weather, colours, jobs and careers, places in town, directions, sports and pastimes and food and drink, common adverbs, prepositions, and key question words and adjectives. These are recurring areas in the Reading and Listening papers each year.
- ◆ Candidates must be aware that detailed answers are required and that quite often a one-word answer will not be enough.
- ◆ For Reading, centres must be confident that their candidates have had sufficient practice in coping with four reading texts in the time allocated to the task in the examination.

Writing

- ◆ Centres must reinforce the need for candidates to attempt all bullet points rather than focusing on perfecting one or two. Examiners cannot stress enough the importance of impressing upon candidates the need to make a response in each of the sections.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to use their dictionary in Writing.
- ◆ Teachers are encouraged to use the Pegged Mark Descriptors to give feedback on students' work and show them what is required to produce a good essay.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	31
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	5
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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	60.0%	60.0%	3	70
B	40.0%	100.0%	2	60
C	0.0%	100.0%	0	50
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	45
No award	0.0%	-	0	

For this Course, grade boundaries have been stable for a number of years and the intention was to set similar grade boundaries to previous years. The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

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.