



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Mandarin (Simplified and Traditional)
Level	Advanced Higher

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

2011 was the second year of presentation at Advanced Higher level in Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese. The number of centres and entries increased. There were a total of 14 candidates for Mandarin (Simplified), which compared to two candidates in 2010. There was one candidate for Mandarin (Traditional) in 2011, although no presentations at this level in Cantonese.

The examination was of an appropriate level of difficulty and in line with Modern Languages Arrangements. It was evident that candidates had been well prepared by centres for the demand at this level. The overall level of performance was very strong, with some excellent performances.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Many, if not most candidates performed well in nearly all aspects of the examination. There were some outstanding performances. Most candidates were clearly well prepared for the examination, and familiar with the format.

In Speaking, centres are to be commended, as the performance of candidates in this component was highly pleasing, with many candidates giving skilled and sophisticated performances.

Many candidates clearly engaged with the topic of the Reading passage (environmental issues in China), and produced excellent responses in the comprehension questions.

There were also a large number of thoughtful and fairly sophisticated responses to the Discursive Writing topics.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Paper I Reading and Translation

The Inferential Question was the most challenging part of Paper I, and a number of candidates struggled with this element. Some candidates simply retold detail from comprehension questions and did not develop their argument based on evidence from the text. Translation also presented challenges for a few candidates. There were mistakes including the omission of articles, pronouns and the incorrect rendering of tense.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Essay

Listening also presented a number of challenges. There was perhaps a tendency to prejudge content on one or two occasions, and this did not work in candidates' favour.

Folio

There was insufficient critical analysis or evaluation in approaches to some background topics. Some Folio essays on literary topics were based on simply the retelling of the story/plot, with little appropriate critical analysis.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading and Translation

In preparing candidates for the Reading, centres should encourage candidates to read the whole passage to gain a more comprehensive understanding from the outset. Candidates should be discouraged from tackling the Inferential Question and/or the Translation before answering the comprehension questions. Time management in the various aspects of this Paper is also very important.

Centres should also provide candidates with sufficient practice in dictionary use, enabling them to become more familiar with the various features of a dictionary and to find information quickly and efficiently.

Answers to the comprehension questions should contain as much relevant detail as possible. More practice is needed for the Inferential Question and Translation.

Folio

Read the Folio guidelines carefully. The selection of essays/essay titles could be wider and the title or essay question should generate debate and critical analysis.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Mandarin (Simplified)

Number of resulted entries in 2010	2
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	14
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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 200				
A	100.0%	100.0%	14	140
B	0.0%	100.0%	0	120
C	0.0%	100.0%	0	100
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	90
No award	0.0%	100.0%	0	-

Mandarin (Traditional)

Number of resulted entries in 2010	0
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	1
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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 200				
A	***	***	***	140
B	***	***	***	120
C	***	***	***	100
D	***	***	***	90
No award	***	***	***	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.