



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Cantonese and Mandarin (Simplified and Traditional)
Level	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 Higher level in Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese. The number of centres increased this year, with eight more presenting candidates. On the whole, candidate performance was very good.

Areas in which candidates performed well

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

In Writing, there were some outstanding Short Essays, in which learned language was successfully adapted to suit the context in an entirely appropriate manner, and there was enterprising use of language and structures. This was also the case with Directed Writing, where many candidates fully engaged with the topic and were able to address all bullet points well.

In Reading, the content of the passage was particularly relevant and topical (protection of the panda). This topic clearly engaged candidates. They responded very well to most questions, and many wrote extensive responses. There were several good examples of skilful translation.

Listening was handled well and with confidence, and this was reflected in the improved marks overall for this element.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Directed Writing, a few candidates failed to address all bullet points as required, for which they were penalised. Centres should ensure that all candidates are familiar with the requirements of this task.

This year, the Translation section of the Reading and Directed Writing was again one of the most challenging aspects for candidates. Responses sometimes lacked sufficient detail to convey meaning accurately, and there were sometimes grammatical mistakes, such as the omission of articles/pronouns and incorrect tenses.

In Reading, one or two candidates used their knowledge of the topic, rather than trying to understand the passage. Other difficulties arose, for instance, in Question 2 (b): to get full marks, candidates had to mention that bamboo is the **'main'** food **and** that pandas spend **14 hours every day** eating bamboo. Many candidates only mentioned 'pandas eat bamboo every day', which was insufficient to gain the marks.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading and Translation

Centres should continue with the good practice already developing when preparing candidates for Reading questions. This involves discussing with candidates techniques for conveying comprehension, including discussion of the amount of detail likely to be required (eg including associated adjectives/adverbs when locating lexical items).

For the Translation, centres should encourage candidates to pay particular attention to the need for articles and accurate tenses when translating into English. Candidates should also be encouraged to read the passage globally rather than sentence by sentence, in order to gain the full understanding of the whole passage. Associated with this is the need to encourage candidates to tackle the Translation after the comprehension questions, and also to allocate enough time to cover this adequately.

Directed Writing

Centres should advise candidates to read each bullet point carefully, to ensure that they do not miss any, and also to ensure that learned material is both relevant and appropriate.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Cantonese Higher

Number of resulted entries in 2010	3
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	6
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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	83.3%	83.3%	5	70
B	16.7%	100.0%	1	60
C	0.0%	100.0%	0	50
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	45
No award	0.0%	100.0%	0	-

Statistical information: update on Courses

Mandarin (Simplified)

Number of resulted entries in 2010	28
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	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 100				
A	96.2%	96.2%	25	70
B	3.8%	100.0%	1	60
C	0.0%	100.0%	0	50
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	45
No award	0.0%	100.0%	0	-

Mandarin (Traditional)

Number of resulted entries in 2010	5
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	6
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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	100.0%	100.0%	6	70
B	0.0%	100.0%	0	60
C	0.0%	100.0%	0	50
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	45
No award	0.0%	100.0%	0	-

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.