Course Report 2019

Subject	Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

The question papers this year were considered fair, accessible, and challenging in places, where appropriate for Higher.

Marking instructions clearly explained where marks are available to differentiate responses. Assessors made effective use of the marking instructions to award marks, and make judgements in line with national standards.

In 2019, the number of the entries has increased again, with more candidates from non-heritage backgrounds than previous years.

Overall, candidates' performance was very good, with several instances of outstanding performance. Candidates were well prepared for each component. It was encouraging to see a wider range of performances this year.

Question paper 1: Reading

The reading question paper was a text that sampled the context of society. The text was accessible to all candidates and was deemed to be of a level appropriate to Higher, which resulted in a good range of performances.

Candidates were required to answer in English comprehension questions on the text in the modern language, including an overall purpose question. Most questions were well answered by the majority of candidates. It was pleasing to see a good level of understanding overall in candidates' responses.

The last question required candidates to translate a section of the text. It required a great deal of sophistication and accuracy in the language. Full marks are only available for translations with a very good rendering of the text into English.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

The directed writing question paper required candidates to choose one of two scenarios taken from the contexts of employability and culture. Candidates had to address six bullet points. The first bullet point contained two pieces of information. The remaining five bullet points each contained one piece of information. The paper was fair and accessible to all candidates.

Question paper 2: Listening

The listening question paper was based on the context of employability. The topic was about looking for a first job and future plans. This paper performed as expected and was fair and accessible.

Assignment–writing

The new assignment–writing allows candidates to produce a piece of writing in the modern language, using detailed and complex language, based on one of the following contexts: society, learning, employability, culture.

Performance–talking

Most centres selected for verification, used approaches to assessment that were valid and acceptable. They used a range of assessment tasks to assess candidates appropriately.

Most centres selected for verification, made reliable and accepted assessment judgements in line with national standards. The assessors made effective use of the marking instructions and justified how they awarded marks to each candidate.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Question paper 1: Reading

Candidates performed well in the reading question paper. Most candidates had a clear understanding of the text.

Questions which required less detailed answers were attempted well by the majority of candidates. Question 1(a), 1(b), 2, 3(a), 5(b), and 6 were particularly well answered. The majority of candidates gained at least 1 out of 2 marks for the overall purpose questions.

Some highly competent translations were observed. Very few candidates failed to score any marks in this question.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Candidates continue to embrace the element of personalisation and choice in the directed writing question paper. The choice of directed writing tasks between the contexts of employability and culture, allowed candidates who felt more comfortable with the employability context to perform well in the task, while allowing more candidates the opportunity to undertake the culture task.

Candidates generally coped better with the more predictable bullet points. There were very few poor performances. The majority of candidates scored in the top two bands of marks. Some candidates wrote accurately, demonstrating they could use a wide variety of structures and a range of tenses.

Question paper 2: Listening

Candidates related well to the familiar topic area of a job application and future plan. In general, candidates tackled the monologue better than the dialogue. Most candidates were able to gain at least half of the available marks. Questions that required less detail, or where there was optionality, were particularly well done.

Assignment–writing

There were many outstanding assignment–writing performances, in which learned language was successfully adapted to suit the context. The majority of candidates produced well-structured and accurate writing containing an excellent range and variety of language structures.

Performance–talking

All candidates selected for verification performed to a high standard during the conversation. Discussions lasted for an appropriate length of time, as required at Higher.

Conversations selected for verification covered different contexts. Candidates were able to understand questions and interact appropriately with assessors. They readily adapted learned material as appropriate to the discussion, and appropriately used different structures. It is very pleasing to hear different slangs and a wide range of colloquial expressions from candidates.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

In the reading question paper, the questions were balanced in terms of high, low and average demand. The performance was satisfactory, though there are some points to note:

♦ Some candidates didn't give attention to details, for example question 3(a) 'they cannot afford their own <u>house</u>' (买不起自己的<u>房子</u>), a number of candidates answered 'they can't afford their own room' instead. In question 3(b) 'they have to pay for English/Math private tuition' (<u>花钱</u>为他请英文和数学家教), a number of candidates answered, 'they went to English/Math classes' and missed the important detail 'pay for/spend money on'.

♦ It is challenging to answer the overall purpose question, but this year there was a significant improvement in responses to this question. In general, candidates did very well. However, a few candidates only translated or retold the text without detailed comments. Some candidates simply restated their answers from previous reading comprehension questions. A number of candidates failed to provide any references from the text, or justification that showed an accurate reading of the text.

♦ Some answers were not specific enough, for example in question 5(c), many candidates responded, 'Government provide the free nursery' and omitted '<u>to low income families</u>', and therefore could not gain the mark.

♦ The translation has always been a challenging part in the reading question paper. Some marks were lost due to lack of precision and accuracy, for example in sense unit 3, 大部分 should be translated as 'most' or 'majority', but not 'a large of' or 'large portion of'. In sense unit 5, 生活水平 should be translated as 'standard of living', but not 'lifestyle' or 'life quality', which is not accurate. Many candidates continue to lose marks through a basic lack of accuracy, omitting words, and incorrect use of a dictionary.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

In the directed writing question paper, candidates have the choice of two scenarios: employability and culture. The two scenarios were chosen in a balanced way. The bullet points candidates need to address has increased to six.

A number of candidates failed to address all bullet points, including the double questions in the first bullet point, for which they were penalised. In particular, candidates from native speakers' background often missed the bullet points despite writing excellent language and structure.

In scenario 2, bullet point six posed the most difficulty for some candidates. They simply used pre-learned material about 'whether they would recommend the experience' instead of addressing 'whether they would like to attend another Chinese festival'.

Question paper 2: Listening

The listening question paper was linked to the context of employability. The two items talked about looking for the first job and future plans. Although it is familiar to candidates, it proved challenging if candidates tried to predict or guess answers.

Some candidates were unable to retain sufficient details to answer the questions accurately, often understanding part of the information but not giving sufficient detail. For example in item 2(c) 一个星期只需要工作两天 'only works <u>two days</u> a week', some candidates responded 'twice a week', and therefore did not gain the mark.

Assignment–writing

Some candidates attempted the assignment–writing without showing progression from National 5 when writing about their daily routine, family, or future plans, and did not demonstrate content, language resource, or accuracy as expected at Higher.

A few candidates failed to produce a piece of writing in a discursive nature or in a focused and structured way. At times, candidates struggled to express or discuss different viewpoints or draw valid conclusions.

In some instances, candidates did not look for the correct sentence structure and there were occasions where candidates translated directly from English or relied too much on the dictionary to help them to create new sentences, which often had a poor outcome.

Performance–talking

Candidates selected for verification demonstrated confidence in using detailed and complex Chinese in the conversation. Candidates showed a strong ability to use pronunciation and intonation readily understood by a Chinese speaker.

However, non-heritage candidates appeared to find it challenging to use updated expressions of specific linguistic features, for example new phrases and slangs developed in Chinese. It is understandable that it takes support and help for non-heritage candidates to use more updated learning materials from different resources, for example the internet or films.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

It is recommended that centres share this report with candidates, along with the marking instructions for the 2019 question papers. This will show them the correct amount of detail required for a mark at Higher in both reading and listening, as well as the precision required for translating. Centres should share, and discuss, the writing criteria for the directed writing question paper and the assignment–writing with candidates.

Centres who have heritage background candidates should ensure their candidates are aware of the structure of the paper and understand the approaches of the exam.

Candidates answers should be written in English not in Chinese, apart from when they do pieces of writing.

Centres should encourage candidates to make sure handwriting is legible as this can affect the mark awarded.

Question paper 1: Reading

Continue to highlight to candidates the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate and precise translation. Detailed marking instructions for the reading and listening question papers are available on SQA's website, and show the level of detail required for answers. Centres also should encourage candidates to read the passage globally, rather than sentence by sentence, in order to gain the full understanding of the whole passage.

In the translation passage, centres should encourage candidates to pay particular attention to the articles and tense used. Centres should ensure candidates know not to include information from the translation section in their comprehension answers. Candidates should allow enough time to complete the translation where accuracy plays a very important role.

The penultimate question requires candidates to identify the overall purpose of the text. For this question, candidates must draw meaning from their overall understanding of the text rather than translating a part of the text.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Centres should remind candidates to check that they address all the bullet points or parts of bullet points.

Candidates should have the opportunity to practise more unpredictable bullet points in class and to learn techniques to deal with these bullet points.

Centres should encourage candidates to address all bullet points in a balanced way. They should try to use a variety of language structures and resources if they wish to achieve full marks.

Question paper 2: Listening

Before candidates listen to the recording, they should study the heading and questions, and the number of marks allocated to these. This helps to anticipate the type of information that will be required of them.

It is important that candidates do not presume the context of what they hear and avoid guesswork.

Centres should encourage candidates to give as much detail as possible in their answers and not to lose marks by lack of accuracy and inaccurate information.

Assignment–writing

Centres should be reminded that writing tasks require the candidates to select, manipulate and recombine learned material appropriate to the specific tasks, and not rely on the dictionary to help them to create new sentences.

The information relayed in the piece of writing should be mainly of a discursive nature. Centres should encourage candidates to write in a focused and structured way, and to write in paragraphs.

Candidates should practise how to structure a piece of writing, while developing techniques on how to check the accuracy of their written work.

Candidates should express or discuss different viewpoints, while demonstrating relevant content, ideas and opinions and, where applicable, give reasons for their opinions.

Candidates should draw conclusions and demonstrate language resource (variety and range of structures) and accuracy.

Performance–talking

Centres must use the updated pegged mark descriptors for the Higher performance–talking. These are provided in the Higher Modern Language Course Specification.

Centres and candidates should ensure they appropriately complete, sign and date each candidate assessment record (or equivalent), as provided in the performance–talking assessment task.

To help the SQA verification team and the centre, the centre should submit the completed candidate assessment records (or equivalent) together with the audio recording of candidates' performances. Centres should also provide evidence of effective internal verification.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	152

Number of resulted entries in 2019	173

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	75.3%	75.3%	143	86
B	7.9%	83.2%	15	72
C	13.2%	96.3%	9	60
D	2.1%	98.4%	4	48
No award	1.6%	-	2	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
♦ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
♦ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.