



## Course Report 2015

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

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

## **Section 1: Comments on the Assessment**

### **Component 1: Question paper**

2015 saw the dual running for Higher examinations, and was the first year of examination at New Higher level in Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese. The intention was to create an examination benchmarked to the standard of the old Higher with the same notional boundaries.

On the whole candidates' performance was very good, and it was clear they had been well prepared for each component

### **Component 4: Performance**

Most centres have used the SQA Higher Course Assessment task effectively to assess all candidates.

## **Section 2: Comments on candidate performance**

### **Component 1: Question paper**

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the examination, and there were several instances of outstanding performances. Most candidates were clearly well prepared for the examination. Centres are to be congratulated for ensuring this level of performance in this new exam.

### **Component 4: Performance - Talking**

In internal assessment, most candidates demonstrated a high level of performance. In some instances, candidate performance exceeded the level required.

Most centres have used the SQA Higher Course Assessment task effectively to assess all candidates.

The chosen topics for the performance provided candidates with a good opportunity to adapt effectively set phrases typically covered in the contexts at this level.

Interlocutors asked a good range of open-ended questions.

## Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the examination, and there were several instances of outstanding performances. Most candidates were clearly well prepared for the examination. Centres are to be congratulated for ensuring this level of performance in this new exam.

### Component 1: Reading

The performance in Reading and Translation was well done, with many excellent performances. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the reading passage ‘中国年轻人真有必要买房子吗?’ relevant, interesting and accessible.

### Component 2: Listening and Writing

Listening in the new Higher featured a monologue in addition to a conversation, and candidates performed well, particularly in the dialogue.

There were many outstanding short essays, in which learned language was successfully adapted to suit the context.

### Component 3: Directed Writing

Candidates performed well in both writing pieces. Some very able candidates produced a well-structured and accurate piece of writing containing an excellent range and variety of language structures.

### Component 4: Performance

Most candidates demonstrated high level performance of talking skills. They gave well organised presentations, had very good conversation to include relevant ideas and opinions and communicated with a good degree of accuracy to sustain the conversation.

## Section 4: Areas in which candidates found demanding

### Component 1: Reading

In the **Reading and Translation** passage, performance was highly satisfactory, though some candidates failed to identify accurate key information, such as in Q3 (a) where a number of candidates only provided ‘pressure’ rather than ‘**social** pressure’.

It is challenging to answer the new overall purpose question fully, but able candidates did very well. Some candidates only translated or retold the text without detailed comments.

The translation has always been a challenging part of the Reading exam. Some marks were lost needlessly through lack of precision and accuracy. Many candidates continue to lose

marks through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles ('the'), conjunctions and misusing tenses, such as 因为...所以...which should be translated as either *because or so*, rather than *because... so...*

## **Component 2: Listening and Writing**

It was encouraging to see many excellent performances in **Listening**, although adding a monologue has been challenging for some candidates.

Some candidates were also unable to retain sufficient details to answer the questions accurately, often understanding part of the information but not giving sufficient details, such as Q1(a) 世界上最大的经济体, where many candidates only provided 'large', not 'largest'.

In **Writing**, overall performance was very good, though some candidates didn't read the question carefully enough. There were two elements in the topic: language learning and future plans which some candidates did not address in a balanced way.

## **Component 3: Directed Writing**

In **Directed Writing**, the new Higher has a choice of two scenarios, which were equally popular. A number of candidates failed to address all bullet points as required, for which they were penalised. In particular, a number of candidates failed to address both questions for the first bullet point.

## **Component 4: Performance - Talking**

Candidates who don't get school support in preparing for assessments will struggle to meet the requirements of the presentation within the Talking Performance.

## **Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

It is recommended that centres share this Report and the old Higher report with candidates, along with the Marking Instructions for the 2015 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 be shared and discussed with candidates.

## **Component 1: Reading**

Centres should continue with the 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 a full understanding of the whole passage.

In the translation passage, encourage candidates 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.

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

## **Component 2: Listening and Writing**

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

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

Encourage candidates to give as much detail as possible in their answers and avoid the possibility of losing marks through a lack of accuracy.

## **Component 3: Writing and Directed Writing**

Centres should continue with the established good practice in preparing candidates for writing.

In Directed Writing, writing a long passage but failing to address the bullet points won't necessary entail a high mark. Advise candidates to read carefully each bullet point and to ensure that they do not miss out any bullet points.

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

## **Component 4: Performance**

All centres should provide a breakdown of candidate marks relating to Presentation, Conversation and Natural Element.

An interlocutor should prompt candidates when necessary, but not during the presentation.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	20

## 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	85.0%	85.0%	17	70
B	10.0%	95.0%	2	60
C	5.0%	100.0%	1	50
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	45
No award	0.0%	-	0	

For this Course, the intention was to set an assessment with grade boundaries at the notional value of 50% for a Grade C and 70% for a Grade A. The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore the grade boundaries were set as intended.

## 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.