Course Report 2017

Subject	Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) & Cantonese
Level	Advanced 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 assessment. 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 documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

2017 was the second year of presentations for the new Advanced Higher courses in Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese. It is pleasing to see a number of new centres delivering the course this year.

The examination was of an appropriate level of difficulty and in line with the Course Arrangements. Evidently, candidates had been well prepared by centres for each component. The overall level of performance was very strong, with some excellent performances.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

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

The questions in both Reading and Listening provided for a full range of candidate responses. In particular, candidates performed very well in the Reading papers, and it is worth mentioning that there was a significant improvement in the quality of responses to the overall purpose question.

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Translation

Candidates responded very well to this paper, and questions 1–5 were answered particularly well. Although the overall purpose question is one of the most challenging parts of Paper 1, there are increasing numbers of good performances in this question.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

Performance in Discursive Writing continues to be good, with many outstanding performances. Candidates generally achieved very good results when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their answer and when their essays were relevant to the question.

Component 3: portfolio

Candidate performances in Portfolio improved this year, and some very good pieces of work were submitted. Some submissions took literary texts as their focus and produced strong

performances. Candidates performed well when they had an opportunity to demonstrate an analytical approach through the choice of an appropriate question/title.

Component 4: performance: talking

Centres are to be commended, as the performance of candidates in the Talking performance was highly pleasing. Most candidates managed to achieve full marks. The majority of candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared. Many candidates made good use of learned material, were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses, and incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into their conversation with the visiting assessor.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to the comprehension questions. Failing to provide accurate details caused some candidates to lose marks, for example:

♦ In question 2(a), 工作压力和竞争都非常大, the candidate has to answer both 'the pressure and competition' to be able to get the mark. A number of candidates failed to answer both details.
♦ In question 4 (a) one of the answers is 'The happiest cities are not Beijing and Shanghai'. However, again a number of candidates lost mark due to missing both details.
♦ The overall purpose question — some candidates merely retold the reading passage without developing their own argument. Some candidates also wrote unnecessarily long answers in which they repeated most of the information they had given in answer to the comprehension questions, rather than addressing the question and highlighting the key aspects of the text and stylistic techniques used by the author. Many candidates mostly provided information from the text rather than attempting to draw inferences. Some included quotes from the text in their answer, but just repeated these in English instead of using them to develop their argument.
♦ Translation remains challenging but it was seen to improve this year. Grammatical mistakes still appeared in candidates' responses. Some lacked the accuracy and details required for a fully accurate translation. A lack of consistency in tenses was often the cause of penalties.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

The topic of the Listening was part-time jobs. Although candidates seemed familiar with this topic, it proved challenging where candidates tried to predict answers or relied on guesswork.

A few points to address are:

- Some candidates were unable to retain sufficient details required to answer the questions accurately, often demonstrating an understanding of only part of the information. For example, in Item 2, 2(a), 'worked in supermarket near school, worked in shops in city centre', candidates have to answer in full detail to access the full marks available.
- In the **Discursive Writing** paper, all four essay topics were attempted, with the most popular context being Employability (每个学生都应该打工). There were some candidates who did not address the aspect set in the essay title, or whose content was very thin, preventing them from accessing the higher pegged marks.
- Some candidates chose the learning context in the **Discursive Writing** paper, 在课堂上每个中学生都应该有自己的平板电脑' (Every secondary school student should have their own tablet computer in class). A number of candidates wrote only about the advantages of tablet computers, but did not mention why students should have their tablet computer in class. Candidates should be reminded to read the topics carefully and that their content should be relevant to the topic.

Component 3: portfolio

This year there were some very good works submitted for the portfolio, but there are still a few points to address:

- Selecting a title appeared to have been problematic for many candidates — some found it difficult to select a title or essay question that generates debate or critical analysis. Too many had poorly worded titles or titles that were vague, contrived or overly-complicated.
- Weaker performances were those where candidates were descriptive, rather than critical and analytical, in their discussion. This was often the result of a poor choice of essay title.
- Often, there was too much of a 'story-telling' approach and insufficient critical analysis or evaluation.
- Some offered little analysis or critical reflection in their portfolio. Some candidates spent the majority of the piece retelling the story rather than on critical reflection.
- Some candidates used the first person in their essays, eg 'in my opinion'/'I think' etc. Essays of this type tended to be lacking in detailed analysis. Where the third person was used, there tended to be better critical evaluation of the subject matter.
- A number of candidates appeared not to have proofread their work effectively in English.

Component 4: performance: talking

Despite this being an area where candidates generally do well, some still have difficulty in manipulating and adapting learned material to cope with questions they are asked. Some candidates were over-prepared for 'conversation' and sometimes lost a bit of spontaneity in their response.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

General

♦ Encourage candidates to make full use of the SQA Modern Languages website, especially by referring to Course Reports for AH Chinese from the previous years, as well as the Marking Instructions.

♦ Share all general assessment information, pegged mark descriptors/performance descriptors etc and SQA documentation with candidates.

♦ Candidates should be reminded that handwriting needs to be clearly legible to ensure they are awarded the appropriate marks for their content.

♦ Centres should encourage teachers/practitioners to work with other Modern Languages colleagues/departments to share best practice with other colleagues.

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Translation

♦ Answers to the comprehension questions should contain as much relevant detail as possible. Candidates should demonstrate a comprehensive understanding as well as attention to detail.

♦ Centres should encourage candidates to draw inferences from the passage during the overall purpose question, and not just provide factual information or repeat their answers to comprehension questions.

♦ Answers to the overall purpose question should be well structured and have a rounded conclusion, preferably at the end of the answer. Any quotation from the text should be appropriate and relevant, not just a repetition of what has been argued in English.

♦ To receive good marks in the Translation, candidates are required to demonstrate both a good understanding of Chinese and reasonable expression of English. More attention should be given to the development of translation skills and, in particular, care should be taken with recognising and accurately translating tenses.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

♦ Candidates should be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as much as possible. They should try to avoid prejudging the content.

♦ Practitioners should advise candidates on how they use the time they have when looking at questions before they hear the recording during the examination. Strategies for note-taking while they are listening to the recording could also be discussed.

♦ Encourage candidates to read the essay title carefully and to construct a relevant and personal response in which they may draw upon learned material — but this must be relevant to the essay title.

Component 3: portfolio

♦ Candidates should read the portfolio guidelines carefully. The selection of essays could be wider, and a title or essay question which generates debate or critical analysis is crucial.

♦ The title should not be over-ambitious or too general, but should generate a discursive/ evaluative approach. Encourage candidates to make the title as specific as possible, and research the area as deeply as possible. Centres should negotiate appropriate essay titles with their students to ensure they adopt a consistently investigative tone throughout their work.

♦ Share the assessment criteria for portfolio writing with candidates so that they know what is expected in terms of content, analytical approach and structure.

♦ It would be advisable to negotiate choice of essay titles with candidates, to ensure more individual responses; particularly if they are studying the same text or topic.

♦ Encourage candidates to develop an appropriately formal and accurate use of English. More care and attention is needed in proofreading in English — particularly for spelling, typing errors and punctuation, as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts.

Component 4: talking

Centres should continue to prepare candidates in discussion techniques to enable them to deal with any question that goes beyond their 'comfort zone' of learned material.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	32

Number of resulted entries in 2017	31

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	80.6%	80.6%	25	140
B	6.5%	87.1%	2	120
C	9.7%	96.8%	3	100
D	0.0%	96.8%	3	90
No award	3.2%	-	1	-

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.