Course Report 2015

Subject	Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified), and Mandarin (Traditional)
Level	National 5

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

This was the second year for presentations at National 5 level, with the Question papers offering a suitable range of texts, all of which were clearly linked to the Contexts for National 5

Markers commented positively on a balanced examination at the appropriate level of demand for National 5.

Component 1: Question paper – Reading

The **Reading** paper was of an appropriate level of difficulty, which was accessible to all candidates but proved appropriately demanding and produced a good range of performances. The three texts dealt with young people's leisure activities, a weekend Chinese school and Dong Ling's part time jobs.

Component 2: Question paper – Listening

The monologue of the **Listening** item covered Li Ming's trip to Sichuan Province in China, followed by a dialogue on Liu Mei's holiday in Spain.

Despite the changes in format from three separate monologues at Intermediate 2, to a short presentation and conversation, the difficulty of the examination was to standard and clearly correlated to National 5 course assessment specification.

Component 3: Question paper – Writing

The **Writing** task advertised a job as a travel agency tour guide, with the same format as the previous session — six bullet points to be addressed (four of which were predictable and two were unpredictable).

The assessment was set at an appropriate level for National 5.

Component 4: Performance – Talking

Most centres have used the SQA National 5 Course Assessment task effectively to assess candidates.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Overall, the performance of candidates was very encouraging and of a high level, with some excellent performances (in both Reading and Writing) and with relatively few poor performances (mainly in Writing).

Component 1: Question paper – Reading

For the Reading paper, candidates on the whole had been well prepared by centres, and there were many excellent performances.

Component 2: Question paper – Listening

Listening proves to be the most difficult component for many candidates. Many candidates still find it difficult to retain specific details, especially in the Conversation section (Item 2). Nevertheless, the majority of candidates took good advantage of supported questions in the monologue section (Item 1).

Component 3: Question paper – Writing

The Writing task, in spite of the level of its predictable nature, was the element that produced the greatest range of performances, from very good to unsatisfactory, with only a very few poor performances.

Component 4: Performance – Talking

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

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

Component 1: Question paper – Reading

In Reading, most candidates coped well with the paper. Most of the supported questions were done particularly well.

The performance of most candidates in the Reading texts was strong. The texts were linked to the topics of 'leisure activities' (text 1) and 'school life' (text 2). Most supported questions were correctly answered by many candidates — for example, Questions (b), (c) and (d) in text 1, Questions (b), (c) and (d) in text 2, and the overall purpose question (f) in text 3. As for the 'open' questions section, most candidates tackled Question (a) in text 1, Questions (a) (ii), (c) (i), (ii), and (d) in text 3 well.

Component 2: Question paper – Listening

In the Listening paper, most candidates scored more than 50% in Item 1, most notably in the supported questions (for example, Questions (b), (d), and the overall purpose Question (e)). Many candidates managed to give correct answers to the open questions (a), (b) and (g) in Item 2. Generally speaking, most candidates performed better in Item 1 than Item 2.

Component 3: Question paper – Writing

In Writing, many candidates were comfortable with the four predictable bullet points. There were many excellent performances, with many demonstrating the content, accuracy and variety of language required of a Very Good performance.

It was encouraging to note that some candidates were able to address the advertisement completely and competently, including information in response to the unpredictable bullet points.

Component 4: Performance – Talking

In internal assessment, most candidates demonstrated a high level of performance of talking skills. They gave well-organised presentations, had very good conversations, including relevant ideas and opinions, and communicated with a good degree of accuracy to sustain the conversation.

Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper – Reading

In the Reading paper, many candidates failed to gain points through not understanding some lexical items or not providing sufficiently detailed answers:

- ♦ Question (a) in text 2: This question seemed to provide a particular challenge to many candidates. Instead of 'more and more popular', many only answered 'popular'.
- ♦ Question (e) (i) in text 2: The lexical item 'Accounting' appeared to be difficult for many candidates.
- ♦ Question (a) (iii) in text 3: Some candidates lost one point by answering 'He gets along with his colleagues', which was not the same as 'his colleagues are friendly'.

Component 2: Question paper – Listening

Most candidates dealt with the supported questions better than the 'open' questions in this paper. The following are some 'open' questions which candidates found difficult to answer correctly:

Item 1
- ♦ Question (a): Some candidates were not able to get the correct answer — last month. A small number of candidates answered 'by train'. Although it would be grammatically correct and matching the content of the recording, we were not able to reward the mark as it would not answer the question – '**When** did Li Ming….?'
- ♦ Question (c): Instead of 'a good variety of food', many candidates answered 'a lot of food'.

Item 2

♦ Item 2 proved the more difficult, with many candidates understanding part of the answer but losing marks as they were not able to give sufficient details, for example, Question (d): 'market' and 'souvenir'.

♦ Question (e), appeared to be one of least well answered items in the examination. Most candidates were not able to answer 'His grandfather was born in Spain'. Many answered 'His grandfather lived/lives in Spain' instead.

♦ Question (f): Many candidates failed to answer 'They speak many different languages', and 'long school holiday'.

Component 3: Question paper – Writing

♦ In the Writing task, it was clear that some candidates found the two unpredictable bullet points difficult to address. Some were not able address them at all, and some attempted to address them, but were not able to do so effectively.

♦ A few candidates struggled to incorporate learned material with the required level of accuracy to achieve a satisfactory performance.

♦ Very few candidates failed to address the compulsory bullet points, but some candidates were not well prepared to give reasons for their application or to deal with requesting information about the job, and were unable to form questions

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 Talking Performance.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Since this is a fairly new qualification, centres are strongly encouraged to make full use of current resources available such as Hanban's and SQA's support materials, as well as resources from SQA's Understanding Standards Events. The availability of Marking Instructions is also useful, and can assist with future preparation of candidates. Moreover, despite the change of contexts from themes and topics, many topic areas — such as numbers and time, daily routine, prices, weather, colours, sports and pastimes, food and drink, jobs and careers, places and directions — should still continue to be learned by students. In preparation for the Reading, Writing and Listening papers, teachers could still use the Intermediate past papers to revise and improve students' language skills.

Centres should encourage candidates to pay attention to detail and accuracy. Marking Instructions for Reading and Listening, and the Writing Pegged Mark Criteria, are available on the SQA website, and show the type of detail required for answers. It is recommended that centres share these with candidates and explain why particular answers are acceptable or unacceptable.

Candidates should carefully read the introductions and the key question words for each question, such as 'Who', 'What', 'When' or 'Why', etc. They should always be careful and take their time with supported questions, which are not necessarily easier.

Component 1: Question paper – Reading

- In the Reading paper, candidates are encouraged to get into the habit of reading over all their answers to ensure that they make sense and that their English expression is clear.
- Teachers are encouraged to broaden candidates' vocabulary by guiding students towards learning words from the four contexts. In addition, teachers are encouraged to collect short interesting stories/texts for class reading.
- Teachers should familiarise themselves with the new course specification, particularly the part referring to 'the assessment details'. For text-handling questions, teachers should try to use some authentic materials to get candidates used to this. It is helpful if candidates could practise the types of questions prior to the exam.
- Most candidates seem to be better at the intensive/scanning types of questions, but find it hard to apply their extensive/skimming reading skill. Teachers might wish to provide some overall purpose questions for practice, and apply this particular reading strategy in the classroom.

Component 2: Question paper – Listening

- In Listening, candidates should be ready to use the built-in minute before each of the two Listening texts to study the questions for that item. This can help candidates anticipate possible answers.
- In the usual classroom listening exercises, students are encouraged to take notes, either in Pinyin or in English.
- Frequent dictation exercises should help to improve students' listening skills.

Component 3: Question paper – Writing

- In the Writing task, centres should ensure that candidates read carefully the information regarding the job for which they are applying.
- It should be noted that writing long lists of school subjects is not usually helpful. Candidates should be aware of the need to address all compulsory bullet points in a more balanced way. With the introduction of two unpredictable bullet points, teachers may wish to tackle this new element by offering more practice with writing scenarios.
- Candidates should develop the necessary dictionary skills, so that they can make effective use of this resource under exam conditions. Moreover, candidates are encouraged to use the dictionary to check the accuracy of what they have written.
- Be aware of the extended criteria to be used in assessing performances in Writing, and ensure that candidates are informed of what is required in terms of content, accuracy and range and variety of language to achieve the good and very good categories. Teachers are encouraged to provide samples of good essays.

Component 4: Performance – Talking

All the 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	1

Number of resulted entries in 2015	84

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	69.0%	69.0%	58	70
B	6.0%	75.0%	5	60
C	14.3%	89.3%	12	50
D	0.0%	89.3%	0	45
No award	10.7%	-	9	-

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 examination provided an appropriate level of challenge to candidates. For this reason, grade boundaries remain unchanged and no adjustment was required.