



## Course Report 2018

Subject	Mandarin Simplified, Mandarin Traditional and Cantonese
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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**

## **Summary of the course assessment**

It was felt the question papers were fair, accessible and challenging in places, as appropriate for Higher.

Markers made effective use of the marking instructions to award marks and make judgements in line with national standards.

### **Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing**

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

Candidates were required to answer comprehension questions on the text in English, including an overall purpose question. The comprehension questions were worth 20 marks, which included 2 marks for the overall purpose question. Most questions were well answered by the majority of candidates. The last question required candidates to translate a section of the text, which was worth 10 marks. The translation task was challenging, although some candidates tackled this well. This slight increase in challenge was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries.

The directed writing question paper required candidates to choose one from two scenarios taken from the contexts of learning and society. Candidates were required to address four bullet points. The question paper was fair and accessible to all candidates. This directed writing question paper was worth 10 marks.

### **Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing**

The listening section of this question paper has two parts — a monologue worth 8 marks, and a dialogue worth 12 marks. The paper was based on the context of culture. The topic was about Chinese customs and Chinese New Year.

The writing section of this question paper, worth 10 marks, required candidates to write about an important festival or holiday. This topic was fair and accessible to all candidates. Marking instructions clearly explain where marks are available to differentiate responses.

### **Component 3: performance–talking**

Candidates performed in line with expectations, and feedback from the verification team and from practitioners suggested that the performance–talking for Higher, had a high standard in terms of information coverage and overall level of demand.

The approaches to assessment were valid and acceptable. Centres used a range of assessment tasks to assess candidates. Marks awarded by centres were in line with national standards. Centres made effective use of the SQA marking instructions to justify marks awarded to each candidate.

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

### **Areas in which candidates performed well**

The number of the entries this year has increased again and there are more candidates from non-heritage backgrounds than in previous years.

Overall, candidates performed very well, and they were well prepared for each component. It is good to see a wider range of performances.

It was pleasing to note that candidates performed well across all sections of the question papers and there were several instances of outstanding responses.

Most candidates were well prepared for the examination.

### **Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing**

The candidates performed excellently in both the reading and directed writing question papers.

Candidates are continuing to embrace the element of personalisation and choice in the directed writing question paper. The choice of directed writing tasks between the contexts of society and learning, allowed candidates who felt more comfortable with the learning context to perform well in the task, while allowing candidates that were more confident the opportunity to undertake the society task.

### **Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing**

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

### **Component 3: performance–talking**

All candidates selected for the verification sample, performed to a high standard, for both the presentation and conversation.

During the presentation, candidates used detailed and complex language to cover relevant and well-organised content. They were able to express a range of ideas and opinions beyond minimum responses.

During the conversation, candidates were able to understand questions and interact properly with assessors. They readily adapted learned material as appropriate to the discussion and used different structures appropriately.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

In the reading and translation passage, the questions were balanced in terms of demand. The performance was satisfactory although there are some points to address:

- ◆ Some candidates didn't give enough attention to details, for example in question 2, a number of candidates missed 'in class' in 'Children used English words learned in class' (在课堂里学过的英语)?" In question 4, a number of candidates answered 'Hopes to become a teacher' and missed the important detail 'primary' (能成为一名小学老师).
- ◆ It is still challenging to answer the overall purpose question, but this year there has been a significant improvement in this element. 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 did not provide any references from the text or justification that shows an accurate reading of the text.
- ◆ Some answers are not specific enough, such as question 5(a) 'it is not difficult to find a job they like'. The candidates who missed any details wouldn't achieve the mark.
- ◆ The translation has always been a challenging part in the reading question paper; however, the overall translation responses were very pleasing this year. Some marks were lost needlessly by a lack of precision and accuracy, such as 要有责任感, it should be translated as 'to be responsible', some candidates translated as 'have responsibility'. Many candidates continue to not gain marks through a basic lack of accuracy in translating articles 'the' and misusing tenses.

In the directed writing question paper candidates have the choice of two scenarios, one on society and one on learning. A number of candidates failed to address all bullet points as required, including the double questions in the first bullet point, for which they lost marks. The candidates from native speakers' background often missed the bullet points despite writing excellent language and structure.

### Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing

The listening question paper covered the context of culture. The two items covered were Chinese Spring Festival customs and traditions. Although it is familiar to candidates, it proved challenging when candidates tried to predict answers or relied on guesswork.

Some candidates were also unable to retain sufficient details to answer the questions accurately, often understanding part of the information but did not give sufficient detail, for example, item 1(c) 准备非常多的饭菜, 'prepare a lot of food', some candidates missed 'a lot'.

In the writing question paper, at times candidates did not use the correct sentence structure. There were occasions where candidates were translating directly from English, or relied on the dictionary to help them to create new sentences, which often had a poor outcome.

### Component 3: performance—talking

All performances sampled, demonstrated confidence in using detailed and complex language to make effective presentations and become involved in the conversation. Candidates showed their strong ability to use tones with subtle differences and to have readily understood pronunciation and intonation.

However, all candidates found it challenging to use productive expressions of specific linguistic features, for example measure words, and slang. It is understandable that it takes more time and support for non-heritage candidates to have a good command of such knowledge and skills.

## **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 2018 question papers, to demonstrate to them the correct amount of detail required for a mark at Higher in both reading and listening, as well as the precision required for translation.

Centres should share and discuss with candidates the writing criteria for both directed writing, and for the writing section in the listening and writing question paper.

Some centres who have heritage background candidates should ensure that candidates are aware of the structure of the paper and understand the approaches of the exam.

Apart from writing pieces, candidates should write their answers in English, not in Chinese.

Encourage candidates to make sure handwriting is legible as this can adversely affect the marks awarded.

### **Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing**

Continue to highlight to candidates the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate and precise translation. Detailed marking instructions for the reading question paper 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, encourage candidates to pay particular attention to the articles and tense used. Candidates should not 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 this part of the text.

In the directed writing question paper, writing a long passage but not addressing the bullet points will not gain marks. Advise candidates to read each bullet point carefully, to ensure that they do not miss any information, and they use learned material both relevant and appropriate to the bullet point.

## **Component 2 — question paper 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 is required.

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

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

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

## **Component 3: performance–talking**

For the purposes of verification, it would be good practise if the centre could provide commentary in the *Candidate Assessment Record* (or similar document) against the marks awarded for each section of the performance–talking.

Centres should appropriately complete each *Candidate Evidence Flyleaf* including the right course code, signature and date.

## Grade boundary and statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	129
------------------------------------	-----

Number of resulted entries in 2018	152
------------------------------------	-----

### 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	61.2%	61.2%	93	71
B	13.1%	74.3%	20	60
C	7.9%	82.2%	12	49
D	3.3%	85.5%	5	43
No award	14.5%	-	22	-

## **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 which 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.

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 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.

Grade boundaries from exam 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 exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.