Course Report 2016

Subject	Chinese Languages
Level	National 5

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

Component 1: Question paper 1: Reading and Writing

Candidates in Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese) have shown a high level of achievement in their overall performance in the National 5 examinations. It was pleasing to note that candidates, in general, showed a good level of competence in their grasp of the language. Many candidates clearly had a very sound command of the language. The question papers covered a range of topics and across all aspects had an appropriate level of challenge and demand for National 5.

As indicated in the Course Assessment Specification for National 5 Modern Languages, the content of the Course Assessment covered all 4 contexts: society, learning, employability and culture, across the Reading and Listening question papers and was of the appropriate level of challenge. Markers noted that the marking instructions were clear, fair and relatively easy to apply.

In **Reading**, candidates read three texts of approximately 150–200 characters in Chinese and answered in English the questions that followed each text. In this year's paper, the three texts covered the contexts of Culture: Text 1 – booking a hotel room, Society: Text 2 – family and lifestyle and Learning: Text 3 – ways to learn Chinese. The overall purpose question this year, the question that assesses the candidates' ability to understand the overall purpose of a text, was for Text 3.

In **Writing**, candidates read a job advert in Chinese and responded to a task with six bullet points, of which the first 4 bullet points were:

♦ Name, age and where they live
♦ School/college/education experience until now
♦ Skills/interests which make you right for the job
♦ Related work experience

The last two unpredictable bullet points were:

♦ Languages spoken
♦ Previous contact with Chinese-speaking countries

Candidates wrote an e-mail applying for the job in Chinese by addressing these six bullet points.

Component 2: Question paper 2: Listening

In the **Listening** question paper, which covered the context of society, candidates listened to Item 1, a short monologue of approximately one minute, in which Mingze spoke about the importance of the internet in people's lives. In Item 2 candidates listened to Mingze talking to Ziyi about his life in Scotland. After each item, candidates answered questions in English. At the end of Item 1, the monologue, candidates answered the overall purpose question.

Component 3: performance: Talking

The course component performed in line with expectations — the overall standard of candidate performance was very high. Assessors are familiar with the aim of the performance task, demonstrating their skills in the handling of their interactions with candidates, facilitating natural conversations. Most candidates' presentations were suitable for National 5 level, and many more able candidates tackled this task confidently.

Overall, candidates were able to show a very competent range of linguistic achievement to express opinions and ideas. They were mostly able to maintain focus and communicate and elaborate their ideas during interaction with the teachers. Their fluency in language skills enabled them to express their ideas coherently.

The revised detailed marking instructions allowed centres to mark candidates' performances with increased confidence. The majority of centres, therefore, were able to mark candidates' performances in line with national standards.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question Paper 1: Reading and Writing

Overall, the performance of candidates in this year's question papers has been very good, with some candidates accessing full marks for many of the individual questions in each section of the assessment.

In **Reading**, candidates were able to engage well with the texts which covered relevant topics, and many were able to access the full range of marks by reading the questions carefully and understanding the key sections of each text. The questions provided an appropriate level of challenge and were tackled well by many candidates. Notably, the supported questions served to make the passages accessible at this level. The majority of candidates demonstrated good dictionary skills.

On the whole, candidates' responses suggest that this was a well-prepared cohort with very good level of reading comprehension.

In **Writing**, markers commented on the fact that this task was well handled by candidates. The majority of candidates had addressed all the bullet points fully. There were many examples of detailed language with sophisticated structures, including a good range of expressions, structures and accuracy throughout. There were many examples where the content of the writing was clearly relevant and consistent with a job application e-mail.

It is also pleasing to note that candidates are using a good level of accuracy to address the last two unpredictable bullet points. A number of candidates covered the unpredictable bullet point

'languages spoken' in the 'skills/interest that make you right for the job. On the whole, candidates were well prepared for the task and made good use of learned materials.

Component 2: Question Paper 2: Listening

Listening often poses difficulty for many candidates due to the fact that the answer requires good comprehension of spoken Chinese and the ability to recognise a broad range of vocabulary from the context of society in which the Listening Items were set. Candidates were able to access marks in particular where there was more than one possible answer as well as in supported questions.

Component 3: performance: Talking

The overall quality of candidate performance was high. Centres have managed to deliver the assessment in line with SQA guidelines.

Presentation section (10 marks)

Candidates performed very well in the Presentation section of the performance. Most of the topics were suitable for this level, and many of the more able candidates tackled them confidently. In most of the evidence sampled, candidates were awarded the upper pegged marks (8 or 10). This is as expected given that this section of the performance can be thoroughly prepared ahead of the assessment.

Conversation section (15 marks) and sustaining the conversation (5 marks)

In the evidence sampled, candidates coped well and the majority of candidates were awarded pegged marks 12 or 15.

With regards to the 'sustaining the conversation' aspect, most candidates sustained the conversation well, despite any errors, and were awarded 3 or 5 marks for this aspect. Notably, there was also good interaction between the teachers and the candidates.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question Paper 1: Reading and Writing

In **Reading** the majority of candidates coped well, but there were questions that some candidates found more challenging.

In Texts 1 and 2, candidates did well in supported questions, and did well in choice type questions and those asking for them to select relevant information from the texts. Simple language without complex connectors in the structure were handled well, without much sign of comprehension difficulties. The majority of candidates demonstrated basic to high levels of comprehension skills in their responses.

Text 3 Question (a) 'Some people comment on the Chinese language. What do they say? Complete the sentence.' Some candidates did struggle to translate '很特别' and therefore lost the mark with poor expression in English or insufficiently accurate answers.

Text 3 Question 1 (f) proved to be challenging for some candidates where they missed out 双语 (bilingual) from news. Others lost the mark because they did not detail '中文' in the phrase 看中文电影和电视节目 and wrongly translated this as 'watch movie and TV' in question 1 (f). In this same question the use of 中文 and 中国 both translate as 'Chinese', which necessitated discussion among markers to avoid double penalisation.

In **Writing,** candidates successfully dealt with the demand of this task, hence the overall standard of the writing this year was very good.

Most candidates showed strong skills in presenting their written response in the target language. They also showed awareness of marking criteria. They made an effort to include a range of vocabulary and structures appropriate to National 5, producing well thought out and competently written job applications. One can interpret this as a reflection of candidates being better prepared for this task and many showed good understanding of the requirements for this assessment. However, there were some 'one-size-fits all' learned materials. which do not allow candidates to demonstrate their ability and to manipulate and adapt language.

There were a number of candidates who did not complete the written task in a timely manner, as evidenced by the amount written and incomplete nature of their responses. Evidently, poor examination technique such as unequal allocation of time to the demands of two separate tasks in this paper let down these candidates.

In terms of content and language resource, many candidates are comfortable with what is required of the writing task. On the other hand, accuracy is still the main challenge for some candidates. There were also some instances of misuse of dictionary, ie false friends, using 像 'xiang' to express 'like' where it should be '喜欢 xi huan'. On some occasions, levels of accuracy in candidates' writing were affected by literal application of English grammar structures into Chinese sentences, such as '*zhong guo SHI da* 中国是大' (China IS big). Simple sentence such as 'I study in a secondary school' were written as *wo xue ZAI yi ge zhong xue* 我学在一个中学' — with the wrong word order.

Component 2: Question Paper 2: Listening

Listening
A number of candidates found some aspects of the paper challenging, including:

♦ The very formal register used in Item 1.
♦ The complex structure and word choices of Item 1, eg 人们，随着.
♦ Words and phrases that are without direct equivalent in English or are difficult to translate into English, such as 丰富多彩，远在外地的
♦ The concept of making a long-distance call presented in item 2 was somewhat out of date and not wholly appropriate to the experiences of the cohort.

In Item 1, question 1 (a), Complete the sentence: With the development of technology, computers have ___, some candidates found the figurative speech 'walked into every homes' challenging to translate into English and missed out on the one mark available. In question 1 (b)

(ii) 'Mingze talks about social networking. Complete the sentence. Mingze thinks that social networking makes people's lives____', most candidates did not recognise the Chinese expression 丰富多彩 and therefore answered this question wrongly, thus losing marks.

In Item 2 question 2 (c) 'What does Mingze say about the pace of life in Edinburgh compared to Tianjin?' some candidates did not recognise the comparison, ie Edinburgh's pace of life is not as fast as Tianjin's, they provided answer for the opposite comparison, thus losing the mark.

In question 2 (f) (i) (ii), 'Mingze and Ziyi arrange to keep in touch. (i) What will they do? (ii) What is the benefit of this arrangement?' Across the incorrect answers there was a distinct impression created that candidates struggled with the somewhat unfamiliar concept of charges for long distance calls.

Finally, many candidates lost marks because they failed to pinpoint the specific vocabulary items.

Component 3: performance: Talking

Conversation section

Some candidates found the conversation section of the performance more demanding as it is less predictable and involves a series of questions.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

In both **Reading** and **Listening**, candidates should read questions carefully and respond giving the correct amount of information, and ensure that enough detail is given.

Marking instructions for **Reading and Listening** are available on the SQA website and show the level of detail required for answers. Candidates should be familiar with the approach here.

Component 1: Question paper 1: Reading and Writing

In **Reading**, candidates should be familiar with and recognise the structures, grammar and detailed language appropriate for this level.

Vocabulary is important. Learning many words means increased vocabulary knowledge, and awareness of detailed language under the broad contexts of society, learning, employability and culture would facilitate reading.

Candidates should also re-visit their answers and look at the questions to check that the responses make sense.

In **Writing,** candidates have been very well prepared by centres this year, given the overall performance in this part of the course assessment. Candidates should develop ways of addressing the first four bullet points that allow them to use a range of vocabulary and

structures. Candidates should be able to provide at least one accurate sentence for each of the two unpredictable bullet points, and practice at dealing with these unpredictable elements should be encouraged. A variety of reading sources is an important preparation for good writing production.

Component 2: Question Paper 2: Listening

For **Listening,** candidates should be familiar with a range of basic vocabulary from the four broad contexts of society, learning, employability and culture. They should be able to understand verbs as well as nouns and noun phrases.

Centres should:

♦ provide opportunities for intensive and active listening tasks
♦ encourage candidates to listen to a wide variety of audio recordings, such as podcasts, pop music, cartoons in addition to course materials
♦ provide candidates with opportunities to explore a broader variety of topics for listening
♦ encourage candidates, where possible, to read the transcript for the recording and look up words, and then listen again

Component 3: performance: Talking

Centres are advised to continue to encourage their candidates to use listening materials as a source for modelling their pronunciation. Pronunciation is key to enhancing candidates' performances because assessors and verifiers must be able to understand them. Therefore, candidates must strive to minimise incorrect pronunciation, intonation and word stress that will detract from the overall impression of the performance.

Centres are advised to continue with grammar practice and to encourage candidates to use a variety of persons and good connecting structures, where appropriate. In general, among the candidates sampled, performances were delivered with a good range of detailed language and structures corresponding to the level at National 5.

Centres are encouraged to continue to prepare candidates to take part in natural interactions. Many performances demonstrated confident delivery, good flow in the presentation and a variety of opinions. Candidates who were able to use interjections, ask relevant questions and use idiomatic phrases were able to sustain the conversation well. It is important that candidates are equipped with strategies for asking for questions to be repeated, or can use language structures and phrases when they have not understood an aspect of the conversation. Where candidates struggle to answer certain questions, assessors should try to support the candidate by rephrasing, asking another question or changing the topic.

Centres are also encouraged to ask candidates questions that may provide scope for shorter as well as more extended answers to produce a more varied conversation. With more able candidates, open-ended questions provide opportunities for candidates to elaborate their ideas and fluency in their language allows them to express their views coherently.

The length of performances (notably presentations) varied. Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the presentation and the conversation should last provided in the document *Modern Languages Performance: talking, General assessment information (National 5)*.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	84

Number of resulted entries in 2016	98

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	74.5%	74.5%	73	70
B	11.2%	85.7%	11	60
C	4.1%	89.8%	4	50
D	1.0%	90.8%	1	45
No award	9.2%	-	9	-

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.