Course report 2019

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

This report provides information on candidates' performance. 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

The 2019 Advanced Higher Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese question papers performed in line with expectations. It is pleasing to see the steadily increasing number of entries over the past few years.

The question papers were of an appropriate level of difficulty. Feedback from the marking team and practitioners indicated it was positively received by centres and was fair and accessible for candidates.

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the course assessment. There were some outstanding performances. Most candidates were clearly well-prepared for the question papers, and familiar with the format. The questions in both reading and listening question papers were able to stretch some able candidates, but also benefit less able candidates.

This year it is worth mentioning that there was an improvement in the overall purposes of the reading paper and portfolio. The performance of non-heritage background candidates appears to be improving.

Question paper: Reading and Translation

The question paper largely performed as expected, enabling candidates to access the wide range of marks available. Candidate performance in the overall purpose question and the translation improved this year.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates performed very well in the listening section of this question paper, which related to social media. The marking team felt the topic was familiar to candidates and that the questions were accessible and fair.

In the discursive writing section of this question paper, the overall standard was high. There were many very good essays that demonstrated flair, appropriate rendition of subjunctive clauses, and accurate use of discursive language. The most popular choices were question 4 on learning, and question 6 on culture.

Portfolio

The portfolio is always a challenging part of assessment for candidates. However, this year the overall performance had improved with some outstanding essays with a variety of literature-based work. No centre presented candidate evidence relating to language in work.

Performance–talking

Visiting assessors reported that the majority of candidates were well-prepared and gave confident performances.

Candidates often performed strongly where an informative STL form had been received by the visiting assessor before the assessment date.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Overall, candidates responded well to this paper. Most candidates demonstrated a high level of understanding to the article. There were a number of outstanding responses from the overall purpose question.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

The performance of the candidates should be commended. Both items 1 and 2 in the listening section allowed candidates to perform well. The topic was about social media and the majority of candidates were familiar with this topic.

The performance of candidates in the discursive writing section continues to be very good, with many outstanding pieces of writing. Candidates generally achieved very good results when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their answer and when their essays were relevant to the question.

Portfolio

Candidate performance in the portfolio continued to improve this year with some very good essays. Some submissions which took the poetries as literacy texts as their focus produced strong portfolio essays. Again, candidates performed well when they had an opportunity to demonstrate an analytical approach through the choice of an appropriate question.

Performance–talking

The performance of candidates in this element of course assessment was highly pleasing. Most candidates managed to achieve the full 50 marks. The majority of candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared. Many candidates made good use of learned material, and were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses and incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into their conversation with the visiting assessors.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to the reading comprehension questions. However, there are still a few areas that can be improved upon. For example, failing to provide accurate details caused the loss of marks. In question 2(e), one of the answers is 'you must stay positive', and some candidates wrote 'happy' not 'positive'.

In question 3(c) one of the answers is 'Make the most of internet business every day', but a number of candidates wrote 'online shopping' rather than 'internet business'.

There were also a few candidates that didn't have a good grasp of the number comprehension in Chinese, for example in question 2(f) 五亿 '500 million' and 三千万 '30 million', some candidates wrote '50 thousand' and/or '3 million'.

Overall purpose question
Although the overall purpose question is one of the most challenging parts in the reading question paper, there were improvements in this question this year.

A number of candidates had difficulty summarising the overall purpose of the text. Some candidates 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 actual question and highlighting the key aspects of the text and any stylistic techniques used by the author. Many candidates 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 question
The translation improved this year, despite it usually being a challenging part of the reading question paper. Many candidates translated the text word by word, providing an interpretation or literal translation of the text. Grammar mistakes still appeared in candidates' responses. Responses often lacked the accuracy and details required for a fully accurate translation.

The lack of consistency of the tenses was often the cause of penalties, for example:

♦ 花时间 is 'spend time' not 'use time'
♦ 大多数 is 'majority' not 'a large number of'
♦ 我们还应该 is 'we should also' not 'we need' or 'we have to'

Many candidates continue to lose marks through a basic lack of accuracy in conjunction words and misusing tenses.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing
The topic of listening was social media. Although candidates seemed familiar with this topic, it proved challenging if candidates tried to predict answers or relied on guess work. Some candidates were unable to retain sufficient details required to answer the questions accurately, often understanding part of the information. For example:

Question 1(a): 聊天 'chat' is not 'communication'.

Question 1(b): 几乎每个人 '**almost** everyone' is not 'everyone'.

Question 2(g): 了解客人的想法, a few candidates wrote 'to gain customers' information' rather than 'to know what customers think'.

Question 2(d)(ii): some candidates didn't pay attention to the details, for example many candidates omitted 'every night' or wrote 'everyday' instead of 'every night'.

In the discursive writing section all the topics were attempted, with the most popular being question 4 on learning and question 6 on culture. There were still some candidates who did not address the aspect set in the essay title, and the content was very thin, hence they couldn't gain higher marks. Some writing pieces lacked structure or focus and despite some good language being employed, the top band of marks could not be achieved.

The wrong word order is often a repeated error, for example at place do something 在… 做…; time should be at the beginning of sentences or before verbs.

Misuse of the dictionary remains an issue this year.

Portfolio

This year there were some very good essays in the portfolio and this improvement appeared to be due to the Understanding Standards events. It was encouraging to see that some new and varied literature was used.

Selecting a title continues to be problematic for many candidates. They appeared to find it difficult to select a title or essay question that generates debate or critical analysis, and too many had poorly worded titles or titles that were too vague or in Chinese.

Some candidates incurred a penalty for failing to produce a bibliography or had very limited information in their bibliography.

The 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 storytelling approach and insufficient critical analysis or evaluation.

Some candidates offered little analysis or critical reflection in the portfolio. Some candidates wrote the majority of the essay by retelling the story but not offering a critical reflection. Some candidates did not proofread their work effectively in English.

Performance–talking

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

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Centres should remind candidates to ensure their handwriting is legible to ensure marks awarded equates to the content.

Centres should encourage Chinese teachers or lecturers to work with Modern Languages departments to learn the best practice from other colleagues.

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Answers to the comprehension questions should contain as much relevant detail as possible in order to have a comprehensive understanding as well as attention to detail.

Centres should continue to develop dictionary skills with their candidates. In order to receive good marks in translation, both a good understanding of Chinese and a reasonable and accurate expression of English is required. More attention should be given to the development of dictionary skills, especially when tackling the passage for translation. Some candidates simply choose the first entry they find for the word they are looking up, rather than persevering to capture the meaning that best fits the context.

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

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Centres should encourage candidates:

♦ to provide full and detailed answers as much as possible
♦ to try to avoid prejudging the content and guessing the answers
♦ to pay attention to the structure of the essay and read the essay title carefully
♦ to construct a relevant and personal response in which they may draw upon learned material, however this must be relevant to the essay title

Portfolio

Centres should refer to SQA guidelines when preparing their candidates in this element of course assessment, particularly the suitability of the bibliography used.

Candidates should develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies overall. Reliable bibliographies containing three or more references to sources were a feature of good practice. Wikipedia (without mention of a website), and a reference to a Chinese article (on its own without any author and publisher) do not constitute appropriate items for a bibliography.

The title or essay question should generate debate or critical analysis and should not be over ambitious, vague or too general but should include a discursive and evaluative approach. Candidates should try to make the title as specific as possible, and research the area as deeply as possible.

Many of the portfolio essays would benefit from quotations in Chinese to support the arguments being developed. Simply translating these quotations into English should be avoided at all costs.

Centres should encourage candidates to develop an appropriate, formal and accurate use of English. More care and attention is required when proofreading in relation to the use of English, spelling, typing errors and punctuation, as well as accuracy in quotations from literary texts.

The quality of English in the portfolio is of paramount importance, and an appreciation of how to structure an essay is essential. Teachers and lecturers have an important role to play in monitoring the work of their candidates in this respect.

Performance–talking

Centres should continue to train candidates in discussion techniques in order 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 2018	54

Number of resulted entries in 2019	61

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	83.6%	83.6%	51	140
B	9.8%	93.4%	6	120
C	6.6%	100.0%	4	100
D	0.0%	100.0%	0	90
No award	0.0%	-	0	-

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 that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
♦ 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 head of service and statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
♦ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question 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 question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.