Course report 2023

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

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. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022:   76

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   91

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	71	Percentage	78	Cumulative percentage	78	Minimum mark required	138
B	Number of candidates	13	Percentage	14.3	Cumulative percentage	92.3	Minimum mark required	118
C	Number of candidates	6	Percentage	6.6	Cumulative percentage	98.9	Minimum mark required	98
D	Number of candidates	1	Percentage	1.1	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	78
No award	Number of candidates	0	Percentage	0	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics and information page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

The question papers performed as expected. It is pleasing to see a steady, increasing number of entries given the disruption to learning and teaching over the last few years.

The examination was of an appropriate level of difficulty and feedback from the marking team, teachers and lecturers indicated it was positively received by centres and was fair and accessible for candidates. The questions in both reading and listening were able to stretch some able candidates but also to benefit the less able candidates.

Question paper: Reading and Translation

The question paper largely performed as expected, enabling candidates to access the wide range of marks available. The performance in the overall purpose question 6 and the translation question 7 continue to be more demanding questions and differentiated candidates. However, question 5(a) had less distinguishing answers and most candidates answered correctly.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates performed as expected. The topics were familiar to candidates and the questions were accessible and fair. Most candidates answered correctly in questions 1(c) and 3, while questions 2(a) and 2(d) were more challenging.

In discursive writing, 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. All four questions were attempted, with question 6 on culture being the most popular.

Portfolio

The portfolio is always a challenging part of the assessment for candidates. Overall, this year the candidates performed poorer, however there were some outstanding pieces with a variety of literature used. Language in work was not chosen by any candidates. Many performed significantly better in the portfolio where they were attempting to address a title that allowed them to demonstrate a critical and analytical approach.

Performance–talking

In session 2022–23 there was a reduction in length of the performance–talking (20 to 15 minutes).

Visiting assessors reported that many 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. The format of this assessment allows candidates a good degree of autonomy, with many candidates producing impressive performances.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Many candidates produced high-quality answers in all aspects of the examination that indicated familiarity with marking guidance and focused on topics that invited discussion and debate. There were some outstanding performances. The gap between able and weaker candidates was smaller than previous years.

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to the reading comprehension questions. The overall performance of candidates was strong with more capable candidates receiving higher marks. However, there are still a few areas that could have been improved. Some candidates provided a very long answer but failed to identify some key details, whereas some didn't provide accurate details and caused them to miss out on marks.

The overall purpose question is one of the most challenging parts in the question paper. For candidates to gain 3 or more marks they must summarise the overall purpose of the text. Candidates who tackled the overall purpose successfully showed a strong grasp in identifying the writer's overall purpose with a clear, concise and reflective manner.

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 highlight the key aspects of the text and any stylistic techniques used by the writer. Some included quotes from the text in their answer but just repeated these in English instead of using them to develop their argument.

The translation question is a challenging part of this question paper. Successful translations showed attention to accuracy of words and were able to cope well when translating idiomatic language. Some candidates translate the text word by word, providing an interpretation or literal translation of the text. Grammar mistakes appeared repeatedly in candidates' responses. Candidates should be careful of using the definite article 'the' in the right place. Some candidates had difficulty translating "竞争激烈" (sense unit 3). The lack of consistency of the tenses were often the cause of the penalties.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Both items 1 and 2 in listening allowed candidates to perform well. It is an accessible topic that candidates seemed familiar with. However, it proved challenging if candidates tried to predict answers or relied on guessed work. Some candidates were unable to retain sufficient details required to answer the questions accurately, often understanding only part of the information.

Performance in discursive writing continues to be very 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. All topics in the discursive writing question paper were attempted, with the most popular being question 6 (culture). Some candidates did not address the aspect set in the essay title, and the content was very thin, which meant they could not gain higher marks. Some writing pieces lacked structure or focus, despite using some good language and the

top band of marks could not be achieved. Less successful essays were characterised by weakness in language control, unidiomatic translation from English. The wrong word order and misuse of dictionary remains an issue this year.

Portfolio

The overall standard of the performance in portfolio is lower than previous years, however, there were some very good pieces of work. Literature-based portfolio was a popular choice this year, in which some submissions produced strong performances. There were increasing numbers of submissions based on media and films. Again, candidates performed well when they had an opportunity to demonstrate an analytical approach through the choice of an appropriate question. A good number of candidates used appropriated titles to outline the focus of their study. They were also able to present convincing evidence from sources to support the conclusions made. Many candidates used appropriate critical terminology and/or specialist vocabulary to analyse and demonstrate understanding of their chosen area of study. The candidates were able to use evidence from the source texts to justify their analysis and findings. This is important as it allows the candidates to convey a clear and coherent message.

Candidates focused on a wide range of texts and films, including 花木兰，三国演义 and some poets including 李白，徐志摩，李清照

It is encouraging to see both new and variety of literatures being used.

There are a few areas that candidates found demanding:

♦ selecting a title was still problematic for many candidates. The title should be in line with the focus of the work
♦ candidates 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
♦ the weaker performances were those where candidates were descriptive, rather than critical and analytical, in their discussion. This was often the resulting of a poor choice of essay title
♦ often, there was too much of a 'storytelling' approach and insufficient critical analysis or evaluation
♦ candidates should avoid translating the text from Chinese to English in the essay
♦ some offered little analysis or critical reflection in the portfolio. Some candidates wrote most of the article by retelling the story rather than giving a critical reflection
♦ some candidates did not proofread their work effectively in English
♦ candidates should develop a coherent line of argument and stronger structure throughout the essay
♦ candidates should use direct quotations more effectively

Performance–talking

Most candidates' performance was very good. There was a reduction in length of the performance–talking (20 to 15 minutes). The assessment provided an opportunity for candidates to show their ability to interact appropriately with the visiting assessor and demonstrate their ability to express ideas and opinions effectively in Mandarin and Cantonese, in many cases with considerable success.

There was more variety in the range of marks this year. It is evident that most candidates were well-prepared with the topics they learned. There 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.

Some candidates appeared to find this section challenging due to a lack of practice. Some were unable to answer unfamiliar but accessible questions. Some candidates needed encouragement to take the initiative and to be engaged more effectively in the discussion.

Despite this being an area where candidates generally do very 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 were less spontaneous in their response.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ read the marking instructions, to demonstrate to them the correct amount of detail required for a mark at Advanced higher level
♦ read the general principles and detailed marking instructions for discursive writing
♦ make their handwriting legible, as this can affect their mark

It would be beneficial for teachers and lecturers of Chinese languages to work with Modern Languages departments to share best practice with other colleagues, for example:

♦ making use of support materials published on SQA's Understanding Standards website to help prepare candidates for the course assessment
♦ encourage candidates to access past papers available on SQA's website

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ answers to the comprehension questions contain as much relevant and accurate detail as possible. A long answer that lacks accurate details doesn't gain the marks. They should have a comprehensive understanding of the text and show attention to detail
♦ develop their dictionary skills and pay attention to the grammar. To receive high marks in translation, it would require both a good understanding of Chinese and reasonable and accurate expression of English. More attention should be given to the development of word order skills, especially, when tackling the passage for translation
♦ answers to the overall purpose question are well structured and have a rounded conclusion
♦ are aware any quotation taken from the text should be appropriate and relevant, not just a repetition of what has been argued in English. It is essential to provide the summary of the text to gain a minimum of 3 marks or more

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ provide full and detailed answers
♦ avoid prejudging the content and guessing answers
♦ pay attention to the structure of the essay and the word order
♦ construct a relevant and personal response in which they may use learned material relevant to the essay title
♦ use time in the exam to read the questions to gain insight into what they might expect to hear

- build in note-taking strategies when preparing for the exam as this is a useful skill in the exam
- for the discursive writing, maintain a well-balanced structure, and to use appropriately complex and sophisticated language throughout

Portfolio

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- refer to SQA guidelines when preparing bibliographies to ensure quality and breadth
- know that bibliographies containing three or more references to sources are good practice
- are aware that Wikipedia (without mention of a website), and a reference to a Chinese article (on its own without any author and publisher) are not appropriate items for a bibliography
- decide on a title that is in line with the focus of their work and generates debate or critical analysis
- make the title as specific as possible and research the area as deeply as possible
- know that portfolio pieces benefit from quotations in Chinese to support the arguments being developed. Translating these quotes into English should be avoided
- carefully proofread their submissions
- practise accuracy in their quotations from literary texts
- are aware that the quality of English in the portfolio is very important
- practise how to structure an essay
- develop appropriate, formal, and accurate use of English

Performance–talking

Teachers and lecturers should:

- continue to support candidates in discussion techniques to enable them to deal with any question that goes beyond their 'comfort zone' of learned material. More practice with the native speakers could help with the interactive discussion and 'spontaneous' response
- ensure that the STL forms are submitted on time and contain sufficient detail to allow the visiting assessor an insight into the areas candidates wish to discuss
- ensure STL forms contain enough detail and do not resemble a series of prescribed questions. This helps the visiting assessor to lead the candidate towards a topic area where they have ideas and opinions
- ensure candidates' STL forms are not changed at the last minute as this puts the visiting assessors in a difficult position by having to change the questions at very short notice

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade 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 for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty 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 on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report.