

Summary of SQA Course Reports for National 5 Modern Languages 2016

Reading

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Candidates engaged well with the texts, and many were able to access the full range of marks. The questions provided an appropriate level of challenge and were tackled well by many candidates. The supported questions served to make the passages accessible at this level. The majority of candidates demonstrated good dictionary skills. However, some candidates lost marks due to poor English expression and insufficiently accurate answers.

French

The reading texts were accessible to all candidates but proved to be appropriately demanding. Overall, candidates performed well with very few candidates giving no response to a question. There were a few examples of poor expression and mistranslation, but on the whole candidates gave enough detail to get the marks available.

Gaelic

Candidates generally performed better in Reading than listening, providing the greater level of detail required. Candidates should practise dictionary skills, especially with regard to using the singular noun to identify plurals. They should also revise adjectives in comparatives. Candidates should recognise simple idiomatic phrases to avoid literal translations.

German

Overall, candidates performed well in this paper, although some candidates did not provide enough detail from the text to access some of the marks. Particular difficulties were the recognition of comparative adjectives, separable verbs and composite nouns. Most candidates made an attempt to answer all questions and the vast majority passed or almost passed. Item 3 proved to be the most challenging text.

Italian

Overall this paper was well done, but some candidates had difficulty in identifying the precise details in some of the questions.

Spanish

Candidates were able to achieve full marks by reading the questions carefully and understanding the key sections of each text. Insufficient detail and inaccurate translation in a response were major factors that led to some candidates not receiving marks. Mistranslation, poor dictionary use and poor English expression were the three other factors that contributed to candidates losing marks.

Urdu

Candidates answered questions well, but some found a few of the questions demanding. Some candidates did not write full answers, and some wrote answers in wrong sections. Some language was perhaps challenging, and some candidates were not well prepared for this paper.

Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

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. In most cases, the content of the writing was clearly relevant. Many candidates addressed the last two unpredictable bullet points well.

There were a number of candidates who did not complete the written task.

In terms of content and language resource, many candidates are comfortable with what is required of the writing task. However, accuracy is still the main challenge for some candidates and there were also some instances of dictionary misuse.

French

Candidates performed very well in this component. Many candidates addressed the four predictable bullet points in a balanced manner and were able to use detailed vocabulary and grammatical structures. Candidates were more prepared for the two unpredictable bullet points and it was encouraging to see them referring directly to the job being advertised.

However, many candidates struggled to form accurate questions in French and this prevented some candidates from achieving full marks.

Gaelic

Candidate performance was encouraging, better in the unpredictable bullet points than in previous years. Appropriate opening and closing sentences enhanced the authenticity of the job application. There were some excellent examples of how past, future and subjunctive tenses could be included. Candidates who achieved 'very good' produced responses, which were mostly accurate and included a wide range of verbs, tenses, sentence structures and conjunctions. Candidates should be secure in their use of accents and the use of the apostrophe to denote verbal nouns. They should develop more awareness of the dative case. Information included should be relevant and authentic and candidates must be careful not to repeat themselves in addressing the unpredictable bullet points, which do not need to be done in order. They must write in complete sentences and not in bullet points.

German

Most candidates coped well with the first four bullet points. Most candidates did attempt all six bullet points, but many encountered difficulties in the final two unpredictable bullet points, particularly with formulating questions. Lots of candidates kept the final two bullet points simple, which worked overall. Some candidates did not provide a range of tenses, and some had particular difficulty in forming the past tense. Other points of difficulty for some candidates were adjective endings, word order and verb agreement.

Italian

Many candidates were able to show that they had prepared appropriately for this task by writing sentences with good content, accuracy and language resource — in particular with the first four bullets. However, some candidates had difficulty in addressing the two unpredictable bullet points in full (if at all) as a result of being unable to manipulate verbs and of inappropriate dictionary use.

Spanish

Many candidates addressed all the bullet points fully. There were many examples of detailed writings with a good range of expression, structures and accuracy throughout, and where content was clearly relevant. Accuracy (rather than content) is still the main challenge for some candidates, including misuse of the dictionary, other language interference and literal translations of idiomatic phrases.

Urdu

In the predictable bullet points there was evidence of a good range of vocabulary and structures and some very complex language. Many candidates were able to use memorised material correctly when addressing the predictable bullet points.

However, the unpredictable bullet-points proved more challenging, with a large number of candidates having difficulty with these, although some candidates were able to demonstrate accuracy and detail in addressing the these bullet points.

Most candidates showed competence in the use of different tenses and many pieces of writing were authentic

Listening

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Listening often poses difficulty for candidates, but candidates were able to access marks where there was more than one possible answer to the question as well as in supported questions. A number of candidates found some aspects of the paper challenging, including the very formal register used in Item 1 and the use of words and phrases that have no direct equivalent in English.

The concept of making a long-distance call in item 2 was somewhat dated and not wholly appropriate to the experiences of the cohort.

French

There was a good range of marks in the listening paper, with some candidates achieving full marks. Some candidates did find this paper to be rather challenging but the majority got the mark for the overall purpose question. Candidates still found the dialogue to be slightly more demanding than the monologue with many not giving enough detail to get all the marks available.

Gaelic

Candidates found this paper challenging. Candidates should take advantage of all opportunities to develop their listening skills. Candidates should familiarise themselves with beneficial media resources e.g. BBC Alba, www.learnghaelic.net, etc. Candidates must also ensure that they revise vocabulary and grammar pertaining to topic areas. Candidates are strongly advised to revise common verbs, common adjectives and numbers e.g. mìle, millean, etc.

German

Overall, most candidates coped well with the listening. Others almost got the correct answer but failed to provide sufficient detail for the point. Some candidates struggled with composite nouns. Item 1 was generally well attempted but some candidates found Item 2 more challenging.

Italian

Overall this paper was well done, but some candidates had difficulty in identifying the precise details in some of the questions.

Spanish

Some candidates did not recognise a range of qualifiers and so lost marks. Others showed a lack of detail where it was required. Across the incorrect answers, there was also a distinct lack of clarity of response, and candidates were too general in their answers, thus losing marks.

Urdu

Most candidates performed well in this paper and many attempted to give the appropriate level of detail. Some candidates underlined question words and took notes rather than attempting to answer the questions in full before they had heard the third playing. This is to be encouraged.

Talking

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

The overall quality of candidate performance was high. Candidates performed very well in the presentation. In most of the evidence sampled, candidates were awarded 8 or 10. In the conversation section, the majority of candidates were awarded 12 or 15, and most were awarded 3 or 5 in the sustaining the conversation element. However, some candidates found the conversation section of the performance more demanding as it is less predictable.

Notably, there was also good interaction between the teachers and the candidates.

French

Candidates performed better in the presentation section. In the sample verified, most candidates were awarded 8 or 10. This is as expected as this section can be thoroughly prepared and rehearsed ahead of the assessment. Some candidates found the conversation section of the performance more demanding as it is less predictable.

Gaelic

Generally, centres used a variety of questions, including unexpected and more open questions to assess candidates. This allowed for a more natural conversation and for candidates to demonstrate their ability to sustain the conversation.

German

Generally speaking, candidates did well in the talking performance.

Most candidates scored 6 and above in their presentation and the vast majority scored 9 and above in the conversation section. In most cases, candidates performed more confidently in the presentation, with many well-structured and fluent performances. However, some candidates struggled with the complexity of the language of the topic they had chosen.

In the sustaining the conversation element, all candidates gained 3 or 5 marks.

In general, candidates performed well in the conversation section and were able to sustain an interaction based on the same or related topic in relation to the presentation context. Where interlocutors used a wide variety of questions in the conversation section, this often helped candidates to avoid recycling the same language and structures from their presentations into their conversations.

Spanish

Candidates performed very well in the presentation section of the performance. 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. Most candidates sustained the conversation well, despite any errors.

Urdu

Candidates had prepared and rehearsed the presentation section very well. Most candidates achieved 8 or 10. In the conversation most of the candidates coped very well and the majority of candidates were awarded 15. Most also gained 5 or 3 marks in the sustaining the conversation element.

However, where all candidates in a centre chose the same topic for the presentation, performance in the conversation tended to be average or poor. Some candidates also chose easy topics which meant there was little scope for discussion in the conversation section. This led to repetition of language already covered.

Advice to Centres

General

- Candidates should ensure that their handwriting is legible.

Reading

- Candidates should be guided by the number of marks awarded for each question, and should give as much detail in their answer as they have understood. They should be discouraged from giving extra information as this could negate any correct information and could be penalised.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of verb conjugation, adjective endings and the comparative in French.
- Candidates should also be reminded to use the dictionary carefully and not always choose the first word given. They should be aware of common 'false friends' and should check these carefully in the dictionary.
- Candidates should be encouraged to read each question carefully and underline the key word or words in the question, which will lead them to the answer in the text.

- Candidates should also be encouraged to read their own answers carefully to ensure they make sense in English.

Writing

- Centres should make it clear to candidates that there is now no requirement for them to use the formal beginning and endings as was required in the past.
- Centres should ensure that candidates read the information carefully regarding the job for which they are applying.
- Candidates should ensure they have addressed all 6 bullet points and use the dictionary to check the accuracy of what they have written (e.g. spelling, adjective endings, accents, words omitted).
- 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.
- Candidates should be prepared ask questions about the job as this could be one of the unpredictable bullet points.
- Candidates should leave time to read through their piece of writing.
- Candidates should be made aware of the criteria to be used in assessing performances in writing, so that they are aware of what is required in terms of content, accuracy and range and variety of language to achieve the good and very good categories.

Listening

- Candidates should be guided by the number of marks awarded for each question and should give as much detail in their answer as they have understood, but should be discouraged from giving extra information as this could negate any correct information and could be penalised.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of numbers, seasons, months, common adjectives, nationalities, school subjects, weather expressions, days of the week and question words.
- Candidates should be encouraged to read all the questions carefully and underline key words so they can pick out the information required more easily. More practice on notetaking would also help candidates improve their listening skills.
- Candidates should be encouraged to make use of the third playing to check the accuracy and specific details of their answers.
- Centres should provide opportunities for intensive and active listening tasks and should encourage candidates to listen to a wide variety of audio recordings, such as podcasts, pop music, cartoons in addition to course materials.
- Cognates are used frequently in the listening paper, and centres should continue to prepare the candidates to understand these in less familiar contexts and expressions.

Talking

- Centres should ensure they use the most up-to-date Marking Information Grid for the talking performance at National 5, to make their assessment judgements.
- Centres are advised to encourage the pupils to select different topics for the performance from the four contexts of learning, employability, culture and society.
- Centres are advised to encourage their candidates to use listening materials as a source for modelling their pronunciation as assessors and verifiers must be able to understand them. Candidates must strive to minimise incorrect pronunciation, intonation and word stress that will detract from the overall impression of the performance. This is particularly important in French and in the Chinese languages.

- Centres should ensure that the presentation and follow-up conversation is carried out in a single assessment event, i.e. the presentation must be followed by the conversation during the single recording of the performance.
- Centres should ensure that candidates use detailed language in most parts of the performance.
- Long lists of more than two or three items (e.g. places in town, school subjects) or repetition of straightforward descriptions (e.g. hair and eyes) are unlikely to allow candidates to use a suitable range of structures and vocabulary.
- Centres should provide advice to candidates as to what level of language they should be able to cope with and should ensure comprehension of their presentation in preparation for delivering it.
- Interlocutors should try to avoid asking closed questions, especially for more able candidates as these are likely to invite very short answers and prevent candidates from demonstrating their full ability.
- Interlocutors should ask questions, which follow on naturally from the presentation. Interlocutors could go on to refer to other contexts, which allows for personalisation and choice. Naturally moving on to other contexts or topics also allows the candidate to demonstrate a variety of language.
- Centres should avoid asking questions about items that candidates have already addressed in the presentation.
- 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.
- Centres should not be overly prescriptive in preparing candidates for the conversation. Conversations should be as spontaneous as possible and should not sound excessively rehearsed. It is recommended that centres ask a range of questions adapted to the responses of each candidate.
- Centres are reminded that a candidate does not necessarily have to ask a question in the conversation to gain full marks. Candidates could demonstrate their ability to sustain the conversation by including a mixture of extended and shorter answers (i.e. not a suite of short presentations/monologues); appropriate thinking time; natural interjections; acknowledgement that they have understood the question; asking questions that are relevant to the conversation and at relevant times; sustaining the conversation by asking for repetition or clarification.