

SQA Higher Mandarin (traditional), Mandarin (simplified) and Cantonese External Assessment Report 2014

General comments

- The number of new centres presenting candidates continues to grow; there are also increasing numbers of candidates from non-native speaker backgrounds.
- The content of the examination related clearly to the teaching syllabus as indicated by the prescribed Themes and Topics for Higher level, and was of an appropriate level of difficulty.
- On the whole, performance was good, and candidates were well prepared for each component.

Areas in which candidates performed well

- Most candidates were clearly well prepared, and thus performed well in all aspects of the examination. There were some outstanding performances.
- Reading and Translation were again done well, with many excellent performances. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the reading passage accessible.
- Candidates again performed very well in both Writing pieces and Speaking. There were many outstanding short essays, in which learned language was successfully adapted to suit the context.
- In Directed Writing, many candidates fully engaged with the topic; some very able candidates produced a well-structured and accurate piece of writing containing an excellent range and variety of language structures.

Areas which candidates found demanding

- In the Reading passage, some candidates failed to provide sufficiently detailed key information, eg Q4(a) 'What does he write songs about?' some candidates answered 'his life' rather than specifying 'life in Beijing'.
- Poor use of dictionary was evident in some attempts.
- In translation, many candidates continue to lose marks through a basic lack of accuracy in the appropriate inclusion of articles ('a' and 'the'), in the translation of conjunction words and through misusing tenses (妻子做饭, 女儿学习 as his wife does the cooking, and his daughter is studying English) .
- The Listening passage was again seen as the most challenging component of the examination. Candidates found the content and vocabulary of the Listening passage, traffic and pollution, less familiar than last year's topic.
- In the listening paper, many candidates were capable of understanding part of the information but did not giving sufficient details to access the marks available, e.g. Q5(b) 'parking fee' without mentioning 'high/expensive'.
- As in previous years, a number of candidates failed to address all bullet points as required in the DW, and were subsequently penalised. In particular, many candidates failed to address both parts of the first 'double bullet point' — 'how you travelled **and what you thought** of the journey'.

- In Listening/Writing, some candidates copied what they found in the dictionary instead of manipulating it carefully into a sentence. There were instances of literal translation from English to Chinese, with over-reliance on the dictionary.

Advice to centres for the preparation of future candidates

General

- It is recommended that centres share the contents of this report as well as the full marking instructions from the 2014 examination with candidates.
- Writing criteria for both the DW and short essay should, likewise, be shared and discussed with candidates.

Reading and Translation

- Candidates should be advised on the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate translation.
- Centres should encourage candidates to read the passage globally to get an full understanding of the whole passage.
- In translation, encourage candidates to pay attention to articles and tenses used.
- Candidates should know not to include information from the translation in their comprehension answers.

Listening

- Encourage candidates to study the questions and the marks allocated to them to help anticipate the type of information that may be required.
- It is important that candidates listen carefully and do not presume the context of what they hear and avoid guesswork.
- Candidates should score out any notes they do not wish to be marked.

Writing

- In the DW, missed bullet points will always result in a penalty regardless of the overall length of the piece. Advise candidates to read each bullet point carefully and to address each one fully with relevant information.
- Candidates should be advised on how to select manipulate and recombine learned material. Candidates should not rely on the dictionary to create new sentences.
- It is disappointing to note that in some centres, candidates write almost identical essays or bullet points for the DW. Centres must ensure that candidates have the opportunity to develop the skills and grammatical knowledge that will allow them to write successfully.