

Summary of SQA Course Reports for Higher Modern Languages 2016

Reading/Translation

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

In reading, performance was highly satisfactory, although some candidates failed to identify accurate key information or did not write sufficient detail in their answers. In the overall purpose question, some candidates only translated or retold parts of the text without making detailed comments.

Many candidates found the translation challenging and lost marks needlessly because of lack of accuracy in translating articles, conjunctions and by misusing tenses.

French

Overall, candidates performed very well in the reading paper and few candidates scored less than half marks. Questions which allowed a degree of optionality were very tackled well by the majority of candidates, as were questions which required minimal detail.

However, in some questions, candidates did not write enough detail in their answers, or used their knowledge of the topic to make up their own answers. Some candidates also lost marks by putting correct information in the wrong question. In some instances, candidates lost marks due to poor English expression, which left the meaning of their answer unclear and difficult to understand.

The overall purpose question was not particularly well done by a number of candidates who failed to make an assertion and back it up with a justification from the text. Many candidates lost marks for quoting parts of the text in French as the means of justifying their answer.

The translation was generally well done and most candidates gained at least half of the available marks. However, some candidates lost marks because of lack of accuracy, omitting words, and using the dictionary incorrectly.

Gaelic

Candidates generally performed well in this paper. Signposting directed candidates to the appropriate sections. The majority of candidates are to be commended for attempting to provide sufficient detail although some combined parts of different answers. Candidates generally performed better in the reading than in the listening. Candidates should be aware of additional detail required with numerals eg about, more than etc. Some candidates gave very detailed responses to the overall purpose question, however they should be specific and concise in their responses and avoid repeating themselves. Many of the translations indicated a high degree of accuracy.

German

Overall, candidates coped well with the reading paper despite the fact that the concept of pupils' responsibility for their own learning seemed to be an unfamiliar one for a majority of candidates. Some candidates lost marks by not providing essential information and relevant details from the text in answer to some of the questions.

Italian

The reading paper was well received by candidates and some went beyond the minimum requirements by giving additional responses to comprehension questions where there was optionality. However, some candidates did not provide sufficient detail in their answers.

The overall purpose question proved more challenging for some candidates. However, the majority managed to give an adequate response. Some candidates wrote excellent responses that showed good inferential and analytical skills.

The translation section proved to be the most challenging aspect of the paper, but many candidates gave solid responses and performed well. Others grasped the overall sense of the extract but found the units containing more complex grammar harder to put into English.

Spanish

Candidates performed particularly well in the reading paper. The overall purpose question was very well done. Many candidates successfully provided an assertion and a justification. Those who used quotes in Spanish translated them which meant they did not lose marks. However, a considerable number of candidates spent too much time on this and wrote lengthy answers which meant they had less time to spend on the translation.

The translation was well done by candidates. However, at times, candidates were not precise and accurate enough. There were examples of the dictionary misuse and some candidates did not allow themselves sufficient time to complete the translation and check that what they had written made sense. Some candidates struggled to translate the verbs/tenses/constructions correctly.

Urdu

The candidates' overall performance in the reading component was very strong. However, the translation was a little challenging for candidates and some candidates did not translate full sentences and or missed out words.

Directed Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

The majority of candidates chose the scenario on Culture. A number of candidates failed to address all bullet points and some failed to address both parts of the first bullet point, for which they were penalised.

French

In Directed Writing, Scenario 1 proved to be slightly more popular than Scenario 2.

Candidates generally coped better with the more predictable bullet points and there were very few poor performances. Very few candidates failed to tackle all the bullet points. Some candidates wrote accurately demonstrating that they could use a wide variety of structures and a range of tenses.

Although there were some good responses, a number of essays lacked detailed and complex structures, a variety of tenses and compound sentences. There were few very good performances but very few poor responses.

Lack of accuracy in spelling, genders, plurals, accents, and adjectival agreement continues to pose problems for some candidates, as does the formation of the perfect and imperfect tenses.

There was evidence of poor dictionary use particularly in the unpredictable bullet points.

Gaelic

The vast majority of candidates opted for Scenario 1 (Employability). Most candidates attempted to address all the bullet points. There were a few very good responses which used a wide variety of verbs, tenses and grammatical structures, including subjunctives. Some candidates did not manage to do this. Candidates must become more secure in their use of the subjunctive tense and should be reminded that they will not be penalised for exceeding the suggested word count.

German

Most candidates chose Scenario 1 and many candidates achieved at least 6/10. Some candidates developed the four bullet points very well, and created and added their own ideas and knowledge about localities in German cities and culture, which gave their essays a special flair. Most candidates showed good control of the perfect tense and German sentence structure and made good use of pre-learned material

Italian

Most candidates opted for Scenario 2 from the context of Culture, which required them to write about a school group visit to Rome. Many candidates wrote excellent responses that showed a good range and a confident knowledge of tenses.

Quite a number of candidates only partially addressed the first bullet point, which has two parts to it.

Generally, candidates showed better control of the passato prossimo tense than the imperfect tense. Frequently, the passato prossimo was used where the imperfect would have been preferable and in some cases obligatory.

Spanish

Candidates performed particularly well in Directed Writing, but some candidates did not manage to tackle the skills bullet point of the employability option. A considerable number of candidates struggled with using the preterite and the imperfect tenses accurately.

Urdu

The directed writing was completed to a good standard. Most candidates covered all four bullet points. Candidates were well prepared and wrote very good essays.

Some candidates were able to demonstrate accuracy and detail in addressing all the bullet points and many candidates were able to use memorised material correctly when addressing the predictable bullet points. However, some candidates could not maintain the level of language in the unpredictable bullet points.

Listening/Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Listening was well done with many excellent performances, particularly in item 2. Candidates clearly found the content and vocabulary of the listening passage relevant, interesting and accessible, although some found the monologue challenging. Some candidates understood part of the information but lost marks by not including enough detail in their answers

There were many outstanding short essays, in which learned language was successfully adapted to suit the context, although some candidates were unable to form sentences correctly. There was some evidence of dictionary misuse and direct translation from English.

French

There was an increase in the number of candidates who performed well in this paper.

In general, the dialogue was better tackled than the monologue. The language was accessible to candidates and the use of cognates supported them in their responses. There were very few instances where candidates failed to respond to questions.

Questions which required little detail, or where there was optionality, were particularly well done, as was the overall purpose question.

However, many candidates used their general knowledge to answer questions rather than focusing on what was being said in the text, particularly in the monologue. Many candidates also lost marks by not writing enough detail in their answers.

In the Writing section of the paper, there were fewer very poor performances than in previous years, but also few very good performances. There is still evidence of dictionary misuse and mother tongue and Spanish interference. In a number of cases, writing is still characterised by poor use of tenses, spelling, accents and adjectival agreement.

Gaelic

Candidates performed reasonably well in the listening. Candidates should take advantage of all opportunities to maximise exposure to Gaelic.

In the literature section, all candidates opted to write about a short story or a poem. Some responses were outstanding and many candidates wrote mature and detailed responses, using technical terms and justifying their opinions succinctly. Some candidates demonstrated a very good understanding of their chosen text but did not address their chosen question. They should refer to their chosen question in their response and ensure it is appropriate for their selected text.

German

There were some good, very good and excellent responses by candidates in this paper. The topic areas were familiar to candidates. There were some excellent and very good performances in both parts of the listening, but some candidates appeared to be guessing rather than understanding. Some candidates lost marks in the listening questions as they did not recognise numbers and tenses correctly.

In writing, many candidates produced some good and very good responses demonstrating correct use of present tense, future tense and/or conditional tense, using detailed and complex language very successfully. Good use of pre-learned material was made by some learners to write about future plans and where they would live in the future.

Italian

Candidates were familiar with the vocabulary in both listening texts and the writing part was very accessible. However, there was a much wider range of performance in the writing element with many more candidates scoring lower pegged marks. There was some evidence of candidates veering off the topic and thus giving a thin response to the question.

Many candidates had prepared generic introductions and/or endings which generally worked well. Some candidates successfully used proverbs and idioms which added extra flair.

Some candidates produced learned paragraphs or essays with only a hint of relevance to the topic of work. There were many errors in basic grammar and the use of the present tense was generally

weak. Many candidates struggled with adjective agreement, gender and plurals. There was evidence of dictionary misuse, with candidates mistranslating words which have several meanings, and using a noun where a verb form was required. Candidates who scored within the lower range of pegged marks showed a lack of knowledge of tenses, and essay content tended to be very repetitive.

Spanish

Candidates performed particularly well in the Listening paper and both the monologue and dialogue were equally well done, although not providing enough information and lack of detail let some candidates down. In writing, those candidates who engaged in the topic with the level of language accuracy and resource expected at Higher level did very well, and those candidates who were less secure in writing still secured enough marks to pass.

Urdu

Most candidates performed well in the listening paper and many attempted to give the appropriate level of detail. Some candidates underlined key words in the questions and took notes rather than trying to write full answers. This is a strategy to be encouraged.

In writing, there was evidence of a good range of vocabulary and structures and some very complex language showing a good degree of accuracy and fluency.

Talking

French

Candidates performed better in the presentation section. In the sample verified, most candidates were awarded one of the two top pegged marks (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.

The language used by some candidates at Higher was not detailed and complex enough, including in the presentation section.

German

This was well done by the majority of candidates. All performances sampled scored 6 and above for the presentation and the vast majority scored 9 and above in the conversation section.

Most were awarded 3 or 5 for the sustaining the conversation element. However, there was some inconsistency in approach and in marking with regard to the sustaining the performance element. Some centres were too severe in awarding marks.

Most candidates performed more confidently in the presentation section with many well-structured and fluent performances. In the conversation section candidates performed well and were able to sustain the performance. Where interlocutors used a wide variety of questions in the conversation, this often helped candidates to avoid recycling the same language and structures from their presentations.

Gaelic

The level of candidate performance was high, however some responses were too long and lacking spontaneity.

Spanish

The overall quality of candidate performance was high. 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). In the conversation section and sustaining the conversation, candidates coped well, with the majority being awarded pegged marks of 12 or 15. With regards to the 'sustaining the conversation' aspect, most candidates sustained the conversation well, despite any errors, and were awarded 5 marks for this aspect.

Urdu

The overall quality of most of the candidates' performance was high. Candidates performed very well in the presentation section of the performance with most candidates being awarded 8 or 10. Most of the performances were very well rehearsed and the candidates performed to the best of their ability. In the conversation and sustaining the conversation section, candidates coped very well and almost all the candidates used detailed and complex language with great grammatical accuracy, variety of verbs and fluency. The majority of the candidates were awarded 12 or 15. With regards to the 'sustaining the conversation' aspect, most candidates sustained the conversation well, and were awarded 5 marks for this aspect.

Advice to Centres

General

- Candidates should ensure they pay careful attention to the numbering of the questions, particularly where a question has several parts.
- Candidates should be encouraged to write detailed answers to the comprehension questions, ensuring that what they have written makes sense. They should be encouraged to spend time going over what they have written at the end of the exam.
- Centres should share course reports with candidates, along with the Marking Instructions, to reiterate the level of detail required at Higher level in all papers.
- Candidates who are native speakers of the language should be aware of the structure of the paper and understand the approaches of the exam.
- Candidates should ensure handwriting is legible as poor handwriting can lead to marks being lost.

Reading/Translation

- Centres should ensure that candidates are well prepared to answer the reading questions, and know the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate and precise translation.
- Centres should encourage candidates to read the passage globally rather than sentence by sentence, in order to gain the full understanding of the whole passage.
- Centres should discourage candidates from doing the translation part of the paper first
- Candidates should be encouraged to write detailed answers to the comprehension questions, ensuring that what they have written makes sense and answers the question they have been asked to answer.
- Candidates should be trained to make an assertion and justify their answer by choosing relevant detail from the passage to gain both points in the overall purpose question. No credit will be given for simply quoting chunks of text in the target language. Candidates should be trained to write succinctly in answering this question.

- Candidates should pay particular attention to the articles and tense used in the translation. They should be reminded not to include information from the translation section in their comprehension answers.
- Candidates should be given the opportunity to read authentic texts and practise translation as much as possible in class with a particular focus on tense recognition and attention to detail.

Directed Writing

- Candidates should be reminded to check that they have addressed all the bullet points, or parts of bullet points, as the maximum mark they can achieve is 6/10 if they miss out a bullet point or part of a bullet. They should be reminded only use learned material that is both relevant and appropriate to the bullet point.
- Candidates should be encouraged to be more accurate in number, gender, spelling, adjectival agreement and the use of the dictionary.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of past tense verbs, in particular how to conjugate the perfect and imperfect tenses, and when to use these tenses.
- Candidates should be given the opportunity to practise more unpredictable bullet points in class and to be given techniques on how to deal with these bullet points.
- Candidates should be encouraged to address all bullet points in a balanced way, using a variety of tenses and structures if they wish to achieve high marks.
- In German, centres are encouraged to give candidates writing opportunities from an early stage and to keep consolidating German sentence structure especially regarding the position of the verb.

Listening/Writing

- Candidates should be encouraged to study the heading and questions and the marks allocated to them before listening to the recording.
- Candidates should be discouraged from using their general knowledge to answer the questions.
- Candidates should try to give as much detail as possible in their answers so as not lose marks through lack of accuracy and inaccurate information.
- In writing, candidates should ensure that they understand the questions. There is no need to write an equal number of words for each question.
- Candidates should be discouraged from translating directly from English.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of the present tense and candidates should pay careful attention to number, gender, spelling and adjectival agreement
- In Gaelic, centres should refer closely to the marking instructions when preparing candidates.

Talking

- Candidates should be encouraged to work on their pronunciation, particularly in French, so that they can be understood by those who are not their class teachers.
- 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 a single recording of the performance.
- Centres should ensure that candidates use detailed and complex language at Higher in most parts of the performance.
- Candidates should avoid 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.

- In the presentation, candidates should not struggle with the complexity of the language of the topic they have chosen. 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 ensure they ask candidates questions appropriate to Higher and refer to the productive grammar grid to inform their choice of questions.
- Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the presentation and the conversation should last, so that candidates are able to demonstrate their ability. Unnecessarily prolonged or significantly short conversations can affect the candidates' performances.
- Centres should ask questions which follow on naturally from the presentation topic chosen by candidates. Where candidates are asked questions about the same topic/context as in their presentation, they are often limited to repeating parts of their presentation in their answers
- 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.
- 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
- Centres should advise candidates as to the level of language required at Higher, it should be detailed and complex.
- Centres should provide candidates with every opportunity for personalisation and choice.