



# **Course report 2024**

## **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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

# Grade boundary and statistical information

## Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 91

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 105

## Statistical information: performance of candidates

### Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

<b>A</b>	Number of candidates	70	Percentage	66.7	Cumulative percentage	66.7	Minimum mark required	138
<b>B</b>	Number of candidates	17	Percentage	16.2	Cumulative percentage	82.9	Minimum mark required	118
<b>C</b>	Number of candidates	13	Percentage	12.4	Cumulative percentage	95.2	Minimum mark required	98
<b>D</b>	Number of candidates	4	Percentage	3.8	Cumulative percentage	99	Minimum mark required	78
<b>No award</b>	Number of candidates	1	Percentage	1	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding 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 statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

## **Section 1: comments on the assessment**

The question papers for Mandarin (Simplified), Mandarin (Traditional) and Cantonese performed as expected. The number of entries continued to increase this year.

Many candidates performed well in all aspects of the course assessment. There were some outstanding performances. The papers were fair and accessible to most candidates. The reading and translation question paper was more challenging than the listening and discursive writing paper this year, and the grade boundary was adjusted accordingly.

### **Question paper: Reading and Translation**

This question paper performed largely as expected. Despite some more challenging vocabulary, it enabled candidates to access the range of marks available. The overall performance of candidates is slightly lower than last year. Candidate performance was strongest in questions 1(b)(ii) and (c), 2(a) and 3(c).

### **Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing**

Candidates performed as expected. The topic of language learning is familiar to candidates and the questions were accessible and fair. Most candidates responded correctly to questions 1(b) and 2(b)(i), while questions 2(c)(ii) and (d) were more challenging.

### **Portfolio**

The portfolio is always a challenging part of the assessment for candidates. Overall, candidate performance was similar to last year; however, there were some outstanding pieces with a variety of literature used. Language in work was not chosen by any candidate. 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**

The length of the performance–talking this year reverted back to 20 minutes (from 15 minutes) and the questions for the portfolio were reinstated.

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. Visiting assessors reported that many candidates had prepared well and gave confident performances.

## Section 2: comments on candidate performance

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

### Question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to 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 improve. Some candidates provided a very long answer but failed to identify some key details, and some didn't provide accurate details, which 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 did not provide relevant examples that supported the justifications. Some candidates wrote unnecessarily long answers. 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 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 the ability to cope well when translating idiomatic language. Some candidates translated the text word by word, providing an interpretation or literal translation of the text. There was some degree of dictionary misuse. 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 '设施·国际化·现代化·西式'. The lack of consistency of the tenses was often the cause of missing out on marks. There was occasional poor use of conjunctions.

### Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Both items 1 and 2 in listening allowed candidates to perform well. It is an accessible topic that most candidates seemed familiar with. However, it proved challenging if candidates tried to predict answers or relied on guesswork.

Some candidates were unable to retain sufficient details required to answer the questions accurately, often understanding only part of the information. For example, '大学英语专业的毕业生找工作的压力非常大' some candidates misunderstood this as 'there is a lot of pressure at work'. Some candidates failed to provide full and detailed answers, such as '有很多世界有名的公司' should not be only summarised as 'famous company', and '我的英语成绩一直不错... 学习法语应该也是一个不错的选择' should not be shortened to 'her English is good'. Candidates should avoid guessing the content and answers.

Performance in discursive writing continues to be very good, with many outstanding essays. 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 5 (employability). Some candidates did not address the aspect set in the essay title, their content was very thin, which meant they couldn't 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 performance in the portfolio is similar with last year; however, there were some very good pieces of work. Poem and literacy-based portfolio is still a popular choice, and some submissions produced strong performances. Most candidates selected suitable resources in the target language to fulfil the assessment requirements and write within the word count. Penalties were rarely applied. There was a wider range of literature and media selected, including some of the latest films.

Candidates performed well when they had an opportunity to demonstrate an analytical approach through the choice of an appropriate question. Many candidates used appropriate titles to outline the focus of their study. They were 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. Candidates who used evidence from the source texts to justify their analysis and findings, conveyed a clear and coherent message.

## **Areas that candidates found demanding**

- ◆ selecting an essay title was problematic for many candidates. The title should be in line with the focus of the work. There were a few titles that limited the scope of evaluation and analysis, not allowing for broader and deeper analysis. Some titles used the wrong register, for example 'How we feel, see, evaluate...'
- ◆ portfolios that were descriptive, rather than critical and analytical in their discussion, did not gain high marks
- ◆ 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 did not proofread their work effectively
- ◆ some candidates have difficulty going beyond an informative approach
- ◆ bibliographies were sometimes unclear and limited. Some candidates consulted a novel and its film adaption without seeking any other additional sources
- ◆ some candidates struggled to present detailed and relevant evidence from sources
- ◆ some candidates struggled in comparative analysis of several poems. Their portfolio lacked structure and was less coherent

- ◆ a few candidates struggled in presenting arguments and drawing conclusions. These portfolios tended to be more descriptive than analytical. They quoted lengthy sentences without eliciting and paraphrasing main ideas, and some quotations from sources were not always accurate. In a few cases, a Chinese quote was included for no reason

## **Performance–talking**

The performance of candidates in this component was very good. 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 many cases with considerable success.

It was evident that most candidates had prepared well. They were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses and incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into the conversation; however, some showed challenge due to lack of practice. Some candidates were very nervous and needed encouragement to speak out or to take the initiative and to engage more effectively in the discussion, but overall, the standard of performance was high.

Despite this being an area where candidates generally do very well, some still have difficulty in adapting learned material to cope with the questions asked. Some candidates were over-prepared for ‘conversation’ and sometimes lost the spontaneity in their response.

A few candidates STL forms did not contain enough detail or resembled a series of prescribed questions. Neither of these help the visiting assessor to lead the candidate towards a topic area where they might have had more ideas and opinions.

## Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read this report and the marking instructions for the 2024 question papers, to demonstrate the correct amount of detail required for a mark at Advanced Higher level
- ◆ are given the writing criteria for the discursive writing question paper and discuss it
- ◆ 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 marks. They should have a comprehensive understanding as well as the attention to detail
- ◆ develop their dictionary skills and pay attention to the grammar. To receive high marks in translation, it requires 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 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
- ◆ provide relevant examples that support their justifications

## 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
- ◆ address the bullet points fully for the discursive writing
- ◆ for the discursive writing, maintain a well-balanced structure using 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 reliable bibliographies containing three or more references to sources are a feature of 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
- ◆ refer to the [Advanced Higher Modern Languages Course Specification](#) for the criteria and conditions relating to sources of the research and evidence
- ◆ after quoting lines from poems, emphasise more on their opinions that are relevant to their discussion focus rather than giving translation of the lines
- ◆ decide on a title that is in line with the focus of the work and generates debate or critical analysis
- ◆ make the title as specific as possible and research the area as deeply as possible
- ◆ use quotations in Chinese to support the arguments being developed, and avoid translating these quotes into English
- ◆ use critical terminology and specialist vocabulary and appropriate register
- ◆ carefully proofread their work
- ◆ develop formal and accurate use of English and are aware of the importance in the quality of English in the portfolio
- ◆ practise how to structure an essay
- ◆ avoid translating the text from Chinese to English in their piece of writing
- ◆ avoid lengthy description of a film's plot, or the storyline in literature
- ◆ are aware it is not acceptable to reference a film with only English subtitles as their sole source



## **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 native speakers could help with the interactive discussion and spontaneous response
- ◆ ensure that the STL forms contain sufficient detail to allow the visiting assessor an insight into the areas candidates wish to discuss
- ◆ ensure the SLT form is submitted in time to SQA, and that candidates have the same form as the visiting assessor

## 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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).