Course report 2024

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: 233

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 312

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	259	Percentage	83	Cumulative percentage	83	Minimum mark required	84
B	Number of candidates	22	Percentage	7.1	Cumulative percentage	90.1	Minimum mark required	72
C	Number of candidates	20	Percentage	6.4	Cumulative percentage	96.5	Minimum mark required	60
D	Number of candidates	5	Percentage	1.6	Cumulative percentage	98.1	Minimum mark required	48
No award	Number of candidates	6	Percentage	1.9	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 covered all four contexts of society, learning, employability and culture.

Markers noted that the papers were fair, accessible, and challenging as appropriate for the level, and performed as expected.

There was an increase in the number of candidates presented for Higher Chinese this session.

Question paper 1: Reading

The reading question paper sampled the context of society. The text was accessible to all candidates and appropriate to the level, which resulted in a good range of performance. The balance of accessible and more challenging questions, particularly the overall purpose question and translation, helped differentiate candidate performance.

In general, there was a very competent response to the comprehension questions and many candidates understood almost all of the main points.

The translation, with complex and detailed language and a focus on grammar as well as the accurate use of English, proved to be more challenging for some candidates. In particular the translation of the past tense into English.

Overall, candidates performed much better than in 2023, and slightly better than 2019.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

The question paper performed as expected. The paper required candidates to choose one of two scenarios taken from the contexts of culture and employability. Candidates had to address six bullet points.

Some candidates chose scenario 2 (employability); however, many candidates opted for scenario 1 (culture). Bullet points in both scenarios were accessible and accommodated a range of candidates.

Overall, candidates did well in the directed writing paper and could adapt prepared material effectively to address unpredictable bullet points.

Question paper 2: Listening

The listening question paper has two parts — a monologue and a dialogue. The paper was based on the context of learning. The topic was about volunteering at a summer camp and taking on summer jobs.

The paper, in its structure and content, allows progression from the National 5 course assessment and topics. This resulted in good responses by many candidates; however, some candidates found the paper challenging. Overall, candidates did not perform as well as in 2023, but better than 2019.

Assignment–writing

The assignment–writing was reinstated for session 2023–24. The assignment allows candidates to produce a piece of writing, using detailed and complex language, based on one of the following contexts: society, learning, employability, culture. Candidates may refer to other contexts in their writing if they wish.

Overall, candidates performed in line with expectations. Most candidates were well-prepared and able to write a suitable discursive essay within the word limit. Many candidates achieved 16 out of 20 marks. There were some excellent pieces of writing, which exceeded expectations at this level.

Performance–talking

The course component performed as expected. Many performances sampled included various open-ended questions for candidates to demonstrate a range of language resource. Generally, conversations were of an interactive nature and provided good examples of a spontaneous dialogue.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

The number of the entries increased again in 2024. There were more candidates from non-heritage backgrounds compared with 2023.

Overall, candidates' performance was good and most appeared well-prepared for each component. There was a wide range of performances.

Areas that candidates performed well in

Candidates performed well across all sections of the question papers and there were several outstanding performances. Most candidates had clearly prepared well.

Question paper 1: Reading

In general, candidates performed well in the reading question paper. Most candidates had a clear understanding of the text. Most candidates did well in questions that required less detailed answers. Questions 1, 3, 4 and 5(a) were particularly well answered.

Most candidates gained at least 1 out of 2 marks for the overall purpose question. There were some highly competent translations. Extremely few candidates failed to gain any marks in this question.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Candidates are continuing to embrace the element of personalisation and choice in the directed writing question paper. The choice of tasks between the contexts of learning and culture allowed candidates to perform well.

Candidates generally performed well with the unpredictable bullet points. There were very few weak performances. Most candidates achieved within the top three bands of marks. Some candidates' writings were highly comprehensive and accurate throughout, where they demonstrated a wide variety of language structures and tenses accurately.

Question paper 2: Listening

Candidates related well to the familiar topic of school life and language learning. In general, the dialogue was better tackled than the monologue. Most candidates were able to gain at least half of the available marks. Questions that required less detail, or where there was optionality, were particularly well done.

Assignment–writing

There were many outstanding assignment–writing performances, in which learned language was successfully adapted to suit the context. Most candidates produced well-structured and accurate writing containing an excellent range and variety of language structures.

Performance–talking

The overall standard of candidate performance was high. Candidates' demonstrated ability and knowledge to express their views and ideas about their chosen topic. Many candidates were able to use relevant content and detailed language features.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

- question 5(b): some candidates had no grasp on '把' structure, which showed in their partial or inaccurate understanding of '把整个公司的网络弄坏了', '把同事的邮件弄丢了'
- a few candidates translated or retold the text without assertion and justification. Many candidates failed to provide references from the text or justification that showed an accurate reading of the text
- some answers were not specific enough: for example:
  - question 2, where some candidates responded, 'there was a sportsground' and omitted 'national flag' and did not gain the mark
- the translation has always been a challenging part in the reading question paper. Some candidates did not gain marks due to a lack of precision, for example:
  - sense unit 1: this passage told a story that happened in the past; therefore, it should be translated in past tense: 'She thought she would lose her job' (她以为她会失去她的工作), '以为' means 'thought', 'think' is not precise
  - sense unit 3: 'because her boss knew she was willing to learn new things' (因为她的老板知道她愿意学习新东西), '愿意' means 'willing', 'wished, hoped, liked' are not correct. Many candidates continue to miss out on marks through a basic lack of accuracy, omitting words, tense inconsistency and using the dictionary incorrectly

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Candidates have the choice of two scenarios of culture and employability. The two scenarios were chosen in a balanced way. There are six bullet points candidates need to address.

Some candidates still failed to address all bullet points, including the double questions in the first bullet point. Candidates from native speakers' background often missed the bullet points despite writing excellent language and structure.

Candidates should avoid covering two or three bullet points in one sentence and writing too many words on irrelevant information. Candidates who had too many sentences with minor grammatical or character errors often resulted in achieving 12 rather than 16 marks. A few candidates completed their writing in one single paragraph. Understanding of the writing structure and requirements of this task is beneficial for candidates to help gain higher marks.

Question paper 2: Listening

The listening question paper was linked to the context of learning. The two items talked about school life in Scotland and language learning. Although it is a familiar context to candidates, it proved challenging if candidates tried to predict answers or relied on guesswork.

Some candidates were unable to answer the questions accurately, often understanding part of the information but not giving sufficient detail, for example:

- item 1(a): 每一位老师都很友好, (every teacher is friendly), some candidates responded, ‘every teacher is nice or kind’, and did not gain the mark
- item 2(a): 想去苏格兰生活, (wanted to live in Scotland), some candidates answered ‘wanted to go to Scotland’ and did not gain the mark. 很多国家的人 (people from many countries) some candidates responded, ‘people in the world’ and did not gain the mark

Assignment–writing

Some candidates did not show progression from National 5 when writing about their daily routine, family, or future plans, and did not demonstrate content, language resource or accuracy expected at this level.

A few candidates failed to produce a piece of writing in a discursive nature or in a focused and structured way. At times, candidates were struggling to express or discuss different viewpoints or draw valid conclusions.

In some instances, candidates did not look for the correct sentence structure. There were occasions where candidates were translating directly from English or were too reliant on the dictionary to help them to create new sentences, which often didn’t go well.

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 Higher level
- are given the writing criteria for the directed writing question paper and discuss it
- who have heritage background, are aware of the structure and understand the approaches of the question paper
- are aware that, apart from writing pieces, answers should be written in English not in Chinese or pinyin
- make their handwriting legible, as this can affect their mark

Question paper 1: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- know the difference between reading for comprehension and providing accurate and precise translation
- read the whole passage first, rather than sentence by sentence, to gain a full understanding
- pay particular attention to the articles and tense used in the translation passage
- do not include information from the translation section in their comprehension answers
- allow enough time to complete the translation as accuracy plays an important role
- for the overall purpose question, know they must draw meaning from their overall understanding of the text rather than translating the part of the text. Assertion, justification and supporting examples are all required to achieve full marks

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- check that they have addressed all bullet points or parts of bullet points
- have the opportunity to practise more unpredictable bullet points and to learn techniques to deal with these bullet points
- address all bullet points in a balanced way. They should try to use a variety of language structures and resources to achieve high marks

Question paper 2: Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- study the heading, questions and marks allocated to them before listening to the recording. This helps them to anticipate the type of information that is required
- do not presume the context of what they hear and avoid guesswork
- give as much detail as possible in their answers so as not to miss out on marks by lack of accuracy and inaccurate information

Assignment–writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- know they are to select, manipulate and recombine learned material appropriate to the specific tasks and not rely on the dictionary to help them to create new sentences
- are aware the information relayed in the piece of writing should be mainly of a discursive nature
- write in a focused and structured way, and in paragraphs
- practise how to structure a piece of writing, while developing techniques on how to check the accuracy of any written work
- express or discuss different viewpoints, while demonstrating relevant content, ideas and opinions and, where applicable, give reasons for their opinions
- draw conclusions and demonstrate language resource (variety and range of structures) and accuracy

Performance–talking

Teachers and lecturers should:

- ensure the performance–talking is conducted in appropriate surroundings, eliminating the possibility of disruptions and background noise, as described in the assessment conditions in the Higher Modern Languages Course specification
- consider allowing for more personalisation in the choice of topics. This can provide candidates with a good opportunity to show a range of structures to express various opinions and ideas
- ensure candidates demonstrate adequate coverage of two different contexts in the presentation and conversation respectively

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.