



Course report 2023

National 5 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 in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 257

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 282

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	217	Percentage	77	Cumulative percentage	77	Minimum mark required	82
B	Number of candidates	27	Percentage	9.6	Cumulative percentage	86.5	Minimum mark required	70
C	Number of candidates	18	Percentage	6.4	Cumulative percentage	92.9	Minimum mark required	58
D	Number of candidates	18	Percentage	6.4	Cumulative percentage	99.3	Minimum mark required	46
No award	Number of candidates	2	Percentage	0.7	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied 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 more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Most candidates were able to engage with the question papers in a meaningful and constructive manner. There were very few poor performances. The question papers covered a range of topics across all aspects and were of an appropriate level of demand and challenge for the level. Candidates time management and exam techniques have shown improvement.

Question paper 1: Reading

In the reading question paper, candidates read three texts of approximately 150 to 200 characters in Chinese and then answer in English the questions that follow each text. In this year's paper, the three texts covered the contexts of employability (text 1: work and future plans), and learning (text 2: learning a language, and text 3: school day).

Feedback suggests that the question paper was appropriate in terms of content and demand. Many candidates demonstrated good reading skills at National 5 level.

Question paper 1: Writing

The writing question paper performed as intended. Candidates read a job advert in Chinese then respond to the advert using the six bullet points.

Most candidates were able to address the four predictable bullet points in a balanced way using detailed vocabulary and grammatical structures. The written responses displayed a good range of expressions, structures, and accuracy.

Most candidates addressed the two unpredictable bullet points, although many did so briefly. Overall, most candidates were well-prepared for these questions and responded appropriately.

Markers noted that both unpredictable bullet points were relevant to the job advert and straightforward for candidates to address. Most candidates performed as expected in this question paper, showing that they had prepared well.

Question paper 2: Listening

This question paper performed as intended. The paper covered the context of society. Candidates listened to item 1, a short monologue of approximately 1 minute, in which Ma Ming spoke about life at home. In item 2, candidates listened to Binbin talking to Ma Ming about his leisure activities. After each item, candidates answered questions in English. At the end of item 1, the monologue, candidates answered the overall purpose question.

The topics used were familiar and there was a range of vocabulary used across the two items. There was a good level of challenge and demand in terms of the content and the questioning.

Assignment–writing

The requirement to complete the assignment–writing was removed for session 2022–23.

Performance–talking

The approach to assessments used by all centres selected for verification were valid and accepted. Assessment judgements and marks awarded were in line with national standards. Different contexts and topics were covered.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Reading

Most candidates were able to engage well with the texts, which covered relevant topics, and many were able to access the full range of marks by reading the questions carefully and understanding the key sections of each text. It provided an appropriate level of demand, which most candidates coped well with. The questions following each of the three texts were clearly worded and accessible to candidates, making it straightforward for most candidates to locate the answers in the text. The supported questions worked well.

Text 1 and text 2

- ◆ the supported questions served to make the passages accessible at this level

Text 3

- ◆ candidates' comprehension and handling of the text have improved
- ◆ many were able to identify the correct information and responded appropriately

Question paper 1: Writing

The overall standard this year was very good. Most candidates tried to include a range of vocabulary and structures appropriate to the level. In terms of content and language resource, many candidates are comfortable with what is required of the writing task. Markers noted that there were fewer 'one size fits all' type of written responses this year. However, candidates made fewer attempts to use advanced language resources, indicating a possible trade-off between accuracy and risk-taking.

Many candidates referred directly to the job advertised rather than just a generic job application. For the second unpredictable bullet point, many formulated a question by using a question word and question particle, in response to the command term 'ask'.

Question paper 2: Listening

This year there was a wider range of marks in the listening paper, however markers noted very few no responses in both items.

Generally, candidates demonstrated a strong understanding of vocabulary relating to the context and topics of society. Candidates were able to access marks where more than one answer was possible. Some candidates continue to find the dialogue to be slightly more challenging, but many were able to successfully comprehend accessible parts of it.

Performance–talking

The overall standard of candidate performance was very high.

Candidates demonstrated good pronunciation and intonation sufficient to be readily understood by a native speaker of the Chinese language. They were able to use relevant content to appropriately complete their speech including different detailed language features.

Many candidates were able to interact well with interlocutors and respond accordingly. Candidates were provided with various topics from different contexts, which enabled them to display skills and knowledge of using the language.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

Most candidates coped well with the reading question paper, although some found certain questions to be more challenging.

Text 2

- ◆ question (a): unable to recognise 百 (hundred) in the number sequence
- ◆ question (e): not giving due attention to details, for example not picking up on the use of superlative 最

Text 3

- ◆ question (b): instead of ‘soya bean milk or soya milk’, a common Chinese breakfast beverage is referred to as bean paste, bean soup, bean syrup. This could be due to an over reliance on dictionary definitions or a lack of cultural awareness

Question paper 1: Writing

Some candidates struggled with accuracy more than content. Most candidates did not have issues with the content. Accuracy affected by dictionary misuse, interference from candidates’ mother tongue or other languages, and literal translations of phrases were the three main factors. These factors were especially apparent when addressing the last two unpredictable bullet points.

Some examples of inaccuracies:

At vocabulary level:

- ◆ handling of days of the week: 星期七

At character level:

- ◆ 母天 / 每天; inversion of the character 和

Misuse of dictionary:

- ◆ to wear = 磨损 · 比如：请问我磨损什么工作？
- ◆ to work = 事情， 比如：我事情从...

Question paper 2: Listening

Most candidates coped well, but there were questions that some candidates found more challenging, for example:

Item 1

Question 1(a): many candidates found it challenging to handle numbers, months of the year, and date formats.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should:

- ◆ encourage candidates to read questions carefully, then respond by giving the correct amount of information, ensuring that enough detail is given, as required at National 5
- ◆ remind candidates to follow instructions carefully, for example when asked to 'tick' a correct box, put a 'tick' not a 'cross' or any other symbol
- ◆ encourage candidates to ensure their handwriting is legible, as this can affect their mark
- ◆ ensure candidates continue to develop dictionary skills as part of the course and think about the context of a word in order to decide which meaning is most appropriate
- ◆ encourage candidates to read their own answers carefully to ensure they make sense in English

Question paper 1: Writing

Candidates should:

- ◆ take time to check spelling, especially with common sight characters, such as 是, 和, 我
- ◆ practise manipulating the language in a range of unfamiliar bullet points
- ◆ know that they are not required to provide a long formal introduction and/or end to the job application as this can prevent them from performing well in the required areas of the job application
- ◆ provide detailed language, for example taking it beyond a simple subject-verb-object structure, when responding to the unpredictable bullet points

Question paper 2: Listening

It is important to emphasise to candidates that the listening exam is not a memory test. Encourage them to take notes while they listen, preferably on a separate piece of paper.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure that candidates:

- ◆ read questions carefully, then respond by giving the correct amount of information, ensuring that enough detail is given, as required at National 5
- ◆ make their handwriting legible
- ◆ present their answers clearly, for example there should be a clear distinction between answers and notes
- ◆ have more practise involving note-taking as this would help candidates improve their performance in listening

Performance–talking

Centres are advised to refer to Understanding Standards materials for internally-assessed components of course assessment, available on SQA's secure website.

Teachers and lecturers should support candidates with relevant training regarding the use of pinyin and detailed sentence patterns to respond to a wide range of topics and themes within the four contexts of society, learning, employability, culture. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to express personal ideas and opinions as widely as possible.

Centres should continue to provide a breakdown of marks for presentation and conversation.

Centres may find the NQ internal verification toolkit webpage useful to ensure national standards are maintained, assessors are supported, and paperwork is not excessive. The toolkit is a suggested approach and SQA recognises that many centres have well-developed processes in place.

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.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).