

Summary of SQA Course Reports for National 5 Modern Languages 2017

Reading

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Candidates engaged well with the texts, and many were able to access the full range of marks. There were very few instances of a candidate not attempting to answer a question. Mistranslation, poor dictionary use and poor expression were factors that contributed to candidates losing marks.

French

Candidates performed very well in the reading paper, with very few candidates giving no response to a question. There were very few examples of poor expression and mistranslation this year, and the majority of candidates gave enough detail to gain the marks available.

German

Overall, candidates performed well in this paper with the vast majority of candidates passing. Most candidates made an attempt to answer all questions. Very few candidates scored less than 12 marks. Some candidates did not provide enough detail from the text to access some of the marks. Particular difficulties were the recognition of comparative adjectives, plurals and composite nouns. Item 1 proved to be the most challenging text.

Italian

Overall this paper was well done, but some candidates had difficulty in identifying the precise details in some of the questions.

Spanish

In reading, most candidates coped well with the three texts. There was little evidence of candidates running out of time or being unable to complete the paper on time. There were few questions with no response. However, some candidates did not provide enough detail in their answers, and thus were not able to access the higher marks.

Urdu

The candidates' overall performance in the reading component was good, although some candidates found a few of the questions demanding.

Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

The overall standard was very good. The majority of candidates had addressed all the bullet points fully. There was a good range of expressions, structures and accuracy throughout the majority of responses. It was encouraging to see many candidates referring directly to the job being advertised, rather than just writing a generic job application. In some cases, candidates went beyond the minimum requirement for the task.

However, accuracy is still the main challenge for some candidates and there were also some instances of dictionary misuse, mother tongue/other language interference, and literal translations of idiomatic phrases.

French

Candidates performed very well in the writing component, with most attempting the unpredictable bullets well and in detail. It was very clear from the number of very good responses that candidates were much better prepared to tackle the writing element. There was less evidence of misuse of the dictionary and learned material. It was encouraging to see that there was a marked improvement in candidates' ability to form questions in French.

German

Overall, candidates performed as expected in the writing element of the paper. There was a full range of performances and a good number of candidates were able to achieve a 16 or 20. Most candidates coped well with the first four bullet points and most attempted all six bullet points, but many encountered difficulties in the final two unpredictable bullet points. Lots of candidates kept the final two bullet points simple, which worked overall.

Italian

Many candidates were able to show that they had prepared appropriately for this task by writing sentences with good content, accuracy and language resource — in particular in the first four bullets. In addition, most candidates attempted both unpredictable bullet points. However, some candidates had difficulty in addressing the two unpredictable bullet points as a result of being unable to manipulate verbs and of inappropriate dictionary use.

Spanish

In writing, many candidates responded well to the overall task, and in particular, coped well with the two unpredictable bullet points. There were fewer examples than in previous years of candidates including irrelevant content in the writing task, and indeed, the vast majority of candidates attempted the last two unpredictable bullet points. Accuracy is still the main challenge for some candidates, including misuse of the dictionary, other language interference and literal translations of idiomatic phrases.

Urdu

In bullet-points one to four, there was evidence of a good range of vocabulary and structures, and some very complex language, showing a good degree of accuracy and fluency. However, the unpredictable bullet-points proved more challenging for some candidates. Candidates also showed competence in the use of different tenses - present, past and future.

Listening

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Candidates were able to access marks where there was more than one possible answer to the question, as well as in supported questions. Some candidates found the dialogue to be more demanding than the monologue. In particular, the reference to a third person in the conversation caused some candidates difficulty.

French

Candidates performed very well in the listening paper this year. There were very few candidates giving no response to a question. Candidates performed particularly well in the dialogue with many achieving the full 12 marks available.

German

Overall, most candidates performed better than expected with the listening. However, some candidates failed to provide sufficient detail for the point and some candidates struggled with composite nouns. Item 2 was generally well attempted but some candidates found Item 1 more challenging.

Italian

Overall, this paper performed as intended. The paper was deemed to be fair and appropriately challenging for the level.

Spanish

In listening, there were very few no response answers. This year there were not as many candidates answering questions in a general manner and many did attempt to answer the questions with answers related to the question vocabulary areas.

Urdu

Most candidates performed well in this paper and many attempted to give the appropriate level of detail. Some candidates underlined question words and took notes rather than attempting to answer the questions in full before they had heard the third playing. This is to be encouraged.

Talking

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Sampling of the Performance of Talking did not include National 5 this session.

French

Candidates performed very well in the presentation, often better or much better than in the conversation. Some candidates used language and structures that went beyond the demand at the level. Pronunciation was overall better in the presentation than in the conversation.

When candidates did not achieve the top pegged mark, it was often due to a lack of detailed language. Candidates lost marks in the conversation by only giving short responses

Many conversations were significantly shorter than the expected length, so candidates were unable to demonstrate the use of a variety of structures, verbs, tenses and vocabulary.

German

Generally speaking, candidates did well in the talking performance.

In most cases, candidates performed more confidently in the presentation, with many well-structured and fluent performances. However, some candidates struggled with the complexity of the language of the topic they had chosen.

In general, candidates performed well in the conversation section and were able to sustain an interaction based on the same or related topic in relation to the presentation context. Where interlocutors used a wide variety of questions in the conversation section, this often helped candidates to avoid recycling the same language and structures from their presentations into their conversations.

Italian

Candidates responded effectively to a supportive interlocutor. Generally speaking, conversations were of an interactive nature, allowing candidates to demonstrate their ability to sustain a conversation.

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 8 or 10. This is as expected given that this section of the performance can be thoroughly prepared ahead of the assessment. Most candidates sustained the conversation well, despite any errors. Some candidates found the conversation section more demanding as it is less predictable.

Urdu

Sampling of the Performance of Talking did not include National 5 this session.

Advice to Centres

General

- Candidates should ensure that their handwriting is legible.

Reading

- Candidates should be guided by the number of marks awarded for each question, and should give as much detail in their answer as they have understood. They should be discouraged from giving extra information as this could negate any correct information and could be penalised. It is important to note that it is rare for a single-word answer to be sufficient detail at National 5 level.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of verb conjugations, adjective endings and the comparative in French.
- Candidates should also be reminded to use the dictionary carefully and not always choose the first word given. They should be aware of common 'false friends' and should check these carefully in the dictionary.
- Candidates should be encouraged to read each question carefully and underline the key word or words in the question, which will lead them to the answer in the text.
- Candidates should be reminded that the information comes in chronological order and the questions include hooks to support the candidate throughout the text.
- Candidates should also be encouraged to read their own answers carefully to ensure they make sense in English.

Writing

- Centres should make it clear to candidates that there is now no requirement for them to use the formal beginning and endings as was required in the past.
- Centres should ensure that candidates read the information carefully regarding the job for which they are applying.
- Candidates should ensure they have addressed all 6 bullet points and use the dictionary to check the accuracy of what they have written (e.g. spelling, adjective endings, accents, words omitted).
- Candidates should be able to provide at least one accurate sentence for each of the two unpredictable bullet points, and practice at dealing with these unpredictable elements should be encouraged.
- Centres should develop ways of addressing the first four bullet points which allow candidates to use a range of vocabulary and structures, as well as applying knowledge of verbs and tenses.
- Candidates should be advised to use the dictionary to check the accuracy of what they have written (spelling, accents, genders etc) but **not** to create new sentences, as this often leads to many inaccuracies and sentences which are incomprehensible.

- Candidates should be made aware of the criteria to be used in assessing performances in writing, so that they are aware of what is required in terms of content, accuracy and range and variety of language to achieve the good and very good categories.

Listening

- Candidates should be guided by the number of marks awarded for each question and should give as much detail in their answer as they have understood, but should be discouraged from giving extra information as this could negate any correct information and could be penalised.
- Candidates should be discouraged from providing a range of alternative answers
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of numbers, seasons, months, common adjectives, nationalities, school subjects, weather expressions, days of the week and question words.
- Candidates should be encouraged to read all the questions carefully and underline key words so they can pick out the information required more easily. More practice on notetaking would also help candidates improve their listening skills.
- Candidates should be encouraged to make use of the third playing to check the accuracy and specific details of their answers.
- When the context is familiar to candidates, candidates should be advised to listen very carefully and ensure they answer the questions with what is actually said on the recording rather than answering from their own experience

Talking

- Centres are advised to encourage their candidates to use listening materials as a source for modelling their pronunciation, as assessors and verifiers must be able to understand them. Candidates must strive to minimise incorrect pronunciation, intonation and word stress that will detract from the overall impression of the performance. This is particularly important in French and Spanish
- Centres should ensure that candidates use detailed language in most parts of the performance.
- 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.
- 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 ask questions, which follow on naturally from the presentation. Interlocutors should refer to other contexts, which allows for personalisation and choice. Naturally moving on to other contexts or topics also allows the candidate to demonstrate a variety of language.
- Interlocutors should be supportive, especially with anxious candidates. Where interlocutors are aware of candidates' interests, this helps more natural/spontaneous conversations
- Centres should avoid asking questions about items that candidates have already addressed in the presentation.
- It is important that candidates are equipped with strategies for asking for questions to be repeated, or can use language structures and phrases when they have not understood an aspect of the conversation.
- Centres should not be overly prescriptive in preparing candidates for the conversation.