Summary of SQA Course Reports for Higher Modern Languages

Reading/Translation

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

The paper content was relevant, interesting and accessible. The paper was very well done with many excellent performances, although some candidates failed to identify key information. Able candidates tackled the overall purpose question well, but some only translated or retold the text without detailed comments
Candidates lost marks in the translation through lack of precision and accuracy

French

Candidates performed very well in this paper, particularly where the marking instructions allowed for a variety of responses. However, some candidates failed to write sufficient detail in their answers, or used their own knowledge of the topic to make up answers.
The majority of candidates responded very well to the overall purpose question with a large number writing lengthy answers and exceeding requirements.
In the translation, sense units 2 and 5 posed difficulty for a number of candidates with very few translating the last sense unit correctly.

German

Candidates coped well with this paper, although some candidates lost marks because they did not write sufficient detail in their answers. Candidates with a sound knowledge of culture performed better than those who had little knowledge of Europe.
There were some very good performances in translation, although some candidates are insecure in their knowledge of English tense forms

Italian

The content of paper was relevant and accessible and candidates showed a good understanding of the topic, although some aspects were challenging. Most candidates gained at least one mark in the overall purpose question.
The final sense unit in the translation proved challenging

Spanish

The content of the paper was accessible and candidates performed well, although some candidates found the overall purpose question quite challenging. Some candidates quoted their justification in Spanish and therefore lost marks. Some candidates also wrote considerably more than necessary.
On the whole, the translation was well done, but some candidates had not allowed themselves enough time. Sense units 4 and 5 were very well done but sense units 2 and 3 proved more challenging.

Urdu

The paper was accessible and the topic relevant. Candidates showed a good understanding of topic, although some found some aspects challenging
Most candidates gained at least 1 mark in the overall purpose question.

Directed Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Candidates performed well in both scenarios. Some candidates produced well-structured, accurate pieces of writing with an excellent range and variety of language structures.
Some candidates did, however, fail to address all the bullet points and a number of candidates only addressed one part of the first bullet point.

French

Most candidates chose scenario 1. Most candidates demonstrated a good knowledge of the perfect tense and generally tackled the more predictable bullet points well, often writing more than was required. However, a number of essays lacked compound sentences and complex constructions which resulted in few very good performances. There were, however, very few poor responses.
Some candidates incorporated learned material which was often irrelevant and there was lack of accuracy in genders, plurals, adjectival agreement and tenses

German

Most candidates chose Scenario 1 with many very good and good responses, although more detail could have been provided by some candidates in bullet point 4.
Most candidates showed good control of the perfect tense and sentence construction and made good use of learned material.

Italian

Candidates completed this successfully and few omitted bullet points, although some candidates failed to address the second part of bullet point 1 in Scenario 2.
Scenario 1 was the most popular choice. Learned material was used successfully

Spanish

Candidates performed very well in Directed Writing and the element of choice had a positive impact on candidate performance.
However, many candidates used the preterite and imperfect tenses inconsistently, and lack of adjectival agreement still continues to pose problem for some candidates.

Urdu

Most candidates addressed all bullet points and used learned material appropriately. The reduction in the number of bullet points may have helped

Listening/Writing

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)
Candidates performed well in the dialogue but some found the monologue challenging. Some candidates did not write enough detail in their answers
In writing, performance was very good with some outstanding essays, although some candidates did not read the question carefully enough

French
Most candidates performed reasonably well in listening, but most performed better in the dialogue section than in the monologue section. Many candidates used their own general knowledge to answer questions rather than focusing on what was being said and many lost marks by not writing enough detail.
Most candidates made a good attempt at the writing with a range of performances. There were some very good performances, but some essays lacked structure and some showed little knowledge of the present tense, preceding direct objects and adjectival agreement.

German
There were some excellent and very good performances by candidates in both parts of the listening, although some candidates guessed answers.
There were some very good and good responses in writing with candidates using the correct form of future and conditional tenses

Italian
Candidates coped very well in the listening, but some based some of their answers on their own general knowledge and not on what was said. Some candidates lost marks for insufficient detail in answers. The overall purpose question was well done.
In writing, most candidates achieved at least 6/10, but few candidates gained 10/10.
There was good use of opinion and linking phrases which allowed the writing to flow well

Spanish
Candidates coped very well in the listening paper, but lack of attention to detail and insufficient information let some candidates down.
In the writing, the vast majority of candidates wrote to, or exceeded, the word limit. Poor handling of verbs and verb tenses and lack of adjectival agreement let some candidates down.

Urdu
The monologue was very well done and the overall purpose question was very well answered by majority of candidates.
The writing was tackled successfully and candidates had been well prepared.

Talking

Cantonese, Mandarin (Simplified) and Mandarin (Traditional)

Most candidates demonstrated a high level of performance in this component and some performances exceeded the level required, although those candidates who do not get school support in preparing assessments struggle to meet the requirements of the presentation

French

Candidates coped relatively well with the presentation with the large majority achieving between 6 and 10/10. Poor pronunciation was an issue in some performances and some lacked the detailed and complex languages, structure and variety expected at this level.
Candidates coped less well with the conversation with some only able to cope with rehearsed questions. Candidates who selected topics that allowed them to use detailed and complex language performed well.

German

Overall, the level of candidate performance was high, although some candidates did not use detailed and complex language appropriate to Higher and some candidates struggled with the complexity of the language or topic they had chosen

Italian

The majority of performances were of a high standard with a huge range of vocabulary and grammatical constructions in evidence. There were no poor performances.
Candidates gave extended answers to questions and showed confident handling and manipulation of language. Candidates were able to sustain the conversation and recover from hesitation. There was no suggestion of conversations being over-rehearsed

Spanish

Candidates had been well prepared and performed well in the talking assessment, although candidates were more confident in the presentation than the conversation. The standard of presentations was high with many candidates achieving full marks

Urdu

Candidates coped well with this component.

Advice to Centres

General
- Centres should be encouraged to incorporate aspects of European geography and culture into their courses from an early stage
- Centres are encouraged to share course reports and marking instructions with candidates to demonstrate what the expectations are at Higher level
- Centres should ensure that candidates have covered all the necessary grammar required at this level by referring to the Productive Grammar Grid for Higher
- Candidates should write clearly and space out answers

Reading
- Centres should continue to highlight the difference between reading for comprehension and translation
- Candidates should be encouraged to pay careful attention to the wording of the questions and to look for "sign posts"
- Candidates should be encouraged to read the whole passage rather than sentence by sentence to gain better understanding of the passage
- Candidates should be encouraged to read questions carefully and to write detailed answers to the comprehension questions ensuring what they have written makes sense. They should be encouraged to check their answers on completion of the exam
- Candidates should be reminded to look at the text globally in the overall purpose question rather than translating part of the text
- Candidates should be trained to write succinctly in their answer to the overall purpose question. They should be reminded that they will be given no credit for simply quoting chunks of text in the target language to justify their answer

Translation
- Candidates should be given as much opportunity as possible to practise translation in class
- Candidates should be encouraged to focus on articles, conjunctions, tenses and verb endings in translation
- Centres should ensure that candidates know not to include information from the translation in their answers to the comprehension questions

Directed Writing
- Centres should advise candidates to read each bullet point carefully to ensure they do not miss out bullet points
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a sound knowledge of how to conjugate verbs in the past tense. They should be encouraged to be more accurate in number, gender and adjectival agreement
- Candidate should be advised to select, manipulate and recombine learned material and not rely on the dictionary to create new sentences
- Candidates should be reminded to incorporate learned materials appropriately
- Centres should remind all candidates - but native speakers in particular- that they will be penalised for not addressing all of the bullet points no matter how accurate or fluent the piece of writing is

Listening

- Candidates should read the listening questions carefully before the recording starts and look at the number of marks allocated for each question
- Candidates should be encouraged to give as much detail in answers to the listening questions
- Candidates should focus on the content of the text and avoid guesswork by drawing on their general knowledge
- Candidates should be encouraged to check verb forms and tenses carefully in writing. They should be discouraged from translating directly from English

Talking

- Candidates should be reminded to use detailed and complex language at this level and they should avoid long lists or repetitions of straightforward descriptions
- Centres should advise candidates on the level of language to be used to enable them to cope with, and ensure comprehension of, their presentation
- Centres should advice candidates on the choice of context or theme so that candidates have scope to demonstrate a variety of tenses
- Centres should develop strategies to enable candidates to ask for help and to recover from any hesitation
- Candidates should be given the opportunity to talk regularly in the target language in class to encourage accurate pronunciation
- Interlocutors should ensure that the questions following on from the presentation avoid the candidate repeating large amounts of material already covered in the presentation
- Interlocutors should ensure they ask open-ended questions to give candidates scope to use detailed and complex language and should avid asking all candidates the same questions.

SCILT (January 2016)