



GCSE
Chinese (Mandarin)

8673/SH Paper 2 Speaking Higher Tier

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

As in previous years, there was a very positive response to this specification: another successful year. The performance of the paper in the light of students' responses demonstrated that schools/colleges continued to have a good understanding of the established specification and its effective implementation. It was very pleasing to see a significant increase in the number of schools that entered students for AQA GCSE Chinese compared to previous years. All these attest to the ongoing encouraging situation for Chinese language teaching and learning.

On the whole, schools/colleges coped very well with the requirements of the specification, with many well-conducted tests seen. The format of the GCSE Chinese speaking test continued to allow all students to demonstrate a level of oral proficiency that was commensurate with their ability. In particular, most schools that had used this specification in the past administered and carried out the tasks to a much higher standard this year, which indicated that they had heeded the report provided by AQA based on the conduct of the exams in 2023 and that teachers had taken on board the advice and suggestions given. While reflecting on this positive aspect, it is also worth noting that in a minority of cases, the specification requirements were not correctly followed, which led to some students being disadvantaged. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the 2024 GCSE Chinese speaking test, both in terms of teacher conduct and student performance. It will highlight best practice, as well as signposting areas for improvement for 2025 and subsequent years.

Tier of Entry

Following on from advice given to schools/colleges in 2023, it was pleasing to note that most Higher tier students performed in a way that justified their tier of entry. However, there were still a small number of students who would have been better suited to Foundation tier. Schools/colleges are advised to make judicious entry decisions that will allow students of all abilities to perform confidently and reach their full potential.

Quality of Recording

Generally, there was an overall improvement in the quality of the sound files this year. Tests were well administered by schools/colleges, with very clear recordings and accurate information provided about individual students, all of which contributed to a more efficient marking process. However, schools/colleges should be aware that it is very important to ensure accurate information when introducing each student at the start of the recording for the benefit of both students and examiners. Any errors in students' candidate numbers, names, etc., cause additional work for clarification and correction. It is imperative that the speaking test is conducted at a suitable venue and that a quality recording device is used. Although this was usually the case, there were some instances where external background noise and/or poor-quality recordings affected the audibility of the recordings, all of which made marking a very difficult exercise for the examiners. In a minority of cases, the recordings of students or teachers were not clearly audible: the teacher's voice was much louder than the student's, or vice versa', there was a lot of background noise, all of which made it difficult for the examiners to work out what the students or teachers were saying. When background noise in all its forms (school bell, mobile phones, paper flipping, etc.) became intrusive, this created problems for marking. Schools/colleges are reminded to be aware of extraneous noise issues and to avoid this happening again in future years.

Teachers are also reminded that they should not stop or pause the recording at any time during the test, and individual student recordings should be saved in a single audio file. Occasionally, this was not the case.

Teacher Conduct

Test Procedures

It was pleasing to note that there has been an overall improvement in the conduct of the tests compared to the previous years of this specification, with the vast majority of teachers adhering closely to the guidelines laid out in the *Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations*. The introductory information for each test was concisely, clearly, and effectively articulated. However, it is worth reminding teachers that at the start of each student's test, the student's candidate number and name should be announced by the teacher, and not by the student. There were some cases where teachers did not announce each section of the test (Role play number; Photo card number; Conversation theme 1; Conversation theme 2). Occasionally the candidate number was wrongly given by the teacher and this caused confusion and delay in the marking process.

The prescribed combination of Role play, Photo card and General conversation given in the sequence chart was adhered to by the vast majority of teachers. Unfortunately, there were a small number of instances where the wrong combination of Role play, Nominated Theme and Photo card was used, resulting in the theme of the Photo card being duplicated in the General conversation, or, at times, only one Theme being covered in the General conversation. In such cases, the maximum mark for Communication that can be awarded is 5 out of a possible 10.

Some teachers also failed to follow the correct sequence while conducting the tests. The table in the Sequence Chart must be followed precisely, so that the first 20 students examined by each teacher-examiner at a centre are all allocated a different sequence of tasks. Only if there are more than 20 students should a teacher-examiner go back to Student No. 1 on the Sequence Chart. This is to avoid a situation in which many students use the same Role play cards.

Once the test has begun, procedural matters should be announced succinctly in the target language. Transitions between sections of the test should be very clear. There is no need for any use of English during the tests: each new section should be introduced in Chinese. For instance, the Role play can be introduced by using a sentence such as ‘第一部分，角色扮演卡片 8，我是你的朋友。’. To indicate to the student that s/he should begin his/her Photo card task, the teacher can say ‘现在进入第二部分，图片会话/or 看图会话卡片 H。照片里有什么？’. To indicate the transition from the Photo card task to the General conversation a sentence such as ‘现在进入第三部分，普通会话 1，你选的是主题 2…….’ can be used. It is particularly important to announce the change of theme during the General conversation, eg 普通会话 2，主题是……’.

This year it was pleasing to see that the vast majority of teachers did very clearly indicate the transition from one section to the next in the target language as suggested above. Teachers should be commended for their well-organised test procedures and consistent way of conducting the test for each student. However, in a minority of cases, English was still used to indicate the start of each section of the test. Occasionally, some teachers conveyed the instructions to lower attaining students in both English and Chinese. In some cases, there was no transition to indicate the change of theme in the General conversation. Teachers are reminded that, for the benefit of both students and examiners, they should

clearly signal the transition to the second theme of the General conversation in the target language after the discussion of the first (nominated) conversation theme has concluded.

Teachers are reminded that students' language should not be corrected during the test, nor should they be given any key vocabulary. In such cases, no credit can be given for a student's subsequent response.

It is also worth noting that no marks are awarded when a teacher repeats a question after the student has given a complete, but incorrect, answer. There were also some cases during the Role play and Photo card tasks in which some teachers re-phrased an unanswered question many times, even after all the tasks were completed. This is to be discouraged.

Students are expected to use repair strategies, if needed, throughout the test. An aspect of this is to ask for clarification or repetition. Many teachers had taught their students phrases in Chinese such as ‘请再说一遍。’. When students asked in English for a question to be repeated, the subsequent response was credited for Communication, but, in the case of the Role play and General conversation, it could contribute to a lower mark for language.

At times, while the student was still trying to answer a question, the teacher moved on to another question and did not allow the student sufficient time to complete their answer. Teachers need to be a little more patient in allowing the students some thinking time and letting them complete their answers before moving on to the next question. On some occasions, teachers accidentally skipped a question in the Role play and/or Photo card sections, which not only confused students but also disadvantaged them by leading to a loss of marks.

It is most important that teachers thoroughly understand the *Instructions for the conduct of the exams* available on the AQA website and ensure that they are applied correctly.

Teacher-examiners should at times pay more attention to their own pronunciation and tones when asking students questions in order to ensure that they convey the message accurately. On occasion, mispronunciation on the part of the teacher actually altered the meaning of the question, which had the potential to disadvantage students.

Timings

Timings were usually appropriate for the tier, but in some schools/colleges this was not the case.

There is no fixed time for the Role play task. However, most students completed this section within the suggested two minutes for Higher tier. Hesitant delivery and repetition sometimes led to overlong Role plays. Occasionally, teachers gave lengthy responses to students' questions, which should be avoided. This also applies to the General conversation section.

Most students completed the Photo card task comfortably within the time limit at both tiers. At Higher tier, where the time limit is three minutes, there were some cases where not all five questions were asked within the time allowed, or where some answers could not be credited because they were delivered outside the prescribed time. This was occasionally due to very slow delivery by the student, but more often the result of an overlong and repetitive type of answer in response to the first question, 'what is in the photo'. The problem was at times also caused by teachers not strictly adhering to the five questions in the Teacher's Booklet, but instead asking supplementary follow-up questions or re-phrasing unanswered questions too many times.

At both tiers, most teachers adhered to the minimum and maximum timings for the General conversation. Some failed to reach the minimum time per theme for Higher, ie two and a half minutes. There were also some occasions when the minimum time requirement was not met for both of the themes. This impacted the mark awarded for Communication. Teachers are reminded that it is vital to allocate the time for the two themes appropriately. Teachers are advised to note that the timing of each General conversation theme starts immediately after the first question on that theme has been asked. Anything said by the student beyond the maximum time limit (seven minutes in total for the two themes) is disregarded for assessment purposes.

Conducting the Role play Task

In the Role play, the prescribed wording in the Teacher’s booklet was adhered to by most teachers. In a minority of cases, however, teachers rephrased the script, which invalidated any subsequent response by the student. Schools/colleges are reminded that teacher-examiners must adhere precisely to the script. Teachers may repeat a question, but they should not rephrase any questions. It was noted that some teachers repeated questions too many times, or rephrased questions, sometimes even supplying key vocabulary. Other teachers waited too long when students were clearly unable to answer. On some occasions, teachers kept repeating ‘还有吗?’ in order to elicit further details, when in fact the student had already given sufficient information to answer the question, which confused the students and at times even resulted in incorrect answers. Occasionally teachers inadvertently skipped a question, or either omitted words from, or added words to, the script when asking a question. Teachers are reminded to take extra care when reading out the script in the Teacher’s Booklet.

In the case of two-part questions, eg those requiring an opinion and a reason, most students responded very well, using the conjunction word ‘因为’ to give a justification immediately after expressing an opinion. It is good practice to prompt the students by repeating ‘为什么?’ to elicit a missing justification in order to ensure that the task is fully completed.

Conducting the Photo card Task

The vast majority of students understood that the questions in this section focus on a specific topic and invite students to first describe the content of the photo and then develop their own ideas and opinions. The ability to develop responses is one of the criteria necessary for achieving the upper bands of the mark scheme. Most students were obviously aware of this. There were, however, a few cases where high attaining students did not seem to be aware of the requirement to extend responses and scored lower in this section.

Overall, this section was conducted well by the vast majority of teachers. The five prescribed questions were asked in the order given in the Teacher’s Booklet. The three-minute maximum time limit for Higher tier was adhered to, and the time allowance proved ample for students to provide developed answers to all five questions. However, some significant issues occurred in a small number of schools/colleges which need to be addressed for the benefit of future students.

Schools/colleges are reminded that, unlike in the Role play section, in the Photo card task a question may be paraphrased. When considering any paraphrasing of Photo card questions, the exact original meaning of the question must be preserved. This can be achieved by the substitution of an individual word with a synonym or, in some cases, with the use of a different language structure. However, no additional elements, which aim to clarify the question further, are permitted. During the test, teachers

generally made only minor changes to the script, without altering the meaning, which was acceptable. However, at times some questions were significantly changed, altering, for example, the sentence subject. For example, in PCG, Q5: ‘这个周末，你的家人打算做什么?’ was changed to ‘这个周末，你和家人打算做什么?’; in PCK, Q3: ‘上个学期，你的朋友觉得什么科目最难?’ was changed to ‘上个学期，你觉得什么科目最难?’; in PCL, Q4: ‘你的家人觉得你应该上大学吗? 为什么?’ was changed to ‘你妈妈觉得你应该上大学吗? 为什么?’. Such changes, which substantially alter the meaning of the original question, are not permitted. Sometimes, students were asked additional questions, a question was omitted, or the answer was supplied to the student by providing a choice question. All of these situations disadvantaged the students concerned and, as a result, students’ responses could not be credited or were seriously affected. Furthermore, the addition of additional questions by teachers sometimes meant that not all of the questions in the Teacher’s Booklet were asked within the prescribed maximum time allowance, preventing students from achieving the highest marks.

Teachers are reminded to follow the *Instructions for the Conduct of Exams* which states: The teacher-examiner must ask the student the five questions in the teacher’s booklet in order. They must ask **only** these questions and **no supplementary ones**, even if the test falls short of the recommended maximum time or if students fail to develop enough answers to gain access to the higher mark bands in the assessment criteria. Teachers are also reminded to keep to the appropriate timing: three-minute maximum time for Higher tier.

On occasion, after the last question of this section had been completed, teachers returned to questions from earlier in the section, which had either been incorrectly answered or which the student had failed to answer. This is not permitted and teachers are reminded that in such instances no marks can be awarded.

Conducting the General Conversation

In general, this part of the test was far more spontaneous than the other two sections, but also more challenging. It was conducted well by the majority of teachers in a highly professional way. Students were provided with sufficient opportunities to show their full potential in responding to questions, including producing at least one question for the teacher to answer during the General conversation. However, there are some areas which need to be improved and also some good practice which should be commended.

First of all, teacher-examiners are particularly reminded that:

- a) The General conversation section is a dialogue, not a presentation or monologue. Teachers should be aware that a presentation is not an acceptable format for this section of the test. At times, at the beginning of the nominated theme, students were asked to give a self-introduction ‘请介绍一下你自己。’ / ‘说说你自己。’ which led to a significantly prolonged monologue and seriously affected the mark for Spontaneity. One glaring issue occurred this year in the conduct of Nominated Theme 2: a 2-minute long presentation was given at the beginning without any instructions from the teacher-examiner, which meant that no questions were answered, and this could not be credited.
- b) While it is fine to make use of the example questions in the Teacher’s Booklet, it is important to make sure that the questions selected belong to the correct theme. For example, if the student is currently being asked questions on Theme 1, then example questions taken from the booklet must also correspond to Theme 1. Occasionally questions were randomly selected by teachers

from a theme other than the one currently being discussed, which confused the students and led to lower marks for Communication.

At Higher tier, the questioning techniques were generally very good, allowing students to give developed and complex responses and use different time frames. Many teachers conducted their tests well and asked different questions to different students, tailoring the questions to their students' abilities and interests. Unfortunately, some teachers seemed to have a set list of questions per topic and kept to that list for all students, no matter what their ability. This usually had a negative effect on students' marks, especially for low attaining students, who could not answer the more demanding questions. When moving from one theme to another, most teachers did as requested and indicated the change of theme on the recording. This was helpful for the students and also for the examiners.

Timings were usually good. The total timing for the General conversation at Higher tier is between five and seven minutes. However, the time spent on each theme is equally important. If a student spends less than two and a half minutes on one or both themes, there is a deduction of two marks for Communication.

Another area where a deduction of marks is applied was when a student fails to ask the teacher-examiner a clearly understandable question. In such cases, there is a deduction of one mark. The question can be on either of the two themes covered in the General conversation. The teacher-examiner is allowed to prompt the student to ask a question by saying ‘你有问题吗?’ or ‘你有问题要问我吗?’ or ‘请你问我一个问题吧。’ In some schools/colleges, the students were not prompted to ask a question. Sometimes the question was asked after the maximum time had elapsed, which meant it was disregarded for marking purposes and a penalty of a one-mark deduction was applied for Communication. Teachers are advised to encourage students to ask a question early on in the conversation to ensure it does not fall outside the time allowed. A few students did not seem to be aware of the need to ask the teacher a question, responding to the teacher's question ‘你有问题吗?’ with ‘没问题’ . This occurred in particular with very able/native-speaker students, who clearly had not been well prepared for the test. A solution to this would be for the teacher-examiner to use a less ambiguous question, eg ‘请你问我一个问题’ particularly when examining students who have not been fully prepared for the examination.

With regard to the Range and accuracy of language, high-attaining students were able to achieve high marks by demonstrating their ability to incorporate complex structures and a wide range of appropriate vocabulary. A set of utterances that is mainly error-free but very simple will not attract the highest marks. To achieve the higher ranges of the mark scheme at Higher tier successful use of ambitious structures and a wide range of vocabulary are required. Teachers are advised to encourage students of all abilities to use three-time frames in the General conversation in order to score in a higher band mark for Range and accuracy of language.

The quality of pronunciation varied greatly. Where poor pronunciation seriously hindered comprehension, this could also have an impact on the Communication mark. In terms of Communication, teachers are reminded that marks are based on the amount of information successfully conveyed by the student. Marks also take into account any ambiguity introduced and reflect how much the students elaborated on their answers. Higher attaining students should be encouraged to develop their ideas and to produce longer sequences of utterances.

An open-ended question such as ‘说说你去年的圣诞节是怎么过的。’ enabled higher attaining

students at this tier to give an extended response by narrating sequences of events. Closed Yes/No questions are often of very limited usefulness.

In their questions, some teachers strayed beyond the theme being discussed. Teachers are advised to check which sub-topics fall within each theme in order to avoid this. As mentioned above in this report, where only one theme is covered in the General conversation, or where the same theme is discussed both in the Photo card task and in the General conversation, a maximum of five marks only can be awarded for Communication.

It is not advisable to ask two or three questions together, in quick succession, without allowing students the chance to respond to each individual question as it is asked, eg ‘你的家人抽烟、喝酒吗？你觉得抽烟、喝酒的坏处是什么？’，as a single utterance. Asking questions in this manner makes it likely that students will forget to respond to one of the questions, potentially disadvantaging the student.

Teachers should be aware that a presentation is not an acceptable format for this section of the test. The emphasis is on a dialogue between the teacher and the student, not a monologue. Where students engaged in long monologues, it prevented them from demonstrating their ability to interact spontaneously, which is the purpose of this section of the test. In order to achieve the best outcomes, students should be given an opportunity to respond spontaneously to a range of questions, rather than relying heavily on pre-learnt responses for a few questions. Where students engaged in long monologues in the manner of a pre-learned presentation, the award of marks was seriously affected.

Teachers are reminded that whilst students are permitted to nominate the first theme of the General conversation, they are **not** permitted, according to the Instructions for the Conduct of Examinations, to nominate a topic or sub-topic within this nominated Theme. For example, a student may choose ‘Theme 1 Identity and Culture’ as a nominated Theme, but may not choose the topic Free-time Activities or the sub-topic ‘Music’.

Student Performance

Students mostly coped well with the requirements of the specification and much good language use was in evidence. At times, where poor pronunciation and tones resulted in an unclear message, credit could not be given for that particular response.

Student Performance in the Role play Task

It was pleasing to note that most students were able to access the bullet points and formulate an appropriate and succinct response. Sometimes students did not address the tasks, but offered other, unrelated information, or did not answer the questions in a straightforward way, which showed that they were relying solely on pre-learnt responses.

As in previous years, the unprepared question, indicated by ‘!’, proved difficult for some students, even though it only required one detail. Even more challenging was the ‘?’ question, which required students to ask the teacher a question by using the information given. The weaknesses in this area indicated the need for more practice in asking different types of questions. It is worth noting that for the ? Task in the Role play and in the General conversation, an elliptical question using ‘你呢？’ is acceptable, but only when there is an obvious context, so that the meaning is clearly understandable from the previous sentence, eg In RP 9 ‘我每个星期都做运动，你呢？’.

A significant number of students at both tiers did not take on board the scene-setting statement explaining where the Role play was taking place, eg Role play 8 ‘in a Chinese restaurant’. Students need to understand the importance of carefully reading the Role play scenario at the start of their preparation time in order to correctly respond to transactional Role plays.

On some occasions, and at both tiers, students gave far more information than was necessary to accomplish the task, which is to be discouraged in the Role play task.

Specific comments on Role plays

Below are those issues which appeared to be the most challenging for students. Tasks that are not mentioned were generally executed well, especially those which required opinions and justifications. It is worth noting that for some students, the responses to questions containing 什么时候 (when), ……的时候 (when…), 几点 (what time), 怎么样 (requiring an opinion), 在哪儿 (where), 怎么 (how), 今天 (today), 这个 (this) remained challenging.

Role play 7

Task 1

In this task, ‘你常常用社交媒体吗？为什么？’ the key vocabulary ‘社交媒体’ was a major challenge for some students, and it was omitted in their response to the question.

Task 2 !

In the unprepared question ‘！你喜欢什么时候上网？’， a straightforward answer which responded to ‘when’ was required. Some students did not seem to understand the question phrase ‘什么时候’， and could not provide a clear answer to the question.

Role play 8

Task 2

In the question ‘你觉得这个饭馆怎么样？’ the interrogative pronoun ‘怎么样’， which was being used to elicit opinions, was not responded to well by some students. The response to ‘这个 (this)’ demonstrated that students did not understand how to respond to transactional Role plays. In such Role plays, students need to imagine themselves in the scenario created and respond appropriately; in this case they are in a (specific) Chinese restaurant and need to provide an opinion about that specific restaurant, rather than Chinese restaurants in general. Students are advised to read the rubric in English on the Role play card carefully so that they are fully aware of what they are expected to do. This is especially true of transactional Role plays. Students should thoroughly understand the scene-setting statement which explains where the Role play is taking place.

Task 3 !

In the unprepared question ‘！今天饭馆几点关门？’， a straightforward answer giving a time was required. However, many students did not respond well and the vocabulary ‘今天 (today)’， ‘几点 (what time)’， ‘关门 (close)’ proved challenging to some lower attaining students.

Role play 9

Task 3!

Some students found responding to the question phrase ‘在哪儿’ in the unprepared task ‘你喜欢在哪儿做运动?’ , which required a location challenging. This was also true of other questions containing ‘在哪儿’.

Role play 10

Task 2!

In the question ‘! 你喜欢怎么去旅行?’ , the interrogative pronoun ‘怎么 (how)’, which was being used to elicit the method of travel, was not responded to well by some students and they were unable to provide an appropriate form of transport.

Role play 11

Task 2

Some students were unfamiliar with the meaning of ‘同学’ (classmate) and instead used 朋友 (friend), which was accepted for communication purposes.

Role play 12

Task 1

The key vocabulary ‘售货员’ in the task ‘将来, 你想做售货员吗? 为什么?’ proved a major challenge for many students. They clearly did not understand it and were unable to pronounce it. Instead, the phrases ‘商店人’ or ‘在商店工作’ or ‘在超市工作’ were used, which were accepted for communication purposes.

Student Performance in the Photo card Task

Generally, students seemed well prepared for this part of the test. Most students were able to give a reasonably well-developed response to the first prepared question ‘照片里有什么’. In the case of lower attaining students, this tended to take the form of descriptions of people in the photo. Almost all students were able to give personal opinions and reasons. There were a small number of cases where students spoke only briefly about the content of the photo before giving a personalised response that was irrelevant to the question. Understandably, responses to the three prepared questions were usually more developed than those to the two unseen questions. At Higher tier, however, many students successfully attempted to give developed responses to all five questions and were able to access the 13-15 band.

Specific comments on the Photo cards

In order to score in the top band, students needed to answer all the questions clearly and develop at least three (‘most’) answers by using at least three clauses, including at least one opinion and one justification. There was no extra credit given in this question for complex language, as this question is marked in terms of Communication only. Accuracy and pronunciation, however, are important factors in achieving clarity. Lower marks were mainly caused by: students misunderstanding the questions, giving short answers, providing no response or an inappropriate response, lacking knowledge of vocabulary or linguistic structures, missing out an opinion and/or justification, or serious pronunciation errors.

It is worth noting that when responding to the first question ‘照片里有什么? What is there in the photo?’, student responses must be rooted in the content of the photo. Merely saying ‘I like the photo’ without any justification would not constitute, on its own, an answer to the first question because it does

not relate to the content of the photo. Remember students must only describe **what is in the photo**, not what is not. When using conjecture, a justification for that conjecture must be given, eg ‘他们很高兴，因为我看到他们在笑。’. A conjecture without justification to support the description/statement cannot be credited.

Regarding the first question ‘照片里有什么？(What is there in the photo?)’, a small number of students responded using the first person, eg: ‘图上有我的家人……’. Students should be encouraged to narrate their descriptions/information of the photo **in the third person** when responding to this question. Answers like this cannot be credited.

Photo card G

Question 4

Some students missed out the superlative adjective ‘最’ when responding to the question ‘在你家里，你最喜欢谁？’. Sometimes ‘很’ or ‘非常’ were used instead of ‘最’. A similar situation arose in other questions containing ‘最’, which were accepted for communication purposes.

Photo card H

Question 4

The choice question ‘你觉得在家还是去电影院看电影？为什么？’ was understood by the majority of students, and responded to well with justifications and detailed explanations.

Photo card I

Question 3

For this question: ‘说说你小时候住过的一个地方。’, some students did not extend their response and just simply answered ‘我住在伦敦。’, with no description of the place.

Photo card J

Question 2

The response to the question ‘你觉得环境很重要吗？为什么？’ was not developed by some students due to a lack of sufficient environment-related vocabulary, and limited information was conveyed.

Photo card K

Question 3

The last question ‘上个学期，你的朋友觉得什么科目最难？’ was intended to elicit a response in the third person, but occasionally some students incorrectly responded with ‘我觉得……’.

Photo card L

Question 3

Some students were unfamiliar with the word ‘兼职’ and could not respond appropriately. At times, they used ‘工作’ instead of ‘兼职’ in their communication, which was accepted for communication purposes.

Student Performance in the General Conversation

It was pleasing to note that almost all students were able to use the target language to ask for a question to be repeated and to say they did not understand. Most students were also able to ask the teacher-examiner a question as required by this section of the test. Many students performed well,

including reference to three time frames and a range of accurate complex language, which enabled them to achieve the top band for Range and accuracy of language.

There was a wide range in the quality of responses in the General conversation, but the vast majority were able to score at least some marks. As in previous years, there was a pre-learnt feel to some of the conversations, but by and large some spontaneity was maintained.

Specific comments on the General Conversation

Generally, most students were well prepared for this part of the test and gave developed answers, particularly in response to prepared questions from the nominated theme. Opinions and justifications were regularly conveyed. On occasion, there was a large discrepancy between the responses conveyed on the nominated theme and those for the second prescribed theme. When this occurred, it inevitably impacted the overall mark for Communication. Many performances were fluent, but not necessarily in an authentic way, suggesting that the material had been pre-learnt. The quality of pronunciation varied greatly. Where poor pronunciation seriously hindered comprehension, this could also impact the Communication mark. With regard to Range and accuracy of language, high marks were achieved by higher attaining students, demonstrating their ability to incorporate more complex structures and a wider range of appropriate vocabulary in their responses. Many students successfully demonstrated the use of three time frames.

In terms of the mark for Communication, the required length of the General conversation is between five and seven minutes. Each theme must last for a minimum of two and a half minutes and, if one or both are under that time, there is a penalty of two marks for Communication. Such being the case, students should be encouraged to develop their responses by conveying additional information in order to meet the minimum time requirement.

It is worth emphasising a requirement for students to ask the teacher-examiner a clearly understandable question, and this can occur at any time during this section of the test. If no question is asked, there is a deduction of one mark for Communication. Correct timings were generally observed, but many teacher-examiners only invited the student to ask a question at the very end of the General conversation. By the time the student had responded, they were often out of time and hence incurred a one mark deduction in line with the mark scheme. Given this potential risk, it is recommended that students try to ask a question earlier in the test. Students in some schools/colleges should be commended for asking a question during the first (nominated) theme of the General conversation, or even at the very beginning of this section. Some students generated a follow-up question by using a ‘statement + 你呢?’ , for example ‘我最喜欢跟朋友一起度假, 你呢?’ or ‘我喜欢喝中国茶, 你呢?’ , which is acceptable.

Some students were able to deliver a reasonably fluent performance using rehearsed responses. However, balanced against this was the lack of ability to interact spontaneously, meaning that the top mark of 5 in the category of Spontaneity and fluency could not be awarded to this level of performance.

In the light of students’ responses, knowledge and skills regarding the time frames still need to be enhanced. In Chinese a verb does not inflect or change its form to indicate tense. Therefore an appropriate time word or expression, or a time reference or context for the action of the verb must be clearly provided when referring to past, present, or future events and actions. Modal verbs such as 想, 会, 打算, 计划, 希望 or 要 + verb, etc. can indicate future time reference. Aspectual particles/aspect

markers can also be accepted for actions with different time references, eg verb + 过 or 了 to indicate past events.

Advice to teachers

Teacher-examiner Tester Performance records (TTPRs)

A *Teacher-examiner tester performance record* (TTPR) will be sent to some schools and colleges following the marking of the speaking tests. The information provided on the TTPR is intended to provide teacher-examiners with feedback on the conduct of the speaking tests in order to inform the conduct of future tests. It is not possible to provide more detailed feedback than the information on the TTPR form. Feedback is provided on the basis of need only and not for every teacher-examiner. Teachers who receive TTPRs are advised to read them carefully. If one is not received, it is still a very good idea for teachers to take a look at the blank TTPR sheet (available via the AQA website) to help them prepare for future tests.

General

- Do a short test recording before the first student's test to check recording levels and clarity.
- Position the microphone or digital recorder so that it picks up both voices clearly.
- Make sure that your own and the students' mobile phones are switched off (not just on silent) before the recording begins. Students should not have access to their mobile phones during the preparation time or during the exam, in accordance with examination regulations.
- Do not shuffle papers or move items around on the desk during the test. Such distracting practices can be unsettling to the student. With regard to recordings, any extraneous noise produced can obscure utterances.
- The 'Instructions for the conduct of examinations' document is available via the AQA website. It is *essential* that you follow the instructions in that document.
- In the Instructions document, you are told how to introduce each student in English. This is what you should say at the start of the recording for every student:
GCSE Chinese examination, June (*year of exam*). Centre number ____, Candidate number ____, Candidate name ____. Role play number ____, Photo card letter ____, General Conversation theme chosen by candidate Theme (1, 2 or 3).
- Everything said by the teacher-examiner must be clearly audible. Instances of whispering will be referred to AQA.
- After you have introduced each student, their Role play, Photocard, and nominated theme *in English* (as detailed above), then use Chinese throughout the rest of the exam.
- Please use an appropriate Chinese translation for English terms, eg Role play card: 角色扮演卡片; Photo card: 图片会话/or看图会话卡片; theme: 主题; topic: 话题.
- Respond positively to what students say, even if it is not very good. It will encourage them during the rest of the test.

Role play

- Keep to your script as laid out in the Teacher's Booklet. Not doing so will mean that the student's response will receive a mark of 0 for Communication for that task.
- If you see that a student is starting to give the wrong answer to your question, stop him/her immediately and repeat the question. Once the student has completed an incorrect answer, a

mark of 0 for Communication is given for that task, even if you repeat the question and a correct answer is subsequently given.

- If a student asks you to repeat a question, you may do so. If a student provides no answer, you may also repeat the question before moving on.
- Do not repeat unanswered questions too many times when students are clearly unable to answer.
- Your reply to the question asked by the student should be clear and concise.

Photo card

- You may paraphrase a question, provided the meaning of the original question is maintained. However, be careful to ensure that this is the case or the student's reply will not be credited.
- Ask all five questions in the Teacher's Booklet, but do not ask any additional questions.
- Keep an eye on the timing. If a student's replies are very long and it looks as though you may not be able to ask the final question within the three-minute maximum time, it may be better to interrupt a student's answer and move on to the next question.
- In a two-part question in an unprepared task, ask the first question, wait for an answer, and then ask the second question. Failure to do so in the unprepared task almost invariably leads to the student having to ask for the question to be repeated.
- Do not re-phrase unanswered questions too many times, as this will interrupt the flow of the conversation.

General conversation

- Encourage students to vary their language structures and vocabulary as much as possible, including a range of opinion words, adjectives, time expressions, verbs, modal verbs, conjunctions and the like to enhance communication skills and enrich conversation content.
- Train students to give and justify opinions without necessarily being asked to do so. This can form the basis of different starter activities in classroom settings.
- Be sensitive to the ability of the students – someone who struggles to describe his/her town is not going to be successful at discussing more challenging aspects of the topic, for example the impact of global warming.
- Try to ask students questions that reflect their interests. Avoid asking all students identical questions.
- In order to achieve a greater sense of spontaneity in the conversation, follow up a student's response by asking about what they have just told you.
- Keep a close eye on the time. If one of the themes lasts for less than 2'30", there is a deduction of two marks for Communication.
- The maximum length of the General Conversation is seven minutes. Everything after that will **not** be marked.
- Remember to prompt the student to ask you a question if they do not do so without being asked. It is better to get them to ask you the question during their nominated theme so that you don't forget to do it later on. Alternatively, encourage students to ask the question early on during the General Conversation, to ensure that it does not fall outside the time allowed.
- If the first question the student asks you makes no sense, get them to ask you another one.
- Keep your reply to the question asked by the student as concise as possible.

Advice to students

- Use the 12-minute preparation time wisely. You can write down exactly what you are going to say in the Role-play tasks and in response to the three questions on the Photo card.
- For the Photo card questions, try to prepare answers of at least three sentences, using a verb in each one, and including opinions and justifications.
- Listen carefully to the questions that your teacher asks you for the unprepared questions in the Role-play and Photo card sections, as well as to all questions in the General Conversation.
- You can ask for a question to be repeated in any part of the test, but make sure you ask in Chinese. You could say ‘请再说一遍。’, for example.
- Remember to ask your teacher a question related to the themes during the General Conversation to avoid a loss of one mark for Communication.

Closing remarks

Teachers and schools/colleges are thanked for their hard work and effort this summer, providing their students with a positive experience and the opportunity to perform to the best of their ability in this component.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.