



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	German
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The 2013 Higher German examination presented candidates with a Reading Text on the life of a large family, a Directed Writing task centred on visiting Germany shortly before Christmas, a Listening Interview on the life of a native German speaker who had left Germany five years earlier, and a Personal Response writing task on plans for the future. Taken as a whole, these topics covered all aspects of the Higher German course. Candidates, in general, responded well to all elements of the paper, which examiners and markers found most encouraging. Most candidates had been well prepared for the examination.

Both the Reading and Listening papers had their fair share of demanding questions as well as relatively straightforward questions with which all candidates should have been able to cope well. In 2012 concerns had been raised about the quality of candidates' translation responses, and detailed advice was provided in the External Assessment Report; it was encouraging to find that centres and candidates have engaged with this advice and the standard of translation was better, with further advice provided in this report.

2013 candidates paid more attention to the detailed bullet points in the Directed Writing with the result that fewer lost marks for failing to address necessary detail. However, certain issues do remain and further advice is provided on this.

The Listening paper provided a mixture of responses. While at least half of the available marks were within the ability of almost all candidates, there was no single question which proved to be beyond candidates' ability.

The Personal Response task was addressed very successfully by almost all candidates, with the result that relevance was not an issue.

The examination as a whole was considered to be a very fair test of candidates' ability and, with no question having caused major problems, the pass mark was restored to 50%, with an A being 70% and an upper A 85%.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Reading

Candidates coped particularly well with the opening question in this paper about the amount of weekday washing and Sunday ironing to be done. Other everyday vocabulary allowed candidates to perform well in questions 2(a), 2(c), 3(a), 4(a)(ii), 6(a)(i) and 6(a)(ii). These constituted 9 of the 20 marks available in this task, and encouraged candidates to engage with the other questions in the paper.

Listening

Highly successful questions in this paper were 2(a) (information about a family), 4(a) (length of time spent with the family), 5 (accommodation of second family), 7 (details of holiday job in Canada), and 8 (what the speaker did on her return to Scotland). These constituted 7 of the 20 marks available. The opening question was also quite well done, with the result that many candidates were able to achieve 9 marks without complications.

Many candidates also performed well in one or both Writing tasks.

Areas which candidates found demanding

All too often the questions in which candidates do not perform well are not linguistically demanding questions. It is frequently a question of lack of attention to detail or sometimes exam 'tunnel vision' — writing an answer which does not make sense due to the pressure of the situation. Usually, at the end of a meal, one does not empty the dishwasher, one loads it; yet a significant percentage of candidates made this error.

However, the major issue was the lack of attention to detail. At Higher level, no mark is gifted to candidates. At question 1(b) 'a paddling pool and sandpit' are no test of a candidate's German; the key information was that the sandpit was inside a wooden hut. The final question of the Reading paper asked 'When **exactly** do the parents get time to themselves?' Some candidates did not fully answer the question, writing just *halb zehn*. That was the first part of the answer and the second part was actually given in numbers: *Bis 6.30*. Many also lost the point for being unable to translate correctly *halb zehn*. This is careless, not to say expensive.

In the translation a significant number of candidates did not perform well in the unit *Das kann natürlich auch nerven*, not because of difficult German but because they omitted *auch*. There was also a difficulty with *Es ist Leben im Haus*, which is tricky to render in good English. However, many candidates still gained 1 mark for this section.

In the Listening paper, question 3(b) proved difficult for many candidates, perhaps more from the point of view of the concept than the difficulty of the German *ich musste mit den Kindern ausziehen* — she had to move out with the children. Candidates were also challenged by *ich habe ein Jobangebot bekommen* and *mich bei ihnen melden, wenn ich ein Praktikum oder einen Job suche* in the final question, although these expressions are within the experience of a Higher candidate.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading

In Reading there is a need for both detail and common sense. Candidates should understand that they will always have to provide detail for every answer in the Reading paper.

As commented on earlier, in 2013 marks were lost unnecessarily for the omission of the *Holz-Häuschen* in question 1(b). At question 2(b) the two youngest twins exhibited two quite different behaviours: the first twin was malicious and deliberately tipped her food on to the floor, while the second one had an accident, although the result was the same — the food ended up on the floor. At 2(c) there was a lack of logic with the dishwasher. At question 3(b) all the detail was needed: *dreistündig+Grosseinkauf+ohne Kinder*. At 4(a)(i) a simple concept was required — to paper and paint the hall. Too often candidates used ‘decorate’ instead of one of ‘paper’ and ‘paint’; this is imprecise. In 4(b) the four twins were going to be able to leave the *elterlichen Schlafzimmer*, the parents’ bedroom. In question 5 Max was taking the dog a walk with *einer seiner Freundinnen*, one of his female friends, while Joshua *ist zu einem Freund gegangen*, went to a friend’s, not went out with a friend. Reference has been made earlier to the lack of detail in the final question.

The key question therefore is ‘How do I avoid making mistakes such as these?’ Candidates can be reassured that all of the language in the Reading text will be accessible to everyone who is well-prepared for Higher German. The examples above show some ways in which candidates can deprive themselves of marks quite unnecessarily. If future candidates understand clearly what went wrong for these 2013 candidates, then they should be able to avoid making similar errors in 2014.

The key to this paper is the time spent reading the German. Answers can very easily be written as bullet points in 20 minutes, if 20 to 25 minutes have already been spent reading and re-reading the text. At the start of the exam candidates would do well to read the whole text through without recourse to a dictionary. Then they should home in on the first section of the text about which questions have been set, and read that section again, still ignoring the dictionary. Finally they should focus on the wording of the question, as that will almost certainly be a translation of part of the text. This will lead them to the answer. Examples of this in 2013 would be these: Question 1(a): Laundry = *Wäscherei*; Question 2(a): Before lunch = *Vor dem Mittagessen*; Question 3(a): the ‘voucher’ = *der ‘Gutschein’*; Question 4(a)(i): in the next few weeks = *in den kommenden Wochen*.

Sometimes a very difficult German word may appear in the text without a glossary; almost certainly the word will be translated in the question. Identify that word, locate it in the text and the required answer should be clear. Candidates who follow this advice will find the Reading exercise considerably less stressful and will therefore achieve well in the paper.

Translation

Detailed guidance was provided on this exercise in the 2012 report; centres and candidates are recommended to re-read this advice. However, some further advice can be offered this year:

Use English word order: All candidates will be aware that German word order can be quite different from word order in English. They should therefore make sure that, in their final translation, they use English word order. In the 2013 translation there were three examples of inverted word order; with the exception of the sentence beginning *Bei acht Kindern* normal word order would be more natural in English. If a sentence reads unnaturally, it is unlikely to be awarded 2 marks.

Omit nothing: Candidates must check that they have translated every single word in the sentence. In 2013 the word *Geräuschpegel* was demanding, but very well translated by the majority of candidates, who sometimes went on to leave out either *meistens* or *sehr* and thus lose all the marks for the unit.

Do not offer alternatives: If you offer two different translations, one of which is correct but the other wrong, the wrong one will be marked. It is not the marker's job to choose the correct response.

Read over everything: In both the reading and translation exercises, candidates must read over everything they write. If the answer does not make sense to the candidate, then it is almost certainly wrong.

Directed Writing

Candidates should make sure that they devote 40 minutes to this task, 10 minutes of which should be used for reading over the response.

The first thing to look at is the content. It was very encouraging to find that most candidates had taken on board the advice offered in 2012 and made sure that they included all the information asked for. It is helpful to write 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5, 6 in the left hand margin to make sure that all bullet points have been covered and, in the case of the first two, both parts of them. It also provides both the candidate and the marker with a clear picture of the balance of the response.

Do not write responses to bullet points that are not there. With 150 to 180 words as the requested length, this only allows 25 to 30 words for each bullet point, and these should be used wisely.

Candidates should read over very carefully all the details of the task set, especially the opening sentence which sets the scene. If it is about Christmas, then reference should be made to December issues. Cold temperatures and snow would be relevant. An Easter scenario should refer to spring activities and an October holiday could include autumn issues.

Attention to these details can make all the difference between success and failure in the final bullet point. In 2013 this was 'what you would recommend about being in Germany just before Christmas'. These last three words are critical, and a pre-learned response about the people being friendly and welcoming does not answer the task. Reference to the Christmas markets, the cold temperatures, the winter activities, however, would be highly relevant.

The task allows candidates to demonstrate their mastery of German grammar, rather than an ability to learn paragraphs and reproduce these in an examination. There will always be at least one unexpected task, and the candidate with a sound knowledge of grammar will cope well with this.

There is a concern that some centres might not be encouraging their most able candidates to be adventurous. Strong candidates should be aiming to show a mastery of complex sentences, which is so often the difference between 12 and 15 marks.

As with every other section of this exam, candidates should make sure that they leave enough time to read over their response and that they put a line through anything they do not want the marker to read.

Candidates who follow this advice are well placed to achieve a positive result in their final examination.

Listening

In the two minutes before the interview is first played, candidates have the opportunity to read all the questions they are about to answer. It is essential that this time is used wisely. By reading the questions carefully, candidates can build up a clear idea of the areas which are going to feature in the interview. They can focus on the question words to ensure that they know exactly what type of information they are going to have to provide, and the number of marks available indicates how much information they will require. By the time the CD is started, well-prepared candidates should be prepared for what they are about to hear.

It is always important that candidates listen carefully to what is being said and that they do not allow their writing of answers to impede their concentration on what they are hearing. Listen first, write second! They have a second opportunity to hear the entire recording.

In the two minutes between recordings candidates can write — on the question paper — the answers about which they are confident. They should then focus on the questions about which they are less sure. Having heard the interview once, one has a good idea of exactly where the interview is going; during the second playing candidates should concentrate fully on the key responses and write down what they think is being said – there is nothing wrong with writing down the German word and working out later what it means.

In 2013 there was a link between two answers – *auf einem Bauernhof* and *die Tiere füttern* ie on a farm and feeding the animals. A minority of candidates rendered the first answer as 'in a station'; this neither fitted with the later answer nor was it a particularly realistic answer. It is important to remember that the questions and responses in the interview may well offer links between different parts of the recording. The environment is meant to be supportive to candidates.

At the end of the second playing, candidates should then finish off all their answers. They should remember to score out anything the marker is not to read. Finally, it is important that candidates should read over their answers, and even more important to resist the urge to change any of these answers without very good reason.

Personal Response Writing

The topic of this part of the examination is always linked in some way to the subject of the Listening paper. The shrewd candidate will always re-use some of the ideas expressed in the interview.

It is important to remember that the response is quite short, 120 to 150 words. There is therefore no place for redundant material. It is not a past tense task and there is therefore no place for anecdotes about eg a past holiday.

Although the question may appear to refer to two separate tasks, they are always interlinked. The 2013 paper asked about future plans with regard to both where to live and potential career. These can be addressed together or separately. However, structure is important, both to the reader and for the writer, so candidates should write in paragraphs.

Over many years the task often refers to *Vorteile und Nachteile*, advantages and disadvantages. It is important for candidates to be clear in their mind that these are both plural nouns; and that they are in fact masculine nouns — *der Vorteil, der Nachteil*.

Finally

The advice offered in this report is aimed at supporting and giving confidence to candidates. There were very clear indications in the responses of 2013 candidates that the advice offered in 2012 had been taken on board, with the result that there was a clear improvement in overall performance. This is highly encouraging and centres and candidates are to be congratulated on their work in 2012–13.

If there were to be one area of the course on which more time were to be spent, it would have to be Listening. It is understandable that candidates find this the most challenging part of the exam, as by its very nature it is here one second and gone the next. Listening to past paper texts is excellent practice, as is turning these into cloze texts, having candidates transcribe the most demanding parts, cutting them up into a series of short listening exercises with the aim of ensuring that, by the time the final examination day arrives, candidates are as confident as they can be about the listening test.

Higher German is a very accessible qualification and this is confirmed by the quality of passes attained in 2013. Well done to all the candidates and to all those who taught you!

Statistical information: update on Courses

Higher

Number of resulted entries in 2012	1118
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	1050
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 100				
A	36.7%	36.7%	385	70
B	22.2%	58.9%	233	60
C	21.4%	80.3%	225	50
D	7.2%	87.5%	76	45
No award	12.5%	100.0%	131	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.