



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	German
Level	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 2010 Higher German paper was designed to give potential 'C' pass candidates every opportunity to achieve such a pass, while also providing significant challenges to allow candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of German and thus gain a pass at 'B' or 'A'. The Reading and Listening texts covered the topics of the Higher German Course very well.

Both the Reading and Listening texts also allowed for some more basic questions around the middle of the text. The setting team had felt that this would provide a good boost to candidates who might be flagging at this point, and who might thus benefit from a surge in their confidence to help them to gain marks in the second half of each text. This did seem to be successful.

Overall, candidate performance was not quite as good as in 2009. The average marks in the papers were 26.0 in Reading and Directed Writing (down 2.0), 17.2 in Listening and Personal Response Writing (down 2.2) and 21.3 in Speaking (up 0.3). Centres' estimates for a 'C' pass were absolutely spot-on; at 'B' and 'A' centres were slightly severe. There was no difficulty in setting the pass mark for the 2010 paper at 50%.

It was interesting to identify fewer very good performances at 'B' and 'A'. Although candidates scored well enough to pass the examination, marks were lost — at times quite unexpectedly — at some of the more demanding questions, and even at some less demanding ones. Lack of attention to detail was an issue which caused candidates to lose marks in both Reading and Listening, while lack of care in addressing bullet points in the Directed Writing remains a concern; some candidates attempted to reproduce a pre-learned essay without adapting it in any way to the tasks set, and this simply does not work.

There is again a drop in the number of candidates willing to aim for 15 in the Directed Writing; too many seem to prefer to stop at a safe 12. The examining team would urge centres to push their candidates to produce responses which would gain them full marks; in most cases, half a dozen complex sentences is all that it would take.

In Listening, the expression *Erinnerungsstücke von ihrer besten Freundin* proved to be beyond all but a very few candidates; as a result, it was felt fair to reduce the minimum mark for an 'A' pass to 69, as a result of which the 'B' boundary was also reduced by 1 to 59. However, because this point was not intended for 'C' pass candidates, there was no need to adjust the pass mark, which remained at 50.

Overall, the paper met its targets and, although the pass rate is lower than in 2009 at 82.1%, this is still the second highest pass rate in recent years, and should encourage centres to promote Higher German to their students. It was disappointing to note a decline of 83 in the numbers presented in 2010, especially given the continuing excellent performance by Intermediate 2 candidates. Centres are encouraged to promote Higher German to their candidates, and the Intermediate 1 and 2 and Higher teams continue to work together in the construction of all three examinations, an approach which allows for a very clear progression across the three levels.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Markers commented that many candidates scored particularly well in the translation. Many candidates also coped well with the demands of the Directed Writing, including the final bullet point which asked them whether a stay in Germany immediately before the exam diet had proved a help or a hindrance. It was also felt that, while the Personal Response Writing on first glance seemed challenging, there were many good responses showing thoughtful and individual ideas making less use of 'prepared' language than has occurred in earlier years with other topics.

Areas which candidates found demanding

A number of candidates appeared to have difficulty with understanding some aspects of German word order and grammar. In the very first question in the Reading paper, difficulties were encountered with *wo mich niemand kennt*, with quite a number of responses reading 'where I knew nobody'. Higher candidates should not be having difficulty with the difference between *ich* and *mich*.

Other unexpected areas of difficulty for some candidates were *Leute, die ihr erzählen, wie es woanders ist; die Eltern legen ihr Veto ein; Sie wollen sich anschauen, wie Annette lebt und wer eigentlich dieser Kerl ist, der alles durcheinander bringt* and the final paragraph of the passage. However, the issues here tend to centre round lack of attention to detail, with far too many candidates incorrectly translating *wie*, which is one of the first question words learned in S1.

In the Listening paper, a number of candidates did not understand *Wir hatten hier eine Cousine aus den Staaten zu Besuch* and *Ich will mal sehen, ob dort wirklich alles so ist, wie man es in den Filmen sieht*. However, the question which proved to be most demanding was the one which centred on *Erinnerungsstücke von meiner besten Freundin, Klaviernoten* and *deutsche Rezepte von der Oma*. It was accepted that the first point had been too demanding, as a result of which the cut-off score for an A was reduced by 1 mark. However, at Higher level, candidates should understand *Klavier* and either *deutsche Rezepte* or *Rezepte von der Oma*.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading

Candidates need to concentrate on the final detail in their responses at Higher Level, and this advice is being repeated once again in 2010. Full responses are essential at this level, modal verbs matter, adverbs like 'too' and 'very' can make the difference between a correct answer and an incomplete one; numbers need to be correct and so do months of the year. Candidates also need to be clear that, at Higher level, subordinate clauses can be extremely important.

An example of this would be in the sentence *und spielt mit ihnen, bis die Eltern kommen*. To write 'play with them' is insufficient according to the German in the text; to gain the mark candidates have to write 'play with them until the parents are/come back'. A further example

would be *um sich für den Studienplatz in Kapstadt zu bewerben* — ‘to apply for a place at uni’ is wrong but ‘to apply for a place at uni in Capetown/in South Africa’ is correct. By failing to collect two such straightforward marks as these as a result of not providing enough detail in the answer, candidates are reducing their own chances of attaining the grade of which they are capable. In short, candidates can do themselves a lot of good by developing the habit of reading over each answer and making sure that all the information is there.

The detailed marking instructions are now published on the SQA website every year, and centres and individual candidates can learn a great deal from using these as a teaching and learning tool. Critical concepts or individual words are underlined in the marking instructions; this means that the inclusion of this information was critical, and this needs to be repeated to candidates on a very regular basis.

The number of candidates reading the line numbers into their answers continues to decline; when working with past papers, all centres are asked to emphasise to candidates that line references are provided in the Reading text and that these do not form part of the text.

Translation

Markers commented that many candidates were well prepared for this part of the examination, and centres are to be congratulated on this. However, preparation for this section of the paper should not be at the expense of the teaching of German, as candidates need to develop the vocabulary, grammar, expressions and skills to allow them to have a good understanding of the Comprehension section of the paper.

The need for precision and accuracy are paramount: candidates must check through their translation with a fine toothcomb, ensuring that every German word has been translated into English, that the personal pronouns have been rendered accurately in English, that *nicht* is not confused with *nie*, etc. Similarly, candidates must not insert words which are not in the text.

To gain full marks, candidates should not paraphrase, and they must not turn direct speech into indirect speech. While it is only a small minority who do this, it does result in the loss of all the marks for the Unit(s) in question, and this is unnecessary.

Centres should consider reviewing their teaching of the main German holidays with their Higher candidates. Although *Weihnachten* was not an issue, for a small number of candidates *Silvester* was. ‘Easter’ was offered as a translation, but some candidates thought that *Silvester* was the name of a person.

Directed Writing

The scenario and tasks are different each year; candidates must therefore read carefully both the task set and the six bullet points which have to be addressed. They need to be aware that they incur a two-mark penalty if they omit some or all of the material required at any one bullet point, and if they do this at three bullet points, then their score is automatically zero.

The opening two bullet points are in two parts, and candidates must include both elements in their response, eg how you travelled to Germany **and** what the journey was like, what the

town was like **and** what you thought of the family home. Although the opening tasks are fairly predictable, they still change each year. Centres may find it helpful to look at the Directed Writing tasks in all the Higher Modern Languages examinations in 2010 and to share these with candidates.

However, the object of the Directed Writing task is to provide some structure round which candidates can demonstrate their ability to manipulate German. Its purpose is not to stifle creativity, although the candidate must not forget to address the tasks set. Candidates must not try to recall an essay written earlier in the year unless they are incorporating aspects which are totally relevant to the task set. The Directed Writing gives candidates every opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of German vocabulary, structures and grammar, bringing these together to show the extent of their mastery of the language.

Candidates are very capable of writing an impressive response to the tasks set; there is no value in reproducing responses to bullet points which are not there. In fact this can seriously jeopardise the balance of the essay. With a recommended maximum word count of 180, candidates should be writing about 30 words for each bullet point, incorporating relative clauses or subordinate clauses as appropriate. Examiners look closely at the content balance of essays, as well as at the quality of the language used, and candidates are unlikely to score the best marks if they have addressed the initial two bullet points in 120 words and the final four in 60 words.

In recent years, one of the bullet points has on several occasions dealt with everyday household chores and activities. Although candidates are now better at addressing these, there is still room for improvement, and centres are encouraged to ensure that candidates re-use their vocabulary from earlier studies. It is not unrealistic to expect Higher candidates to be able to write about making their bed, helping with housework, setting the table or washing dishes.

It is quite common for candidates to be asked to write about how they spent their free time; in 2010 this was expressed as 'What you and your German friend did in the afternoons and evenings'. The 's' at the end of these words directs the candidate to some variety in responses, not merely one day shopping in town or one evening in a restaurant; the tasks set are deliberately open-ended to allow candidates to incorporate a rich variety of vocabulary and constructions in their writing.

Candidates coped well in writing about their families and other people. That was most encouraging, and centres should continue with their excellent preparation for this and similar points.

The final bullet point will frequently have a little challenge in it; it will not necessarily ask whether being in Germany was good, but why it was good and what was good about it. In the 2010 scenario, candidates were specifically asked for a comment about the timing of the stay in Germany. Some responded extremely well with answers about it being good for their German, or stating that it was not good as they did not get any study done, or even that it left them with a lot to do on their return home. This was excellent. Candidates who made no reference to exams, studying, homework or the like were deemed not to have addressed the point, and it is important to reiterate this point to candidates — they really must make sure

that they have addressed the task set in this particular exam, and not answer bullet point 6 from some other piece of writing they have completed.

The Directed Writing is there to allow candidates to show off their knowledge of German. The exercise does not seek to trick the candidates, nor is it static; the tasks change every year but they will always allow the candidates to demonstrate their knowledge of and confidence in German.

It is relevant to repeat advice from 2009. The examining team recommends to all Markers that they assess each response twice, once concentrating on the language used — and underlining errors in the language — and once concentrating on the content and, in particular, checking that all aspects of all bullet points have been addressed.

We would encourage all centres to mark their students' work in the same manner and to ensure that all the bullet points have indeed been covered. By writing 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5, 6 in the left hand margin, the Marker not only sees that everything is there, but these also give a very clear picture of how well the candidates have balanced the content of their Directed Writing. If there is a weakness in the balance, then even very good German writing might not be enough to secure the top mark.

Despite advice given in previous reports, some candidates still tackle the Directed Writing before the Reading; some even do the Directed Writing then the translation before the Reading. Undertaking the paper in this order does not help the candidate at all, and both the examining and marking teams strongly recommend that candidates address the question paper in the order in which it is presented.

Listening

Examiners will always try their best to give candidates slightly easier questions at the beginning and end of the test. It is not unusual to find one of *Juni/Juli* coming up at this level, and candidates really need to listen carefully. In 2010, another option was to select *seit fast einem Jahr*. However, the *fast* was important, and these little adverbs always are vital at this level. Just as important are words like *Wochen* and it is essential that candidates pay attention to their writing and do not put down 'months' instead of 'weeks'.

As in other parts of the examination, attention to detail is of paramount importance — *die kulturellen Unterschiede* do not equal 'culture', *eine Autostunde* is not just 'an hour', *selbstbewusster und selbständiger* are not 'self confident and independent'. Careful candidates can pick up marks quite easily just by paying attention to these little details. In that way they can still attain 12 to 15 marks even without getting the answers to the more demanding questions. It is little hints like this that can make all the difference between passing the exam and attaining a 'B' or even an 'A', and candidates would do well to take this advice.

Personal Response Writing

In 2010, a small number of candidates wrote a past tense essay about a holiday they had spent abroad. Candidates must be clear that this is not a past tense task and, even more importantly, they must read the task set and respond to it. In 2010, the task was *Möchtest du ein Jahr in einem anderen Land verbringen? Wohin würdest du gehen? Warum?* This did not

ask for details of a previous holiday, nor did it ask whether the candidate would rather live in a town or in the country. However, examiners met both of these, and candidates have to realise that these types of response are irrelevant and are awarded zero. Centres must make clear to candidates that, while the Directed Writing will be written primarily in past tenses, the Personal Response task will require the present, future or conditional tenses but very rarely a past tense, and, if at all, on one or two occasions only.

There may well be more than one way of responding to the task set, depending on the emphasis the reader places on the task. Many candidates were quite happy to write about spending a year abroad. However, some chose to emphasise the *Jahr* and wrote very good responses about a year being too long, but three months or so being a different matter. This is fine and is an example of candidates using their own ideas rather than trying to reproduce the same essay as everyone else.

In 2009, centres were asked not to give candidates a formula by which to answer the question, as these result in every response being identical and do not allow the individual candidate to show her/his ability to manipulate German. It is encouraging to note that this advice has been heeded in many centres. Examiners are happy to encourage creativity in the candidates' writing, as long as they make sure that they address the tasks set.

Centres can be very proud both of the quality of their teaching and the resultant quality of their candidates' work. There are many candidates who respond well to the demands of the Higher German examination. This continues to reflect the quality of learning and teaching in Scotland's German classrooms — please continue this good work and encourage more candidates to choose German at this level!

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	1261
Number of resulted entries in 2010	1178

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	37.6%	37.6%	443	69
B	23.2%	60.8%	273	59
C	21.3%	82.1%	251	50
D	8.7%	90.8%	103	45
No award	9.2%	100.0%	108	–

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.