



External Assessment Report 2011

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

Once again the setting team sought to present candidates with a paper that would allow potential 'C' pass candidates every opportunity to achieve such a pass while also providing significant challenges to allow candidates to gain a pass at 'B' or 'A'. The Reading text dealt with a young German's experiences of summer work on a North Sea island. The Listening text concerned a German teenager who was spending a year in Scotland.

As is the case every year, the Reading text was an authentic one, adapted from a German newspaper. It was anticipated that candidates would be able to relate to a text that centred on work in a café, and many indeed did. The translation was different to some recent texts in that certain of the sense units were briefer in German than they would be when translated into English. Some candidates coped extremely well with this exercise. As the translation accounts for 10% of the total marks of the examination, centres are advised to ensure adequate time is given to developing this skill in class.

The main issues in Reading Comprehension centre on candidates' dictionary misuse and lack of attention to detail. The most common examples of these issues would be: medical help in an emergency *hanging from* a helicopter; the omission of 'big' in 'big hotels'; and the omission of 'white' in 'long, white sandy beaches'.

Candidates should be aware that translation requires a focus on detail and accuracy; this exercise is not merely another reading comprehension question. If approximation is offered, the best that can be awarded is 1 out of 2. If a key word is then omitted, the result is 0.

Candidates paid close attention to the requirements of the Directed Writing exercise, with only a few losing marks by omitting all or part of a prescribed bullet point. Some candidates coped well when they were asked to write about their participation in a debate on smoking in cafés and restaurants. It was clear that this was a topic that had been included in many courses, and there were some excellent responses. However, in some cases candidates did not seem to have an adequate knowledge of German grammar to cope with this less predictable bullet point.

It was pleasing to see a significant number of candidates achieving 12 for the Directed Writing element, with a few achieving the maximum 15. Including at least one accurate complex sentence in each bullet point would allow the marker to award 15 more often.

On the whole candidates coped well with the Listening exercise. As with the translation, however, a major reason for lower marks was candidates' lack of attention to detail. Some lost marks in the opening question by omitting 'east' from 'north-east' and turning a 'village' into a 'town'. The follow-up writing was on the subject of the family — clearly a subject with which candidates were comfortable; some excellent responses were provided.

The average mark in Paper 1 was 24.9, 1.1 lower than in the 2010 examination. However, in Paper 2 the average mark rose to 18.0 from 17.2 in 2010, while the average Speaking mark was 0.1 lower at 21.2. The pass mark for the 2011 paper was set at 50%.

Although there were 124 fewer candidates than in 2010, it was encouraging to see presentations from 10 new centres and the return of a further 21 centres.

Centres are encouraged to promote Higher German to their candidates — 82.3% of the 2011 cohort passed, 36.9% at 'A', 23.6 at 'B' and 21.8% at C. Higher German remains a course where candidates can achieve highly.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In Paper 1, Reading, candidates coped particularly well with questions 1, 3 and 4c. In Paper 2, Listening, questions 1a, 3, 7 and 9 were well done.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Candidates found question 6 of the Reading paper the most challenging question; the word *Feierabend* was misunderstood by many.

In Listening, questions 5 and 6 proved to be the most demanding.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading

It is clear that centres do excellent work in preparing their candidates for the Reading Comprehension task. In the same way the setting team seeks to lead the candidates to the relevant part of the text by the phrasing of the questions. Where there is a difficult word in German, the translation of this may well be provided within the question, and it is important that candidates are aware of this.

However, candidates should appreciate that there will be redundant text within the passage, ie text that is required to make the article flow, but about which no questions are asked. In the 2011 paper this was primarily within the second paragraph at lines 13 to 17.

It is vital that candidates read the text carefully and pay attention to fine detail. The following mistakes were common among the candidates who sat this paper:

- ◆ *Familien, die vom Strand kommen* were often 'families who were going to the beach'.
- ◆ *Wenige hundert Meter breit* was changed by many to 'less than a 100 meters wide'.
- ◆ Many candidates did not correctly identify the word *Gymnasium* and translated it as 'sporting activities'.
- ◆ Although most candidates included all the details of *die gute Meeresluft ohne Autoabgase*, often an adjective was omitted from *der lange weiße Sandstrand* with the resulting loss of the mark.
- ◆ *...sind mir manchmal Tassen und Gläser vom Tablett gefallen* was frequently mis-translated. Some common mis-translations were: 'they were knocked off the tray', or

'dropped the tray', and some candidates mistook tray for 'tablet'. In other cases one of cups or glasses was omitted.

Centres should ensure that candidates develop the habit of reading over each answer and checking that all the information is there.

As with all examinations at Higher level, some of the questions in the Reading paper are designed to be discriminatory; Question 6 was intended to be such a question. It is important that candidates understand that there will always be a particularly demanding question and that in some questions worth three or four marks, while two of the points can be reasonably straightforward, one could be a bit more challenging, and one might be very challenging. Question 2b is an example of this.

The detailed Marking Instructions are now published on the SQA website every year, and centres and individual candidates are encouraged to use 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.

Centres are to be praised for ensuring that no candidate read a line number into an answer. When working with past papers, centres should continue to emphasise to candidates that line references are provided in the Reading text and that these do not form part of the text.

Translation

Marks were lost due to lack of attention to detail in the translation. As always, the translation was divided into five sense units, with one deliberately demanding unit. There are two ways in which all the marks for a unit can be lost: omitting a word or phrase, or seriously mis-translating a word. In the first sense unit *Für uns* caused unforeseen issues; some candidates omitted it while others translated *uns* with *them*. The translation of *Hektik* was challenging, where the English word *hectic* does not work on its own. It is important that candidates learn to check that they have translated accurately all of the words in the unit.

In the second unit, some candidates did not correctly identify the concept of 'taking and receiving' orders, writing instead, 'receiving orders'. Candidates should be aware of the importance of clarity of expression when translating into English, and should be encouraged to relate what they are reading to their own life experiences.

The third unit was demanding and was very much a dictionary-skills unit linked with attention to detail. The detail which a significant number of candidates omitted was *Berg*, and many were keeping the dishes in check, rather than the pile or mountain of dishes.

The performance in the fourth unit was generally disappointing, as some candidates did not correctly identify the meaning of *einpacken*. Again, marks were lost for lack of attention to detail in this unit. The final unit saw some candidates re-structure the sentence and thereby lose 1 mark, sometimes 2. *I was dead tired when I fell into bed* is changing the structure of the sentence from the original *I fell into bed dead-tired*, and can only be awarded 1 mark. Similarly ignoring the tense and rendering the verb in the present tense also means that the maximum mark achievable is 1.

To summarise, candidates would achieve well in the translation exercise by routinely carrying out these checks on their work:

- ◆ Have I included every word?
- ◆ Have I translated correctly pronouns, especially personal pronouns?
- ◆ Have I kept to the structure of the German text?
- ◆ Have I kept to the tense used in the original? (The exception to this would be the use of the historical present, when we would use a past tense in English. There were no examples of this in the 2011 translation.)
- ◆ Does what I have written make sense to me? If it does not, then something is wrong and I need to identify what this is and correct it.

Directed Writing

It was extremely encouraging to find relatively few candidates who lost two marks by omitting crucial information. With each cohort of candidates, however, centres should emphasise the point that two of the tasks will require two sets of information; these can be easily identified by the printing of the word '**and**' in bold type.

The scenario for this task is different each year, with four fairly predictable bullet points, one reasonably predictable bullet point, and one fairly challenging. It was refreshing to read this response by one candidate: *Wir haben Gesellschaftsspiele mitgebracht. Auch haben wir Magazine und Zeitungen mitgebracht und untereinander getauscht. Die meiste Zeit aber habe ich Musik auf meinem Handy gehört.* This response reflects what young people actually do when they travel together. Centres may find it helpful to gather ideas from their candidates and update their banks of phrases and sentences.

There was a lack of *Landeskunde* knowledge among candidates. It is reasonable to expect that Higher candidates are aware of the main German rivers, mountains and seas as well as the *Länder* of the country and the basic geography.

Many candidates did not appear to know the German for house, preferring *die Hause* to the more acceptable *das Haus*. There were also errors in sentences involving family members, with genders and cases frequently incorrect. This was repeated in the Personal Response Writing. Some candidates also had difficulty rendering *last October* in correct German.

One word which, perhaps understandably, causes candidates some difficulty is *Jugendliche*. A number confuse this with *Jungen* and blend the two into '*Jugendliche*'. Centres might like to ensure that candidates are clear about the two different words.

Candidates are being well prepared for writing about how they get on with other people and how they spend their free time; centres should continue their good work on these areas. One particularly good additional comment from a candidate was this: *Wir haben unsere E-Mail Adressen ausgetauscht, damit wir auch später in Kontakt bleiben.* Not only is this a relatively uncomplicated sentence; it also includes a subordinate clause which helps the candidate towards the top mark, 15.

Participation in a youth debate on smoking in cafés and restaurants was the unpredictable point. The ideal response to this bullet point could have been as follows: *In der Debatte haben wir über Rauchen in Cafés und Restaurants gesprochen. Ich bin dagegen und das*

habe ich auch gesagt. Ich bin sehr froh, dass wir Schotten die Debatte gewonnen haben. While the candidates might not have known *die Debatte* and *debattieren*, these are not complicated words for a Higher candidate and are also to be found in the dictionary.

Markers have expressed concerns that there are centres where every candidate's response is virtually identical. This is not helpful to candidates. The unpredictable task will always be done well by candidates who can construct German on their own, using their knowledge of German grammar and structures. That said, there were many centres whose candidates had a good knowledge of German and were able to cope with this and other aspects of the Directed Writing task.

The final bullet point asked **why** the young person would (not) recommend taking part in such an event. Some candidates did not read this task correctly and responded that they are going back to Germany next year. This does not address the bullet point and results in the candidate losing 2 marks. It is important that candidates address the exact task set and, in this case, that requires a positive comment about the event or a *weil* or clause or a sentence including eg *deswegen*. One particularly good response was this: *Ich empfehle es sehr, da man die Meinungen anderer Leute hört und man sieht, wie Menschen aus anderen Ländern über ein bestimmtes Thema denken.*

Advice for candidates

- ◆ Content matters. Aim for balance — 30 words for each bullet point.
- ◆ Vary word order, making good use of inversion.
- ◆ Incorporate at least one relative clause or subordinate clause into your response for each bullet point.
- ◆ Read over what you have written, checking each sentence for correct past tense verb, case of each noun/pronoun, gender of each noun.

Advice for centres

- ◆ Encourage candidates to use complex sentences where possible. Look at the Directed Writing tasks in all the Higher Modern Languages examinations and share these with candidates.
- ◆ When marking candidates' work, assess each response twice, once concentrating on the language used — and underlining or marking in some way every error in the language — and once concentrating on the content and, in particular, checking that all aspects of all bullet points have been addressed.
- ◆ Write 1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5, 6 in the left hand margin. In this way you gain a very clear picture of how balanced the content is.
- ◆ It was very encouraging to see a reduction in the number of candidates who tackle the Directed Writing before the Reading. The examining and marking teams strongly recommend that candidates address the question paper in the order in which it is presented.

Listening

It is important in this paper to listen to what is being said. Particular issues in the 2011 paper were:

- ◆ *Vor zwei Jahren* is not the same as *für zwei Jahre*; a significant number of candidates wrote *for two years*.
- ◆ *Ein regelrechter Wettbewerb* was demanding. It is important that, where there is a more difficult word, candidates are encouraged to write down the German and look it up in the dictionary later.
- ◆ *Jeder nimmt ... drei Stücke Pizza* — It is important to focus on the verb — in this case, *nimmt*.
- ◆ *Wir mussten erstmal darüber sprechen, wann man ins Bad kann* — *sprechen*. This vocabulary should be accessible to candidates at Higher. *Fremde Menschen* was mistranslated by many candidates. It is important that learners are aware that these are *strangers* in English.

Given the nature of these issues, it might be a useful exercise for centres to treat one or two short extracts of past papers as dictation exercises so that candidates become accustomed to writing down in German short phrases which initially puzzle them. This might then allow them to use the same technique in future examinations and help them to improve their mark in Listening.

Personal Response Writing

It was pleasing to find that all essays were relevant to the question. Candidates were comfortable with the topic and had ideas to express. As in the Directed Writing, a number of candidates used erroneous grammar when writing about their family, eg *In meiner Familie gibt es meinen Vater, meine Mutter, meine zwei Schwestern und mich*.

A further issue for centres to address is advantages and disadvantages, where some candidates referred to the singular as *eine Vorteile/ Nachteile*. Some candidates also confused *nicht* and *nichts*.

As with every section of the examination, candidates should read over and check their answer when they have completed it.

On the whole, the majority of candidates coped well with the exercise. The responses from certain centres were superb and reflected outstanding learning and teaching.

Conclusion

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

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	1178
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	1054
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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	37.8%	37.8%	398	70
B	23.1%	60.9%	244	60
C	21.9%	82.8%	231	50
D	7.0%	89.8%	74	45
No award	10.2%	100.0%	107	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, 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.