

Research and Information Services

MONITORING STANDARDS REPORT



Comparison of German CSYS 1992 1998 and Advanced Higher 2004

Summary of Findings

1 Syllabus

The syllabus and its assessment are not as demanding in 2004 as they were in the previous years. The range of skills taught and assessed has decreased significantly and there is evidence to suggest that good candidates are not as challenged by AH German as they were by CSYS German.

The 2004 syllabus is less demanding in breadth and depth than the syllabuses from the older years.

2 Candidate performance

In the limited areas where meaningful comparison was possible, the panel found that candidates at a certain grade in 2004 did perform as well as candidates in previous years. However, there was evidence to suggest that in these areas there was an overall downward turn in the level of performance over the period 1992 to 2004.

Findings

1.1 Changes to the general approach

Compared to previous years, the general approach has changed. Between 1992 and 2004 there have been significant changes in the syllabus. Many changes are justified in terms of a 'communicative approach' to language learning (made clear in the 1998 syllabus). Changes can be seen in the aims of the course, the implied approach to language instruction and the weighting of discrete elements of the syllabus:

In the 2004 syllabus, the main aims of the course are to provide candidates with some in-depth knowledge of the country (or countries) where the language is spoken and to contribute to a wider understanding of how language works. 'Critical and analytical skills' are listed as one 'additional benefit' of taking the full AH course. This contrasts with the 1998 CSYS syllabus, which states that the main aim of the course is to be 'a general release of curiosity allied to a sharpening of mental and critical focus [...] combined with an appropriate progression in understanding, experience and use of the language'. The aims of the 1992 syllabus are less clearly set out, but nevertheless, it is clear that a main aim is the cultivation of critical skills, together with the accurate production of language.

In the 2004 syllabus, it is stated that the teaching approaches should 'contribute to the development of confidence in speaking, in interacting with others [...] and in the ability to cope successfully and flexibly with unfamiliar situations.'

Similarly in 1998, there is an expectation that in CSYS courses, the foreign language will be the medium of instruction and discussion. In 1992, the implied emphasis is not on spoken language, but on accuracy of grammar and vocabulary.

The weighting between literature and background, on the one hand, and language, on the other, has changed from 26.5%-73.5% in 1992, to 15%-85% in 2004. (If taking the 'Language in Work' unit, it is possible for a student to gain an Advanced Higher in German without reading a single book in the target language.)

1.2 Changes to level of demand

Changes have made the syllabus as a whole less demanding.

Elements added:

The only item added to the more recent syllabus is the optional unit 'Language in Work'. The panel were not given any work relating to this unit to inspect, but felt that the stated aims and expected outcomes were not sufficiently clear to allow the unit to be taught and assessed effectively. If chosen, this element would make the syllabus less demanding.

Elements missing:

The removal of translation from English to German (from 1998) denies students a vantage point from which to reflect back upon their own language, and makes the syllabus less demanding than in 1992.

The removal of the critical reading of unseen literary texts (from 2004) denies students a chance to learn how to study literature and engage with a high register of language, and makes the syllabus less demanding than in 1992 and 1998.

Elements changed:

'Critical reading' has been replaced with 'reading comprehension', placing more emphasis on reading for facts than 'develop[ing] the candidate's independent judgement and powers of analysis' (1992 Syllabus, p.88), and so demanding less of candidates.

Translation, although identified as a 'higher-order language skill' to be covered in the 2004 course (presumably referring to translation into English), is given much less prominence than in 1992. This makes the 2004 syllabus less demanding than in 1992.

In the 2004 syllabus, topics to be covered in language work are prescribed, giving teachers and students greater guidance, but also making the syllabus less flexible than earlier syllabuses.

Candidates taking the optional unit in 'Extended Reading/Viewing' are now required to study two areas, one of which must be a literary written text. In 1992, the syllabus advised candidates to have studied at least four texts in addition to background topics (or a combination of texts and background

topics), and the syllabus stated that ‘it is hoped that they will in fact read more’ (p.89). In terms of expectations, the level of demand is less than in 1992.

In the 2004 syllabus, as in 1998, no literary texts are prescribed, giving teachers and students more flexibility than in earlier syllabuses. Similarly, no specific sets of linked texts or background topics are specified. Since there is no control over the texts chosen, the effect on the level of demand cannot be ascertained. (However, the evidence (from folios) is that in many schools, teachers are still making use of pre-existing lists of prescribed literary texts.)

1.3.1 Depth of coverage

The depth of the more recent syllabus is less than that of the older syllabuses.

With notable exceptions (listening comprehension, the discursive essay), the more recent syllabus does not allow good candidates the same potential for development as the older syllabuses (and particularly as the 1992 syllabus). Changing the weighting of the syllabus in terms of the balance between literature and background, and language, has not been matched by giving the students more opportunity to produce work in the target language.

1.3.2 Breadth of coverage

The breadth of the more recent syllabus is less than that of the older syllabuses.

2 Assessment instrument

2.1 Structure of question papers

In 1998, there was 1 less Question Paper than in 1992. An element of continuous assessment, in the form of a folio, was added.

In 2004, there were two fewer Question Papers than in 1998. Additionally, the folio was less extensive, and so less demanding, than in 1998.

The Translation Paper set in 1992 became a Reading Comprehension Paper in 1998 and 2004. At this point, translation into German was no longer assessed. Removing this element of assessment made the paper less demanding.

In the 1998 Reading Comprehension Paper, an element of translation into English was retained, requiring candidates to translate a section of the reading comprehension text, rather than translating a non-contextualised passage as was demanded in 1992. This change was based on sound pedagogical principles, but did have the effect of making the task less demanding than in the 1992 Translation Paper.

In 2004, the Reading Comprehension Paper was renamed ‘Reading Comprehension and Translation’, although it did not include any more translation than the 1998 paper. There were some changes to the type of questions set, which made the paper less demanding than the 1998 paper.

The Critical Reading Paper set in 1992 and 1998 disappeared in 2004. Removing this challenging paper made the examination less demanding.

In 1992 and 1998, there were two separate Listening and Writing Papers. In 2004, these were combined to form one Listening and Discursive Writing Paper. This change had no effect on the level of demand, since the amount of time devoted to each element was clearly specified.

In 2004, the structure of the Listening section of Paper II was changed to allow candidates to see the questions in English before listening to the passage for the first time. This was balanced by reducing the amount of time allowed between playings of the tape and so did not amount to a significant change in the level of demand.

In 1992, there was a Literature and Background Paper. In 1998, this was replaced with a folio consisting of five pieces of externally assessed work, three of which were in the target language. In 2004, the folio was scaled back to one or two pieces of externally assessed work, both in English, while the internal assessment consists in one piece of written work in the target language. The 2004 folio is less demanding than the 1998 folio.

Students who, in 2004, chose the Language at Work Unit were able to avoid the study of literature completely. It is not clear how the study of two series of linked texts or carrying out work experience abroad is equivalent to the requirements set for the Extended Reading/Viewing Unit.

In 1992, students were not permitted to use a dictionary in any element of assessment. From 1998, students have been permitted to use a dictionary in all elements of assessment (apart from the Oral Examination). This makes the course as a whole less demanding.

In general, the questions and instructions to candidates in all examinations were clear and helpful.

In the 1998 examination, the rubric in the Listening Comprehension Paper and the Discursive Writing Paper were in the target language. This was more demanding than in 1992 or in 2004.

In the 1992 Essay Paper, candidates were given specific instructions about what constitutes a good essay. This was not provided in either 1998 or 2004.

In the 1992 Critical Reading Paper, the panel considered it particularly helpful that candidates were specifically instructed not to paraphrase the Critical Reading passages. It was therefore surprising that a similar instruction was not be found in the 2004 Reading Comprehension Paper.

Questions

The 2004 Reading Comprehension and Translation Paper consisted in seven questions - five designed to elicit facts, one asking the students to summarise the author's intention, and a passage for translation. In 1998, the equivalent paper consisted in three questions – two asking for summaries of the main points covered in the passage and the third covering translation. The style of

questioning employed in 2004 gives the students more guidance on the content of the passage and therefore makes the paper less demanding than in 1998.

In 2004, the passage set in the Reading Comprehension and Translation Paper was journalistic in style. This was also the case in 1998, while in 1992, a literary text was set. In 1998, students were also required to analyse literary German in the Critical Reading Paper. In other words, the level of demand rose from 1992 to 1998, as students were required to deal with different styles of text. However, the level of demand fell again in 2004, as students were no longer expected to deal with literary German under examination conditions.

In 2004 and 1998, students were asked to translate a passage of ca. 80 words. In 1992, the translation passage was ca. 200 words. In all three examinations, the percentage of the total mark awarded to this exercise was roughly similar (8% in 1992, 8.6% in 1998 and 10% in 2004). This means that the level of demand fell between 1992 and 2004.

In 2004 and 1998, students were asked to translate part of the passage used for Reading Comprehension, and so were given guidance in English on the content of the passage. In 1992, candidates were given no such guidance, as the translation passage was not contextualised. This means that the level of demand fell between 1992 and 1998, remaining at that level in 2004.

In 2004, the types of questions asked in the Listening section of Paper 2 were similar to those found in the Listening Comprehension Paper in 1992. Both sets of questions were posed in English and designed to elicit facts. In 1998, however, there was a significant change, in that students were asked to make notes while listening to the passage and then write a summary of the content in the target language. This is a more difficult task than the one set in 1992 and 2004, meaning that in this paper, the level of demand rose in 1998, and then in 2004, returned to the same level as 1992.

In 2004, the oral examination consisted in a discussion on 'topics, texts and/or vocational area(s) studied'. In 1998, the folio formed the basis for discussion in the oral examination. In 1992, the discussion was expected to cover 'the candidate's reading in literature and background studies', as well as conversation on a general topic, examples of which are given in the syllabus. Additionally, candidates were required to give an oral reading of a passage and answer questions relating to it. The oral examination is now more predictable than in 1992 and therefore less demanding.

In 1992, all candidates studying a particular text answered the same question set by the Examiners. In 2004 and 1998, the titles of essays submitted as part of the folio were set by the candidates themselves, in consultation with their teachers. This was of some concern to the panel, since the samples of work made available to the panel showed significant discrepancy in the essay titles. Successful candidates chose, or were guided towards, very specific questions (such as 'Give examples of *Verfremdungseffekte* in *Der Gute Mensch von Sezuan*. What is Brecht trying to achieve?'), while less successful candidates employ more general titles (such as 'Ludwig van Beethoven'). In other words, the level of demand has the potential to vary from candidate to candidate.

Marking Instructions

Marking instructions are generally clear and helpful across the period under investigation.

A major difference between 2004 and the earlier syllabuses is the increasingly narrow range of marks available to examiners. In earlier years, there were more pegged marks, particularly in the middle range, which allowed much greater discrimination. The narrow range of marks now in use compromises the examiners' ability to exercise academic judgement and makes it difficult to differentiate between candidates.

In the 2004 Translation Paper, dividing the text into 'sense units', which are awarded a set number of marks, removes the possibility of giving candidates credit for a good, elegant translation. This would have been possible under the 1992 marking scheme.

2.2 Repetition of papers, sections or type of tasks

This happened in two papers: Discursive Writing and Listening Comprehension. (In the case of the latter, the 2004 Question Paper is comparable to the 1992 Question Paper, but not to the 1998 Question Paper.)

2.2.1 Do candidates in all years perform in the same way on these questions?

Yes, but there are still trends discernible within the Discursive Writing Paper.

2.2.2 Discernible trends

The panel noted that the range of vocabulary demonstrated by the candidates taking the 1992 paper was wider than that demonstrated by any of the sample taking the 1998 or 2004 papers, despite the fact that the latter had access to a dictionary.

2.3.1 Coverage of the more recent syllabus in the more recent Question Paper

It is comparable to previous years.

2.4.1 Level of demand of questions and marking instructions

The questions and marking scheme of the 2004 Question Paper are less demanding than the questions and marking schemes of previous years. This may be helpful to candidates performing towards the lower end of the grade spectrum, but serves to constrain more able candidates.

3 Scripts

In this section, the panel concentrated on discursive writing, where there has been little change in the assessment instrument over time (3.1 – 3.3 refer). It also, however, considered literary and background studies, where the method of assessment has changed from examination to folio (see 3.4).

3.1 A/B graded scripts

The A/B graded scripts from the older years are comparable to the A/B graded scripts from the more recent year.

The A-graded scripts from 1992 and 1998 would have been awarded an equivalent 'very good' mark under the 2004 marking scheme. However, since the sample did not include any scripts in the 'very good' category from the 2004 cohort, the panel was unable to consider the mark a script in this category would have received under the 1992 and 1998 marking schemes.

The B graded scripts from 1992 and 1998 would have been awarded an equivalent 'good' mark in 2004.

3.2 C/D graded scripts

The C/D graded scripts from the older years are comparable to the C/D graded scripts from the more recent year.

The C-graded scripts from 1992 and 1998 would have been awarded an equivalent 'satisfactory' grade in 2004. However, the ability to distinguish between two essays at the top and bottom of the C-grade, which was available to examiners in the older years, would not have been available in 2004. As the sample provided did not include an essay graded 'satisfactory' in 2004, the panel was unable to consider the mark a script in this category would have received under the 1992 and 1998 marking schemes.

There were no D-graded scripts in the 1992 sample. D-graded scripts from 1998 would have been awarded an equivalent 'unsatisfactory' grade in 2004. The 'unsatisfactory' scripts in 2004 would have been awarded an equivalent D-grade in 1992.

3.3 All grades

Comparing the spread of marks gained in 2004 for discursive writing, with those gained in 1992 and 1998, the panel noted that in the small sample available to them there had been a downward trend in the marks awarded for discursive writing (see appendix 2). Since the scripts at all grades from 2004 are comparable to those from the older years, this suggests that the standard of

written German produced by candidates may have fallen over the period under scrutiny.

3.4 Grades over time

The panel compared a B-graded essay produced under examination conditions in 1992 with an A-graded folio piece produced in a series of drafts in 2004.

The panel concluded that the B-graded essay would have gained a mark of 15 in 2004 had it been submitted as a folio piece, ie it would have received an A-grade in 2004.

(The A-graded essay from 2004 would have gained an A in 1992, had it been produced under examination conditions, but this is not a meaningful comparison.)

A good candidate in 1992 was able to produce a piece of work under examination conditions that would have been awarded a higher mark, had it been submitted as a folio piece in 2004. This suggests that the 2004 assessment instrument is constraining good candidates. The folio lacks the scope (in terms of the number of pieces of work to be produced and the low upper word limit) to challenge the best candidates.

Appendix 1: Summary of assessment instruments used in 1992, 1998 and 2004

The 1992 CSYS assessment instrument consisted of:

Paper 1 (1hr 30mins)	Critical Reading	30 marks (11.3%)
Paper 2 (1hr)	Essay	50 marks (14%)
Paper 3 (35 minutes)	Listening Comprehension	30 marks (8%)
Paper 4 (1hr 45 minutes)	Translation into English	30 marks (8%)
	Translation into German	40 marks (11.7%)
Paper 5 (2hrs)	Literature and Background	90 marks (26.5%)
Test of Oral Proficiency		70 marks (20.5%)
TOTAL		340 marks

Examination time: 6 hrs 50 mins + oral.

The speed candidates were expected to work at ranged from 1.2 minutes per mark in Papers 3 and 4 to 3 minutes per mark in Paper 1.

In Papers 1, 2 and 5, candidates were given a choice of questions to be answered.

In Papers 3 and 4, candidates had to answer all questions.

Candidates were not permitted to use a dictionary in any Paper.

In 1992, the coverage of the syllabus was very good.

The 1998 CSYS assessment instrument consisted of:

Paper 1 (1hr 15mins)	Reading Comprehension	50 marks (14.3%)
Paper 2 (1hr 30mins)	Critical Reading	50 marks (14.3%)
Paper 3 (45 mins)	Listening	30 marks (8.6%)
Paper 4 (1 hr)	Writing	50 marks (14.3%)
Folio	Five essays (3 G, 2 E)	100 marks (28.6%)
Speaking		70 marks (20%)
TOTAL		350 marks

Examination time: 4 hrs 30mins + oral + folio

The speed candidates were expected to work at ranged from 1.2 minutes per mark in Paper 4 to 1.8 minute per mark in Paper 2.

In Paper 2, candidates were given a choice of questions to be answered.

In all other Papers, candidates had to answer all questions.

The Folio introduced a significant element (28.6%) of continuous assessment (ie uncontrolled circumstances). Responsibility for setting literature / background questions was placed on teachers and students, rather than on the Examiner.

Candidates were permitted to use a dictionary in all elements of assessment.

The 2004 assessment instrument consisted of:

Internal assessment:

For the Language Unit, the candidates had to: make a presentation and engage in discussion in the target language; demonstrate understanding of the target language in spoken form; demonstrate understanding of text written in the target language.

For the Extended Reading / Viewing Unit, the candidates had to study 1 literary text plus either a second literary text, a set of linked written texts or a background text and write 300-400 words in the target language about the chosen area of study.

For the Language in Work Unit, candidates had to study two series of linked texts on a sector of business / industry or an area of vocational interest, or carry out work experience abroad, and write a report of 300-400 words in the target language.

For all internal assessment, the pass mark was 50% (band C).

External Assessment:

Paper 1 (1 hr 20 mins)	Reading and Translation	(50 marks) (25%)
Paper 2 (1 hr 20 mins)	Listening and Discursive Writing	(70 marks) (35%)
Folio	2 essays (or 1 longer essay) E	(30 marks) (15%)
Oral Assessment (20 mins)		(50 marks) (25%)

TOTAL (200 marks)

Examination time: 2 hrs 40 mins + oral (20 mins) + folio

The speed candidates are expected to work at is 1.1 marks per minute in Paper 2 and 1.6 marks per minute in Paper 1.

In Section II of Paper 2, candidates were offered a choice of questions.

In all other Sections and Papers, candidates had to answer all questions.

The Folio (now 1 or 2 pieces and up to 1000 words in total, compared to 5 pieces to a total of 1500 words in 1998) represents a continuous assessment element of 15%.

As in 1998, responsibility for setting literature / background questions was placed on teachers and students, rather than on the Examiner.

Appendix 2: Comparison of the spread of marks awarded for discursive writing in the 1992, 1998 and 2004 samples.

A/B-graded scripts

Of the 12 scripts in the 2004 sample, none was awarded an A-grade, while 2 were awarded B-grades.

Of the 11 scripts in the 1998 sample, 2 were awarded an A-grade and 1 was awarded a B-Grade.

Of the 6 scripts in the 1992 sample, 1 was awarded an A-grade, and 1 was awarded a B-grade.

C/D-graded scripts

Of the 12 scripts in the 2004 sample, none were awarded a 'satisfactory' C-grade, and 6 were awarded an 'unsatisfactory' D-grade (4 were rated below that level).

Of the 11 scripts in the 1998 sample, 2 were awarded a C-grade and none were awarded a D-grade (6 were rated 'poor' or 'very poor').

Of the 6 scripts in the 1992 sample, 3 were awarded a C-grade, and none were awarded a D-grade (1 was rated 'poor').