



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	German
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 2014 Higher German examination presented candidates with a Reading Text about a young woman adjusting to moving out of the family home and living on her own for the first time, a Directed Writing task centred on an exchange visit to Germany where the candidate was one of the few participants who could speak any German, a Listening Interview with a native German speaker of Turkish origin who was spending some time at a school in Scotland, and a Personal Response writing task on the advantages/disadvantages of having relatives nearby and on the importance of friends. Taken as a whole, these topics covered all aspects of the Higher German course. Candidates, in general, responded well to most elements of the paper, although the subject matter of the Listening paper appeared to be one with which some candidates were not acquainted.

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. The section selected for the translation aimed to provide all candidates with 3 relatively straightforward sections and 2 more demanding ones and this indeed proved to be the case.

Five of the six bullet points in the Directed Writing task were reasonably predictable. The final point — what was good about being one of the few people who could speak German — required candidates to think a little about how they might respond, and many rose well to the challenge. However, a minority of candidates ignored the task and merely wrote that going to Germany is an excellent experience. They therefore incurred a 2 mark penalty.

The Listening paper provided a mixture of responses. A significant number of candidates answered one question inappropriately — ‘17’ was not the correct answer to one of the questions: ‘Why did her father come to Germany?’ As in previous years, no single question was beyond candidates’ ability. However, there was a significant gap between the performance of candidates who clearly had excellent listening skills and those who did not.

The Personal Response task was addressed very successfully by almost all candidates. A very small number, however, failed to write about family as well as friends.

On balance the Listening Paper was judged to be slightly more challenging than last year. The Grade Boundaries were adjusted to take account of this.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Reading

The content and complexity of the text was accessible to the candidates, and the following questions indicate where candidates performed well:

- ◆ Question 1: While most candidates opted for ensuring that there was enough toilet paper for the weekend, a significant minority had no difficulty with offering the other option — Does it really have to be brand-name butter?
- ◆ Question 3: Most candidates were able to include 'a small kitchen and a bathroom without windows' in their response.
- ◆ Question 4: Most candidates coped well with 'I had the feeling that it was time (to move out)'.
- ◆ Question 5: Most of the candidates who provided the full answer required for this question, coped very well with 'shopping and money for a fun student life' and 'she saves what is left over'.
- ◆ Question 6(b): Following on from their knowledge of financial management, most candidates answered this question well with a very full answer of 'She does not go away at the weekend but stays in and has a nice evening with her friends or her boyfriend'.
- ◆ Question 7(a): Most candidates appreciated that eating alone is no fun and coped well with this. Similarly they coped well at Question 7(c) with the sofa being too big for the small room.

In the translation most candidates coped extremely well with the first and last units, and had no difficulty gaining 4 points. Even if they had gone 'off track' in the middle of the translation, it is extremely encouraging that they were back on the rails for the final unit.

Listening

In Listening, the following questions provided examples of where candidates performed well:

- ◆ Question 10: Most candidates were able to identify that the speaker was going to her uncle's wedding.
- ◆ Question 13: Most candidates appreciated that the speaker was going to find leaving Scotland difficult either because she had met so many nice people or because she had made so many good friends.
- ◆ Question 14: While this question caused the examining team the greatest issues when constructing the final Marking Instructions, the decisions taken were correct and as a result most candidates gained a mark for the information they included in their answer.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Almost every year this report refers to the ongoing issue of candidates not providing detail in their responses in the Reading paper, and this was once again an issue for some candidates, especially those whose target is a C pass in the examination. A little more detail can result in quite a few additional marks and can make all the difference to a borderline candidate.

However, in the 2014 examination it was the Listening paper that a significant number of candidates appear to have found demanding, although others coped extremely well with it. At one time many centres addressed the Reading/Viewing unit of the course by reading either 'Anruf von Sebastian' or 'Oya', the latter work being about issues faced by a girl of Turkish ethnicity in Germany and also in Turkey. The subject of the Listening paper is a German native speaker but one of Turkish ethnicity, and many of the answers to the questions in this paper were very straightforward. Despite this, candidates found the following items demanding:

- ◆ Question 1(a): *mit 4 Jahren* — at the age of 4. (Candidates wrote '4 years ago'.)
- ◆ Question 1(b): Why did her father come to Germany? 'When he was 17' is a totally inappropriate response.
- ◆ Question 5: *rufen wir unsere Großeltern an* — many candidates did not know *anrufen*, 'to telephone'.
- ◆ Question 6: Many candidates did not know 'Silvester' and offered answers such as 'Easter'.
- ◆ Question 9: Many candidates rendered *alle ein oder zwei Jahre* as 'once or twice a year' rather than 'every year or two'.
- ◆ Question 10: *Die meisten Leute in der Türkei sind ziemlich offen*. Far too often candidates wrote that Germans are more open than the people in Turkey.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading

Excellent advice was offered to centres in the 2013 Report and there are clear signs that many centres took this on board and shared it with their candidates.

Attention to detail is essential. The most able candidates do not have an issue with this. Those most likely to benefit from detailed work on this are those candidates who are more borderline — 3 more marks in Reading, 1 or 2 more in Translation and 3 in Listening will make all the difference; indeed it could be the difference between No Award and a C pass.

In the 2014 paper, in the Reading paper, these were the points which these candidates all too often failed to include:

- ◆ Question 2(a): *einigten sich die beiden Freundinnen, getrennte Wege zu gehen* — they **agreed** to go their separate ways.
- ◆ Question 6(a): *Ich achte **sehr genau** darauf, was ich einkaufe* — I pay **very careful** attention to what I buy.
- ◆ Question 7(a): ***anfangs** hatte ich auch Angst, ganz alleine in meiner Wohnung zu schlafen* — **at the beginning** I was frightened of sleeping alone in my flat.

In preparing candidates for the Higher examination it is important to focus on phrases such as these which, although short, can make a significant difference in an overall mark. In this way it is not difficult to help a candidate improve from 9/20 to 12/20.

In the 2014 examination Question 5 asked candidates: Carla has a monthly budget of €1200. Into what **three** parts does she divide up this money? There was a concern that candidates might think that they might gain 3 points for translating *Mietkosten, Strom und Versicherungen* into English despite previous advice that, in Reading at Higher level, it is highly unlikely that there will ever be a mark given for a single word. It would be even less likely that there would be 3 marks for 3 words. For that reason, hints were given within the text by including the expressions *Erstmal; Als Zweites; am Ende*. Many candidates had been well prepared for this and coped very well; some weaker ones did not read beyond the initial 3 words.

It is worth repeating elements of the advice given in the 2013 report. 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 focus on the first section of the text about which questions have been set, and read that section again, still avoiding 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 and will also help with more demanding vocabulary. Examples of this in 2014 would be: Question 2(a): flat-sharing = *Wohngemeinschaft*; Question 4: training = *Ausbildung*; Question 6(b): when she is running short of money at the end of the month = *...wird es am Monatsende etwas eng*.

The 2014 paper also showed that a number of candidates are not acquainted with the verb *gehören* and confuse it with *hören*.

Translation

Detailed guidance was provided on this exercise in the 2012 and 2013 reports; centres are recommended to re-read this advice and to share it with their 2015 candidates. The 2014 candidates certainly seemed to have learned from this.

One additional piece of advice can be offered this year as a result of the 2014 translation. This centres on the tense in which the translation item is written, which in 2014 was the present tense. For once this was not the historic present and therefore candidates were expected to render every verb in the present tense. If a candidate translates the first verb in the past tense and continues in the past tense throughout the translation, this is considered to be a repeated error and (assuming everything else is correct) the candidate scores 1 in the first unit and 2 in all subsequent units. However, a number of candidates failed to be consistent and moved back to the present tense for the second verb, then back to the past tense in the next verb, into the present tense again, and ended up in the past tense. In such examples each incorrect tense is no longer a repeated error and a maximum of 1 mark can be awarded for each unit where the wrong tense is used. Consistency is essential.

In 2013 centres were advised to tell candidates not to offer alternatives. In 2014 one candidate actually offered two versions for virtually every word in the translation and in almost every case one of the alternatives was wrong. That candidate thus scored a very low mark in the translation — it is not the marker's job to choose the correct response.

Directed Writing

Once again centres are referred to the 2013 report for its detailed guidance on this exercise. As with the translation, it was clear that many centres took this advice on board and their candidates duly benefitted from this.

However, in 2014 a lack of attention to detail was evident in some candidates' responses. Some appear not to have read the introduction to the exercise where it was stated that the group travelled by coach and ferry. Despite this, a number of candidates referred to their journey by plane. This was not something that the marking team had encountered before and, after discussion, on this occasion no penalty was applied. It is essential that candidates read the introduction carefully.

This issue continued into the first bullet point for some candidates, where they were required to address the issues of how long the journey took and what you did during the journey. *Die Reise war lang* does not address this, and if there was no mention of a number of hours or days, it was deemed that the point had not been addressed and 2 marks were deducted from the overall mark awarded.

Some candidates can find it challenging to come up with sufficient content for some of the bullet points, and for that reason at Bullet Point 4 candidates were asked to comment about meals both with the family and when they were out. This was not a double bullet point like the initial two, but was intended to offer the candidates an additional stimulus, so that they might write about typical meals in the home while also commenting on items such as *Currywurst mit Pommes*. There are further signs that *Landeskunde* is being neglected. In writing about German families, there would be merit in candidates visiting the website of various tourist offices to learn exactly what kind of group or individual activities might be available, making notes and sharing this information in a lesson.

While many of the tasks set within a Directed Writing exercise will be reasonably predictable, the setting team will ensure that there will be at least one new task. In 2014 that was to say what was good about being one of the few people who could speak German. It was disappointing that some candidates chose to ignore the task and write their pre-learned final paragraph; they therefore incurred a 2 mark penalty. Other candidates tried to write seriously about this, although not always with the level of accuracy displayed at earlier Bullet Points. For some it meant that they could go away on their own, buy bus tickets, go on their own into a restaurant and get a meal, talk to people in the street, ask for and understand directions, help others in the group. They were not short of ideas but too often they appeared to be short of the grammatical knowledge to write accurately on this subject. Centres are therefore encouraged to ensure that all candidates have the skills and knowledge to write accurately on unexpected topics.

Listening

There is a serious concern across Intermediate 2 and Higher this year that the skill of Listening is not being given sufficient emphasis in a significant number of centres. In the 2014 examination candidates either scored well or poorly in this paper; relatively few candidates had totals of 8 to 12.

In any Listening examination at Higher level, approximately half of the marks available should be readily accessible to potential C pass candidates; the remaining marks are intended to be challenging and allow potential B and A candidates to demonstrate their skills. In 2014 the marks intended to be the most accessible involved the following German expressions:

- ◆ *Mit vier Jahren*
- ◆ *Um hier sein Abitur zu machen*
- ◆ *Weil er in der Schule Deutsch gelernt hat*
- ◆ *Wir rufen unsere Großeltern an*
- ◆ *Wir bekommen unsere Weihnachtsgeschenke an Silvester*
- ◆ *Alle ein oder zwei Jahre*
- ◆ *Für die Hochzeit meines Onkels*
- ◆ *Die meisten Leute in der Türkei sind ziemlich offen*

- ◆ *Weil es so chaotisch ist*
- ◆ *Weil ich so viele nette Leute kennengelernt habe/so viele gute Freunde hier habe*

None of these expressions should be particularly challenging to candidates at this level and yet they appeared to be. There is now a bank of 15 Higher examinations in the current format, and centres are encouraged to use these past papers to develop teaching materials which would introduce learners to the level of language they can expect to encounter at Higher level. These could include dictation/transcription exercises, gap-filling exercises and mini listening activities whereby the interviews could be divided into four parts of maximum one minute.

A further important exercise could be analysis of the questions that are used and which, after all, all candidates are allowed to study in advance of hearing the interview for the first time. Learners can be asked to suggest potential answers to the questions before they even hear the text; these can then be compared against what is actually said in the interview. Gradually learners will build up a bank of vocabulary that is likely to appear in a future exam. This should certainly include all relatives, important events such as births, marriages and significant dates in the year – New Year, Karneval, Easter, Whitsun, Christmas, German and Austrian national holidays (3 and 26 October).

Numbers and dates should not be ignored; even Higher candidates can struggle with these, especially numbers like 13 and 30, 14 and 40, 15 and 50 etc. Adverbs are also extremely important — *sehr, zu, ganz, ziemlich, etwa, viel* — and their omission can cost candidates a mark or two quite unnecessarily.

If candidates can pick up the more accessible marks, this will also give them the confidence to cope with at least some of the more demanding questions. With so many young people having ready access to a rich variety of German listening material, German and Austrian radio channels, Tagesschau in 100 Minuten, Youtube, to say nothing of the wonderful ZDF Sendung Verpasst website (<http://www.zdf.de/ZDFmediathek#/hauptnavigation/sendung-verpasst>) which allows us to watch entire TV programmes from the last seven days, we are now in a position to provide learners with a wealth of material that simply was not available to us even five years ago. The more learners are encouraged to make use of this material, the easier they will find it to score well in this section of the examination.

Personal Response Writing

In the Listening paper the interviewee had talked about her absence of any relatives in Germany and about the good friends she had made in Scotland. It was therefore a natural follow-on for candidates to be asked about the (dis)advantages of having relatives nearby and about the importance of friends. The first part of the task seemed to cause some candidates a little difficulty, yet what was expected was that the candidates would write about their relationship with aunts/uncles/grandparents. The task boiled down to an essay on relationships, a key section of any Higher course in a modern foreign language. Every opportunity is provided for candidates to take some of the ideas from the listening and to re-use these.

The 2013 report pointed out that there is no room for redundant material, yet once again a small number of candidates decided to include a paragraph on a holiday with a friend. Indeed in one case, a large section of the Directed Writing response was repeated in the

response to this task. There is not usually an opportunity here to write in a past tense, and centres are encouraged to make this very clear to candidates.

Similarly there is no advantage in centres teaching candidates at Higher level to begin their response with something along the lines of *In diesem Aufsatz habe ich vor, über meine Familie und meine Freunde zu schreiben*. The markers know the task that has been set and candidates would be better advised to begin with a sentence such as *Für mich sind meine Verwandten sehr wichtig*.

It would be helpful to candidates if they were encouraged during their Higher course to use an expression such as *Ich finde es einen großen Vorteil, dass ich meine Großeltern jede Woche besuchen kann*. In this way it might be possible to reinforce the fact that *Vorteil* and *Nachteil* are masculine nouns and that *Vorteile* or *Nachteile* are plurals.

General points

Markers commented on the number of candidates they felt had been entered inappropriately for the Higher examination, and this was confirmed by the fact that 15% of candidates gained No Award. Twenty candidates scored less than 30%, the lowest mark being 16%. It is hoped that in 2015, if candidates are not coping with the demands of the Higher course, they be given the chance to sit Intermediate 2 / National 5 and gain an award at that level.

At the other extreme, 31.2% of the candidates gained an A pass, confirming once again that more candidates gain this top pass than any other grade, which is excellent. It confirms the quality work which is being done in centres and it is to be hoped that, as curriculum reforms embed themselves in Scottish schools, the decline in the number of pupils taking a language at Higher level will be halted.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	1050
------------------------------------	------

Number of resulted entries in 2014	1006
------------------------------------	------

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	31.2%	31.2%	314	69
B	23.8%	55.0%	239	59
C	21.3%	76.2%	214	49
D	8.3%	84.6%	84	44
No award	15.4%	-	155	-

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.