



## External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	German
Level(s)	Advanced 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 overall pattern and distribution of results is very similar to previous years, with a normal distribution and correlation with the national profile that is effectively as close as is achievable. In particular the number of candidates achieving an A pass would seem to suggest a high level of competence in what is, properly, a challenging examination, and it is certainly true that there are some stellar performances. However, it is important to view the bare figures with some caution. The nature of assessment at Advanced Higher is such that even very modest achievement in those parts of the examination that demand high level linguistic skills will not necessarily depress significantly the final aggregate grade.

Additionally, it is important to note the increasing number of candidates, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of the total number of candidates, who are either native speakers or have significant connections to the German-speaking world, such as a parent. While there are areas of assessment where native, or near-native, competence in the spoken language, and, perhaps to a lesser degree the written language, is not necessarily an advantage, common sense would indicate that across the piece the performance of such candidates is likely to enhance the overall results profile.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

Yet again the best performances numerically, and in the comments made by the Examiners, were in the Speaking Test. A good number of candidates showed maturity in engaging in conversation, but there were still instances of candidates who relied excessively on pre-learnt material almost as a series of statements, and were unable to develop and refine points as the Examiner sought to explore the ability of candidates to deploy linguistic resources freely. The Visiting Assessors always allow candidates to use their learnt material, but they will also want to explore the wider linguistic resources of candidates, as indicated in the assessment criteria.

The Examiners also noted a better performance than in previous years in the Inferential Question in Paper 1, although there are still instances of candidates not even attempting the question or providing minimal responses, thereby sacrificing 14% of the marks available for this paper, or substantially more if the exercise of Translation is removed from the equation.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

Examiners expressed concerns about the level of linguistic competence in the two most testing and fundamental areas of the assessment — Translation and Discursive Writing. Generally the Translation was poorly attempted, with basic errors that indicate a lack of grasp of German grammar and syntax. For example, a good number of candidates were unable to recognise singular and plural verb forms, much less to identify tenses correctly or to distinguish between the active and passive voices. The Examiners were also concerned that many candidates demonstrated a general lack of lexical awareness, and a specific awareness of live and contemporary issues such as *Ganztagschule*.

It is, however, in Discursive Writing that the Examiners expressed concern relating to candidates' performance. While the questions will cover the prescribed range of themes, candidates must address the specific question that is set, and there are still examples of candidates simply reproducing a prepared answer.

The level of mastery of even the most basic points of German grammar and syntax in this exercise was an issue. For example, many candidates seem to be unaware that German nouns are written with a capital letter; and the control of subordinate clauses, the understanding of the case structure, the use of prepositions, the conjugation of verbs, adjectival agreement, basic word order and punctuation are, at best, at a minimal level. The Examiners also noted a degree of linguistic interference from English that too frequently rendered sentences unintelligible.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

The advice below is similar to advice which has been offered in the past, since the issues identified above are effectively the same as those identified in previous reports.

### **Speaking**

Candidates should be encouraged to understand that, ideally, this test should be a real conversation. Candidates should be prepared to engage flexibly in dialogue and not to depend on rote-learned material.

### **Folio**

There are still many candidates who are being restricted by the choice and/or formulation of the titles for the Folio pieces. Titles that invite narrative or descriptive responses are almost by definition self-penalising. Many bibliographies amount to no more than a citation of the primary text.

Candidates should be encouraged to engage with critical literature in order to stimulate a more sophisticated appreciation of literary texts. The use of *Jugendliteratur* as primary texts should be carefully considered, since such texts generally eschew the complexities and ambiguities of more complex texts. Examiners also noted the perhaps questionable reliance on Frisch, Dürrenmatt, Böll and other authors whose experience may not have great relevance for young learners, although it has to be recognised that such authors have had a major influence on German-language culture.

The spirit and intention of the Folio is undermined by instances of what must be called bad practice. In some centres with multiple candidates there are instances of identical titles, suggesting an absence of individual engagement with the texts/topics.

Candidates should be encouraged to develop individual research and investigation skills and exploit the wide range of resources readily available.

## **Paper1**

Candidates should gain more experience in the art and skill of translation, including intelligent use of dictionaries. In particular, candidates should focus on detail and accuracy rather than on loose rendering.

## **Paper 2**

In Discursive Writing candidates need to pay heed to the basics of German grammar as well as German idiom, and should be discouraged from viewing this as an extended exercise in translation from English to German. All the questions will relate to the underlying themes, but they need to be answered in response to the specific aspects of those themes that inform the question.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	142
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Number of resulted entries in 2015	109
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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 - 200				
A	41.3%	41.3%	45	140
B	21.1%	62.4%	23	120
C	22.9%	85.3%	25	100
D	5.5%	90.8%	6	90
No award	9.2%	-	10	-

The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

## 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.