



Course Report 2017

Subject	German
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

The 2017 Higher German exam offers flexibility, personalisation and an element of choice to candidates. The components of the exam were created with the following principles in mind:

- ◆ prior knowledge: relevant and familiar concepts in reading and listening items which reflect the course content of Higher
- ◆ choice: flexibility in responses in most reading and listening comprehension questions and a choice of two Writing Scenarios
- ◆ progressive linguistic development: lexical items and phrases as well as a level of demand which corresponds with the course content of Higher
- ◆ coherence: course assessment element in reading and listening follow the National 5 pattern and language development

The Higher German Course Assessment 2017 was composed of balanced papers, which accommodated a range of candidates.

Overall, the Reading passage and the comprehension questions were slightly less demanding than intended and this was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries. The Writing and Listening/Writing papers performed as expected.

Although there were some challenges within the Listening (Item 1) and the Reading (Question 8 Translation), those were compensated for in other areas of the course assessment.

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Writing

The Reading paper presented the candidates with an article about young people going on holiday without their parents. Overall, candidates coped well with the question paper. The concept of travel agencies in general, and a travel agent that specialises in youth travel in particular, seemed to be an unfamiliar one for a majority of candidates.

Translation proved to be challenging for a majority of candidates, with complex and detailed language presented in an accessible manner. Some candidates were able to apply their translation skills and knowledge of language successfully. A number of candidates were unable to identify plural in nouns and verbs (present tense). Candidates with a sound knowledge of English and German grammar performed better in this part of the question paper.

In the Writing component, candidates were given the choice between two scenarios: Scenario 1 (Learning) on a school exchange in Germany and Scenario 2 (Employability) on a holiday job work experience in a hotel in Germany.

Both scenarios and their four bullet points were designed to be open to allow candidates an element of personalisation and give them more control over their writing. There was a good balance in choice between Scenario 1 and Scenario 2. Bullet points in both scenarios were

accessible and accommodated a range of candidates. They gave candidates the freedom of adding information and creating some flair.

The principle of choice in the Writing paper has proven to be worthwhile for candidates.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening

The listening paper presented the candidates with a monologue on the topic of an ageing population in Germany, and a dialogue on the topic of living in a multi-generational housing concept. The follow-up writing topic focused on candidates' home life and their relationships to family members.

The concepts and ideas as well as opinions were presented using Higher language and structures. Candidates with sound knowledge of the European Union and its benefits to individual member states performed better in Item 1.

The listening exam in its structure and contents has been a follow-up from the National 5 course assessment and course topics. The principle of progression has proven its value and resulted in some good and very good responses by candidates.

Component 3: performance: Talking

All centres verified this year used the SQA guidelines for the Internally Assessed Component of Course Assessment — Higher Performance: Talking. This component consists of two elements: a presentation on a topic of the candidate's choice, and a follow-up discussion. In the externally verified sample of Performances, the Marking Instructions for the presentation and conversation were, in the majority of centres, used appropriately.

Many centres provided commentaries on candidate performances, with specific reference to aspects of the pegged mark commentaries provided in the Marking Instructions, eg comment on fluency, accuracy, range of vocabulary etc.

Many centres used the Modern Languages Performance 'Assessment Record' document to record commentaries about the sections of each of their candidates' performances. Centres are advised to refer to the 'Modern Languages Coursework Assessment Task for details of the recommended duration of the talking performance.

All centres provided audio recordings of the performances as appropriate to the task

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Writing

Although some candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with the concept of travel agencies and travel agents that specialise in youth travel, most candidates coped well with the demands of the text. As seen in the 2016 reading performance, most candidates displayed good time management skills in the reading paper.

Overall, the majority of candidates engaged well with the paper, which covered a commonly taught course work topic in the context Culture.

For the third time, candidates were given the choice between two scenarios in the Writing paper. These scenarios were open and allowed candidates personalisation and an element of control. There was a good balance of choice between both scenarios.

Some candidates developed the four bullet points very well, then created and added their own ideas and knowledge about localities in German cities and culture to the writing, which gave their essays a special flair. More detail could have been provided by some candidates in the second and fourth bullet point of Scenario 1 (Learning) and the fourth bullet point in Scenario 2 (Employability).

Most candidates showed good control of the perfect tense and German sentence structure, and made good use of pre-learned material — especially for the first and the last bullet point — showing tremendous effort and determination to achieve a high score in this part of the course assessment.

There were some outstanding writing performances this year, which would suggest that those candidates could be very successful Advanced Higher German candidates in the future.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening

Item 1 and Item 2 in the Listening Paper contained concepts, which a number of candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with — the ageing population and its consequences for society; and the advantages of membership in the European Union for individuals. However, these concepts were presented at Higher level using Higher German language resources and structures.

Although Item 1 did not perform as well as expected, Item 2 performed better than expected and provided the balance for this part of the course assessment.

In Item 1 Question (a) a number of candidates were unable to access the mark due to misunderstanding of German numbers (60, 40 or 30 rather than 70, which was required for the mark).

In Item 1 Question (c) (i) and (ii) a number of candidates were unable to access the marks due to lack of detail.

In Item 2 Question (c) some candidates misunderstood/mistranslated the word 'freiwillig' which functioned as a signpost and was necessary to achieve the mark.

In Item 2 Question (d) (i) some candidates misunderstood 'ältere Menschen' and offered 'parents' in their response.

The follow-up short essay questions on family and home life enabled most candidates to produce some good and very good responses and correct use of present tense, future tense and/or conditional tense. A number of candidates described their home life and family relationships using detailed and complex language very successfully.

Good use of pre-learned material was made by some learners to express their opinion and to include some very authentic German expressions such as 'auf die Nerven gehen' or 'Ich würde mir wünschen, dass...'.

There were some outstanding performances of candidates, which might suggest that these candidates would be successful Advanced Higher candidates in the future.

The topics and sub-topics chosen for listening and short essay followed the principle of coherence and progressive linguistic development.

Component 3: performance: Talking

Overall, candidates performed well in the talking performance

Presentation

In most cases, candidates performed more confidently in this section of the talking performance, with many well-structured and fluent performances. This section of the talking performance provided an opportunity for candidates to show control of the language.

Conversation

In general, candidates performed well in the conversation section and were able to sustain an interaction based on a different context in relation to the presentation context. Where interlocutors used a wide variety of questions in the conversation section, this often helped candidates to avoid recycling the same language and structures from their presentations into their conversations.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Writing

In Question 3, a number of candidates were unable to look up the compound 'Reiseanbieter' accurately in the dictionary. This resulted in some vague descriptions and mistranslations such as 'travel offer'. The ending '-er' did not seem to work well as an indicator.

In Question 4b, some candidates were unable to identify the superlative 'Allerwichtigste' as the relevant signpost for the answer. To this end, some candidates could not access the mark available.

In Question 6b, candidates' responses sometimes lacked the detail required. There were also candidates who seemed to be unable to understand subject-object relation, which prevented them from accessing all available marks.

In Question 7, most candidates quoted from the text rather than approaching the matter holistically and in an interpretive way.

The translation (Question 8) turned out to be quite challenging with very few candidates getting full marks. Knowledge of plural (nouns and verbs) as well as using Standard English accurately seemed to be the barriers to accessing all available marks.

Some candidates did not provide sufficient detail in their answers.

Finally, the translation caused problems for a number of candidates who were unable to identify and translate plural nouns and verbs from German into English. Likewise, a number of candidates failed to apply Standard English in the translation.

In the directed writing, candidates were generally very well prepared. When there were insecurities, they often occurred in addressing one or more than one bullet point sufficiently and in detail. Candidates who read the scenario and the bullet points thoroughly performed better.

The short essay topic seemed to have worked well for all candidates. Some responses lacked the level of detail and complexity required for Higher German. Candidates found it difficult to offer accurate relative clauses and struggled to put the verb in the right position. There were difficulties with regards to both singular and plural of verbs.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening

In general, candidates performed better in Item 2 than in Item 1. Candidates with consolidated basic knowledge of German (numbers, lexical items from N4/N5 courses) were more successful in this component of the paper.

Some candidates failed to understand the numbers 70 and 30, which were relevant for the answer to the first question in Item 1. There also seemed to be some guessing rather than understanding in both items, or some misunderstanding (*ältere* translated as 'parents').

Candidates with good general knowledge of today's society and the role of the European Union performed better in this component of the paper.

Component 3: performance: Talking

Presentation

In the presentation, a small number of candidates seemed to struggle with the complexity of the language of the topic they had chosen. Centres should provide advice to candidates as to what level of language they should be able to cope with and should ensure comprehension of their presentation in preparation for delivering it. Suggested topics for this part of the performance are available in Appendix 3 of the Course Support Notes, which is available on the Modern Languages homepage of the SQA website.

A few presentations were significantly long or short, and this affected the candidates' performances. A few conversations were unnecessarily prolonged or significantly short and affected the candidates' performances. Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the presentation and the conversation should last, so that candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of Higher as provided in the document Modern Languages Performance: talking, General assessment information.

Section 3: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

It has been observed that candidates are able to handle Higher German language structures but find basic German as taught in the broad general education and at National 4/National 5 level more challenging. Centres might wish to consider a more thorough consolidation at those levels or a transition phase for candidates who wish to study Higher German.

Component 1: question paper: Reading and Writing

Most candidates displayed very good time-management skills. Centres are to be commended for encouraging them to analyse the comprehension questions and the reading passage and distinguish between relevant and redundant vocabulary.

However, care must be taken that candidates also develop the literacy element of comprehension and approach the reading passage holistically. Centres might want to encourage the use of transferrable skills from English classes for interpretation of a reading passage.

Candidates with translation skills performed better in Question 8. Centres are to be commended in advising their candidates on the difference between reading and translation skills. Please consider the vital role of native language grammar and lexical skills. Centres are encouraged to always revisit prior learning (Broad General Education and N4/5 grammar and lexical items) before stepping up into Higher German context development.

Candidates with a sound knowledge of German grammar performed better in reading, as they understood the concept of compounds and syntax in connection with verbs in German sentences. This applies particularly to the translation, but also to more detailed and complex reading.

Most centres prepared their candidates very well for the writing paper. Their approach to consolidation of knowledge of perfect tense and German sentence structure is to be commended.

There has been evidence of good use of pre-learned material and centres are to be commended for encouraging their candidates in their effort to perform well.

Candidates who appeared to be more secure in other tense forms (future tense, conditional, present tense) performed better.

Centres are encouraged to give candidates writing opportunities from Beginners' stage onwards, and to keep consolidating German sentence structure with special consideration of the position of the verb.

Candidates with a sound knowledge of present tense, future tense and conditional tense performed better in the writing element. Centres might wish to ensure that all candidates have a sound knowledge of verbs and their ability to appear in different tense forms in German with an awareness of their English equivalents.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening

Candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with the concept of an ageing population and its consequences in society. There also seemed to be a lack of awareness of the benefits of EU membership. These gaps in general knowledge could be addressed by centres through interdisciplinary learning or by introducing aspects of CLIL (content and language integrated learning) as and when appropriate.

It is important to highlight the similarities between English and German with special consideration of the Scots language. Candidates with an awareness of the interconnected nature of languages make more successful listeners.

Component 3: performance: Talking

As recommended in the Higher Modern Languages performance: talking assessment task document, *interlocutors should ask questions which follow on naturally from the presentation topic chosen by candidates. This allows a link between the topic chosen by the candidate for the presentation and the beginning of the conversation. Interlocutors are encouraged to start*

the conversation with a question unrelated to the presentation, as this does not aid the natural flow of the performance.

Over the course of the performance, interlocutors should ensure that at least two contexts are covered at Higher level (one in the presentation and another in the conversation section). Interlocutors should move on naturally to other topics and contexts, thereby allowing the candidates to demonstrate a variety of language. Interlocutors should ensure they do not ask questions, which lead to candidates repeating parts of their presentation in their answers. Interlocutors should therefore try to avoid asking questions about items that candidates have already addressed in the presentation.

Centres should ensure they are not overly prescriptive in preparing candidates for the conversation. Conversations should be as spontaneous as possible for the level assessed. It is recommended that centres ask a range of questions rather than asking the same questions to the whole cohort. A wider variety of questions in the conversation can help candidates to develop strategies to cope with the unexpected (in line with Appendix 1 of the Modern Languages performance: talking, general assessment information, which is available from SQA's website).

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	1019
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	890
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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 -				
A	49.1%	19.1%	437	73
B	23.7%	72.8%	211	62
C	17.4%	90.2%	155	51
D	5.1%	95.3%	45	45
No award	4.7%	-	42	-

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.