



## Course Report 2015

Subject	German
Level	Higher (New)

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 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 assessment and marking instructions for the examination.

# Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

## Summary of the Course assessment

The Higher Course Assessment reflects the Curriculum for Excellence values, purposes and principles. The 2015 Higher German exam has offered flexibility, personalisation and an element of choice to candidates. The components of the exam have been created with the following principles in mind:

- ◆ The principle of prior knowledge: relevant and familiar concepts in reading and listening items which reflect the course content of Higher.
- ◆ The principle of choice: flexibility in responses and a choice of two Directed Writing Scenarios.
- ◆ The principle of progressive linguistic development: lexical items and phrases as well as a level of demand which complies with the level of mother tongue development and corresponds with the course content of CfE Higher.
- ◆ The principle of coherence: course assessment element in reading and listening follow the National 5 pattern.

## Component 1: Question Paper

### Reading and Translation

The Reading Exam presented the candidates with an article on learning non-European languages in Switzerland, with special consideration of the Chinese language which functioned as an example for other non-European languages in the context of the reading passage. Overall, candidates coped well with the question paper. The concept of learning a non-European language in another country seemed to be an unfamiliar one for some candidates. The principle of flexibility in responses has proved its value.

The translation was straightforward and most candidates were able to apply their translation skills and knowledge of language successfully. The level of language in the translation corresponded with candidates' English skills.

### Directed Writing

In the Directed Writing paper, candidates were given the choice between two scenarios: Scenario 1 (Society) on a stay in a German family and Scenario 2 (Culture) on attending a music concert in Germany with friends.

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. Most candidates opted for Scenario 1 (Society).

The principle of choice in the Directed Writing has proven to be a worthwhile change for candidates, with many of them achieving at least satisfactory.

## Listening and Writing

The Listening paper presented the candidates with a monologue on the topic group interviews and a dialogue on the topic career choices and future plans. The follow-up writing topic focused on career and future plans.

The contexts for both listening items have been well chosen this year as they are part of the Higher Course context of Employability and commonly taught topics in centres. Also, 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 coherence has proven its value and resulted in some good and very good responses by candidates.

## Component 2: Talking Performance

This internally-assessed Course component consists of two elements: a presentation on a topic of candidates' choice, and a follow-up discussion. Candidates were allowed to use notes for their presentation. However, notes were not allowed in the follow-up discussion.

Candidates were also assessed on their ability to sustain a natural conversation.

It would appear that some candidates had been guided by the centre in their choice of Presentation topic. While this is understandable where there are large numbers of candidates, or where candidates are taught in bi-level groups, care must be taken to provide candidates with every opportunity for personalisation and choice.

All centres verified this year used the SQA guidelines for the Internally Assessed Component of Course Assessment — Higher Performance: Talking. The difficulty was therefore the same from candidate to candidate.

## Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

### Component 1: Question paper

#### Reading and Translation

Although some candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with some aspects of European geography and cultural knowledge, most coped well with the demands of the text. They displayed good time management skills in the reading paper, and some very good translations have been marked this year, although the translation task revealed insecurity of candidates' knowledge of English tense forms.

In Question 3, most candidates were unable to access *fließend* to describe that somebody can learn to speak a language fluently.

In Question 7, some candidates were unable to access all marks due to insufficient depth in reading and understanding details. There were some mistranslations of the compound *Arbeitsblätter*, with a number of candidates offering 'leaflets' rather than 'work sheets.'

In Question 9, some candidates did not seem to be familiar with the concept of 'native language'.

In Question 10, not all candidates replied accurately to the question but offered some general statements of advantages and disadvantages of learning non-European languages.

### **Directed Writing**

For the first time, candidates were given the choice between two scenarios. These scenarios were open and allowed candidates personalisation and an element of control. Most candidates chose Scenario 1 (Society) with many good and very good responses.

Some candidates developed the four bullet points very well, and created and added their own ideas to the directed writing, which gave their essays a special flair. More detail could have been provided by some candidates in the fourth bullet point.

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.

### **Listening and Writing**

Item 1 and Item 2 in the Listening paper contained concepts which all candidates appeared to be familiar and confident with. There were some excellent and very good performances in both items, only some candidates appeared to be guessing rather than understanding.

The word *Kleiderordnung* posed difficulties to some candidates who were struggling to find the correct English word although they understood the concept and offered some alternative lexical items to convey meaning.

In Item 2, some candidates were unable to differentiate between the forms of 'he' and 'she'. There were also a number of alternative lexical items and phrases in reply to Question 2c, and some difficulties in responding to Question 2f, as it required some more knowledge about photography.

The follow-up short essay questions on future plans enabled most candidates to produce some good and very good responses and correct use of future tense and/or conditional tense. The topics and sub-topics chosen for listening and short essay followed the principle of coherence and progressive linguistic development.

## **Component 2: Talking Performance**

In the internally assessed component, almost all candidates passed, which indicates that centres are presenting the vast majority at the right level. Overall, the level of candidate performance was high, with many accessing marks in the Good or Very Good category for at least one element of the performance.

Some candidates were unable to sustain complex and detailed language as appropriate to Higher level. In the presentation, some candidates seemed to struggle with the complexity of the language or the topic they had chosen.

In the conversation, where interlocutors asked a good range of open-ended questions, this provided greater scope for candidates to effectively use detailed and complex language to express a wide range of ideas and opinions. Where more closed questions on factual topics were asked, candidates seldom gave responses which contained vocabulary and structures in line with the 'Very Good' or 'Good' categories.

There was a level of inconsistency in approach and in marking of the Sustaining Conversation part of the conversation. Some centres were too lenient in awarding marks, especially where conversations seemed to lack spontaneity and sounded rehearsed.

## **Section 3: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **Component 1: Question Paper**

#### **Reading and Translation**

Candidates displayed very good time management skills. Centres are to be commended for encouraging candidates to analyse the comprehension questions and the reading passage, and to 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.

Candidates with a sound knowledge of Europe performed better in the reading exam; centres should implement aspects of European geography and culture in their German courses from an early level.

Candidates with translation skills performed better in Question 11. Centres are advised to explore the difference between reading and translation skills with their candidates. The vital role of native language grammar and lexical skills requires consideration, too.

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 in particular to the translation but also to more detailed and complex reading.

#### **Directed Writing**

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

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.

### **Listening and Writing**

Candidates seemed to be familiar and confident with the contexts chosen in the Listening and Writing component. They performed very well overall, and centres are to be commended for their thorough preparation and the obvious depth in delivering the context 'Employability'.

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

### **Component 2: Talking Performance**

Centres are advised to implement regular talking activities in the German classroom to develop the natural element of response on a regular basis. By doing this, candidates might show more confidence in using spoken German and enhance their productive language skills altogether.

### **Presentation**

Centres are advised to provide guidance for candidates on the level of language they should be able to cope with, and should ensure comprehension of their Presentation before learning it. It is also recommended that centres provide candidates with an opportunity for personalisation and choice regarding their presentation topic.

### **Conversation**

Interlocutors should carefully consider the type of questions they ask. They should also bear in mind the different requirements of National 5 and Higher when conducting assessments. Asking candidates the same questions at both levels is likely to disadvantage candidates at one or the other level. Candidates perform better when they have open-ended questions rather than closed questions on factual topics. Interlocutors should allow candidates time to answer as this will support candidates in accessing upper pegged marks in the conversation.

Most centres had employed a range of techniques to enhance the Sustaining Conversation part of the conversation. While centres are to be commended for encouraging candidates to ask the interlocutor questions, these should arise naturally from the interaction.

Centres are advised to refer to the Productive Grammar Grid for Higher to inform their choice of questions to candidates.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	637

## 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	41.4%	41.4%	264	73
B	23.9%	65.3%	152	60
C	17.9%	83.2%	114	50
D	8.2%	91.4%	52	45
No award	8.6%	-	55	-

For this Course, the intention was to set an assessment with grade boundaries at the notional values of 50% for a Grade C and 70% for a Grade A. The Listening component was found to be slightly easier than intended, resulting in a 1-mark upward adjustment across all levels. In addition, a new assessment approach in the Talking component allowed a slightly higher degree of accessibility at the top end of performance which equated to a 2-mark increase at the A-boundary.

## 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.