



Course Report 2018

Subject	German
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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.

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

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

The 2018 Higher German exam offered flexibility, personalisation and elements of choice for candidates. The components of the exam have been 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 directed 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 2018 Higher German course assessment consisted of balanced papers, which accommodated a range of candidates.

Overall, the reading/translation paper and the listening question paper performed slightly better than expected. This was taken into account when setting the grade boundaries.

Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

The reading question paper presented the candidates with an article about young Spanish people and their experience of working in Germany. Overall, candidates coped well with the question paper. The concept of reasons for working abroad in general, and working contracts in particular seemed to be an unfamiliar one for a number of candidates. The principle of flexibility in responses has proved its value.

The translation proved to be moderately demanding for a number 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. Most candidates were unable to identify the relative clause in sense unit 4 of the translation and the modal verb in imperfect in sense unit 5. Candidates with a sound knowledge of English and German grammar performed better in this part of the question paper.

In the directed writing question paper, candidates were given the choice between two scenarios: scenario 1 (society) on a family holiday in a German-speaking country, and scenario 2 (culture) on a visit to a music festival in a German-speaking country.

Both scenarios and their four bullet points were designed to be open in order to allow candidates an element of personalisation and give them more control over their writing. There was a strong preference of scenario 1 (society) compared to scenario 2 (culture). Bullet points in both scenarios were accessible and accommodated a range of candidates. They gave candidates the freedom of adding information creating some flair.

The principle of choice in the directed writing question paper has proven to be worthwhile for candidates with many of them accessing the full range of marks available.

Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing

The listening question paper presented the candidates with a monologue on a school that specialises in sport and a dialogue on the topic of school life at a boarding school. The writing section of this question paper focused on candidates' own school and their school day.

The contexts for both listening items consists of commonly taught topics as part of the Higher German course. The concept of selective schools that admit pupils after a process of application seems to be an unfamiliar one to a majority of candidates. A number of candidates also seemed to be unfamiliar with school exchanges.

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 3: performance–talking

In the sample of performances verified, 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, for example comment on fluency, accuracy, range of vocabulary.

Many centres used the Higher Modern Languages performance assessment record (found in the *Higher Modern Languages Performance–talking Assessment Task*) to record commentaries about the sections of their candidates' performances.

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 Directed Writing

Although some candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with the concept of emigrating for work purposes and the nature of working contracts, most candidates coped well with the demands of the text. As seen in the 2017 reading question paper, again most candidates displayed good time management skills. The translation part of the paper worked better than expected; however, sense units 4 and 5 revealed insecurity of some candidates' knowledge of English and German grammar resulting in some inaccurate translations. Candidates with sound English language skills performed better in the translation.

For the directed writing section of the question paper, candidates were given the choice between two scenarios. These scenarios were open and allowed candidates personalisation and an element of control. A majority of candidates preferred scenario 1 (society) to scenario 2 (culture).

Some candidates developed the four bullet points very well. They created and added their own ideas and knowledge about culture and localities in German, Austrian and Swiss cities to their directed writing, which gave their essays a special flair.

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

There were some outstanding directed writing responses 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 and Writing

Although some candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with the admission procedures of specialist schools and the existence of school exchanges, most candidates coped well with the demands of both listening items and the short essay.

Candidates showed very good understanding of time phrases (item 2 question (c)) and relationship concepts and vocabulary (item 2 question (b)). Most candidates were able to identify the demands of a school day (item 1 question (b)).

The short essay topic in the writing section of the question paper, followed on from the topic of the listening items and offered the use of prior knowledge from National 4 and National 5 coursework and assessments. Most candidates addressed the stimuli questions well and achieved at least a 'satisfactory'.

There were some outstanding performances from candidates, suggesting that these candidates could 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 performance–talking.

Presentation

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

Conversation

Overall, candidates performed well in the conversation. They were able to sustain an interaction based on the same, or related topic to the presentation context and then moved on to another context in the course of the conversation.

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 Directed Writing

In question 2(a), a number of candidates were unable to understand the phrase *einen festen Arbeitsvertrag* accurately. This resulted in some vague descriptions and mistranslations such as ‘fixed contract’ or ‘stable contract’.

In question 3(a), some candidates were unable to translate the compound *Facharbeiter* accurately with the help of the dictionary. A number of candidates offered ‘compartment worker’ or ‘compartment work’ rather than ‘skilled worker(s)’. To this end, some candidates could not access the mark.

In question 5(a), some candidates’ responses were vague and there was a clear challenge on English language skills requesting an understanding of *dass man von der Bezahlung nicht leben kann*.

In question 7, most candidates were unable to give the detail about a company car after a three months probationary period.

In question 8, some candidates struggled to focus on the key point of the question, and offered a number of answers relying on the content of the paragraph. Candidates who were able to identify the key point (*denn die Situation in Spanien hat sich noch nicht geändert*) struggled to word this phrase and describe it in their own words in English.

The translation (question 10), turned out to be a challenge in sense units 4 and 5 with only some candidates getting full marks. Knowledge of relative clauses and the imperfect tense of modal verbs, as well as using Standard English accurately, seemed to be the barriers to accessing all marks.

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

Although the directed writing question paper was generally well done this year, the following are some areas that candidates found challenging:

A number of candidates misread, or did not read, the first bullet point in scenario 1 thoroughly enough, relying on learned material without considering the content of the task. The same applied to bullet point four in scenario 1. To this end, a number of candidates, including those with heritage background, only achieved 6 marks.

Likewise, a number of candidates wrote about a *Gastfamilie*, which suggests that candidates either misread the bullet point or chose not to write about their family as requested.

Most candidates showed good control of the perfect tense and German sentence structure. Although many candidates coped well with the demands of complex and detailed language at Higher, a number of errors were made in areas of prior knowledge or basic German language skills as developed in the broad general education and National 4 and National 5.

Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing

Item 1 and item 2 in the listening question paper contained concepts which a number of candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with: school admission through a process of application including a written application, and an interview and school exchanges abroad.

In item 1 question (a), a vast number of candidates were unable to access the marks for not understanding the word *Bewerbung* or the phrase *Ich habe mich für diese Schule beworben* as well as the word *Vorstellungsgespräch*. The same applies to item 1 question (d) where candidates were unable to understand the word *Fächer* and the word *gesund*.

In item 1 question (b), a number of candidates were unable to access the marks due to lack of detail.

In item 2 question (a), a number of candidates did not understand that the parents ‘worked’ abroad and that the female speaker ‘wanted’ a German school qualification.

In item 2 question (e), some candidates misunderstood ‘Aberdeen’ and offered ‘Dundee’ in their answer; there was also a general tendency to state that ‘she was better in English’ rather than ‘she liked English better or she preferred English’.

The follow-up short essay questions, on school and the routine of a school day, 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 school and the school day using detailed and complex language very successfully. Good use of pre-learned material was made by some candidates to express their opinion although there was some mistranslation of the phrase ‘comprehensive school’, which a number of candidates considered to be *Grundschule* rather than *Gesamtschule*.

Component 3: performance–talking

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. Topics for this part of the performance should normally be taken from Appendix 3: contexts, topic and topic development, in the *Higher Modern Languages Course Specification* available on the Modern Languages subject page.

A few performances were significantly too long or too short and this affected candidates' performances. Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the presentation and conversation should last, so that candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of Higher as provided in the *Higher Modern Languages Performance–talking Assessment Task*.

Section 3: advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

It has also been observed that some candidates are able to handle Higher German language structures, but find basic German as taught in the broad general education and at National 4 and National 5 levels 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 1: Reading and Directed Writing

Most candidates displayed very good time management skills again this year. Centres are to be commended for encouraging candidates to analyse the comprehension questions and the reading passage, and distinguish between relevant and redundant vocabulary. Further work on keywords in questions might help candidates to identify relevant answers with confidence.

However, centres should further encourage candidates to also develop candidates' comprehension skills and approach the reading passage holistically. This year's course assessment shows a clear improvement in quality of answers to the overall purpose questions, which is the result of excellent work in centres.

Candidates with efficient translation skills performed better in question 10. Centres are to be commended in advising their candidates on the difference between reading and translation skills. Please consider the vital role of German language grammar and lexical skills. Centres are encouraged to revisit prior learning (National 4 and National 5 grammar and lexical items) before stepping up into Higher German context development.

Candidates with a sound knowledge of German grammar and dictionary use performed better in reading, as they understood the concept of compounds and syntax in connection with verbs in German sentences.

Most centres prepared their candidates very well for the directed writing question paper. Their approach to consolidating 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 in encouraging their candidates to perform well. Candidates who appeared to be more secure in other tense forms (future tense, conditional, present tense) performed well. Candidates should be encouraged to analyse the stimulus thoroughly before writing their response. Underlining keywords — especially verbs — might help to address the bullet point as expected. Providing some training in sequencing could help candidates who find essay structuring a challenge.

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.

A more focused approach on learning and teaching grammar might help candidates to become more confident in applying their productive language skills.

Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing

Candidates seemed to be unfamiliar with the concept of selective schools and school exchanges. These gaps in general knowledge could be addressed by centres in their course work, providing learning and teaching experience about schools in Germany and Austria discussing advantages and disadvantages of a selective school system as well as the role of school exchanges and school contacts abroad.

It is important to highlight the similarities between English and German, with special consideration of the Scots language, which has even closer links to German than English. Candidates with an awareness of the interconnected nature of languages will be more successful listeners. Centres are encouraged to provide listening experience by extending those listening items progressively throughout the broad general education and senior phase. Vocabulary consolidation plays an important role in developing listening skills successfully. To this end, regular formal or informal vocabulary checks might support candidates and give them more confidence.

Candidates with a sound knowledge of present tense, future tense and conditional tense performed better in the writing section of the question paper. 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 3: performance–talking

Care must be taken to provide candidates with every opportunity for personalisation and choice, especially where there are large numbers of candidates, or where candidates are taught in bi-level groups.

In terms of the recommended duration of the performance–talking, centres are advised to refer to the *Higher Modern Languages Course Specification*.

Interlocutors should ask questions in the conversation, which follow on naturally from the presentation topic chosen by candidates, as recommended in the *Higher Modern Languages Course Specification*. Making a natural link between the topic chosen by the candidate for the presentation and the beginning of the conversation is good practice. Interlocutors should ensure they do not start the conversation with a question unrelated to the presentation, as this does not aid the natural flow of the conversation.

Referring to other topics in the course of the conversation allows for personalisation and choice. Interlocutors should move on naturally to other topics, 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 adapted to the responses of each candidate, rather than asking the same questions to all candidates. A wider variety of questions in the conversation can aid candidates to develop strategies to cope with the unexpected.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	890
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Number of resulted entries in 2018	817
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative%	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	49.1%	49.1%	401	74
B	23.4%	72.5%	191	62
C	16.3%	88.7%	133	51
D	5.9%	94.6%	48	45
No award	5.4%	-	44	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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.

Therefore SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.