



External Assessment Report 2015

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 2015 Higher German examination presented candidates with a Reading Text about an older couple who had both found their way to a small village on the River Nahe where they had met up and become business partners and friends.

The Directed Writing task centred on a holiday to a house in Germany; unfortunately on the journey the family car broke down near Cologne and the family had to spend three days in a hotel there. (This was a true life story that had happened to a member of the setting team.)

In the Listening paper there was an interview with a young German who had spent a year as a Foreign Language Assistant in Edinburgh where she flat-shared with people from other countries, which led nicely into a Personal Response writing task on whether the candidate would like to flat-share with people from other countries, and whether they would prefer to live at home or live with friends.

The Reading paper was a good text with a balance of challenging and fairly simple structures and vocabulary; there was a fair balance between straightforward questions and more challenging ones. The translation was considered to be straightforward. A small number of centres did not share this view and considered that the text was not interesting and that the figurative language was too demanding for their candidates. They also felt that the Directed Writing was unrealistic and the introduction to the Personal Response Writing was too long. However, candidates' responses did not bear this out — overall they coped well with the more figurative expressions in the Reading; they were able to write about three enforced days in Cologne in the Directed Writing; and not only did the longer introduction to the Personal Response Writing not deflect the candidates from the task, but many actively incorporated aspects of it into their responses. Candidates clearly found it helpful.

Furthermore it was extremely encouraging to find that every possible way of achieving a mark in this exam was used. No question was too difficult or caused unexpected problems, and a very high percentage of candidates addressed all the bullet points in the Directed Writing and covered all aspects of the Personal Response Writing.

Areas in which candidates performed well

In any examination there is a mixture of relatively straightforward questions and more challenging ones. In addition, where there are 2 marks available in a question, it is often the case that one mark will be attainable by all candidates who have been presented at the appropriate level, while the second point will be aimed more at the A/B candidate. This proved to be the case in the Reading paper.

Question 1: Most candidates understood that Brigitte addressed most people at the campsite by their name and many gained the mark for her stopping for a little chat with them.

Question 2(b): The majority of candidates appreciated that Brigitte lived in Cologne with her 9-month old son, and many also understood that she had dreams of opening her own Kindergarten.

Question 2(c): Candidates understood that Leo was in the army and, despite the figurative language, 80% had no difficulty in Question 2(d) with him becoming a bus driver.

Question 3: Almost all candidates understood that the campsite had grown in size over the years since Brigitte took it over.

Question 4(a): Candidates coped well with the reason for Leo wishing to change career — it was not demanding enough.

In Question 5(b) candidates coped well with Leo opening a restaurant at the gates of the campsite.

In the Directed Writing candidates rose to the challenge of the car breaking down on the journey, using relatively simple language along the lines of *Das Auto was kaputt und wir mussten drei Tage in Köln bleiben*.

In the Listening it would be fair to say that candidates found the second half of the text more challenging than the first half, but overall they performed well in these questions:

- 1(a): She wanted to improve her English
- 2: She wanted to cycle and go walking
- 3: There is a lot to do in Edinburgh
- 5: She got on well with her flat-mates, they never fought
- 6: Ceilidh dancing was something completely new
- 7(a): They ate at different times
- 9: Spanish time-keeping

Finally, candidates were able to write about their accommodation wishes for the future.

Areas which candidates found demanding

In Paper 1 some candidates found question 4(c) challenging. This question was intended to discriminate, although 'he discovered the friendly side of the people' was not difficult.

Some candidates also found Question 6(b) more difficult. The word that caused most difficulty was 'reich' (rich). Quite unexpectedly, candidates confused the adjective with the noun 'Reich' (empire).

In a number of centres candidates were not able to cope with the translation — this was a new situation. The opening sentence was not easy, but it should have been within the ability of a Higher candidate. Thereafter the translation should have been much more straightforward, yet candidates lost marks by omitting words and phrases and writing things that made no sense. On the other hand, in other centres candidates coped extremely well and were clearly well prepared for the exercise.

In Listening, question 4 was not simple but there were two aspects of how Lena found her flat — one was passive in that the school sent her an email with an address, and the other was active in that she then had to make a phone call herself to reserve the accommodation.

At Question 7(b) candidates had difficulty with 'Kuchen backen' (baking cakes) and occasionally wrote that they ate tortillas, which was not in the text. What was in the text was that they made something typical from their own countries.

The final question (11) was also more demanding, not because the language was not understood, but because detail was required and frequently not provided.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Approach

While this particular Higher German examination has reached the end of its life, the New Higher has many similarities — the tasks are the same: Reading, Translation, Directed Writing, Listening, Personal Response Writing. It is therefore still highly relevant to pass the wisdom of experience on to centres and future candidates.

In each paper there is a mixture of passive skills (Reading, Translation, Listening) and active skills (Writing in the Foreign Language).

In Paper 1, one hour and 40 minutes was allocated to the tasks and it was anticipated that one hour would be spent on the Reading paper and 40 minutes on the Writing. In one hour there is ample time to read the text three times — the first time very quickly to get a hint of what it is about (it is also always useful to read the English language introduction to the text, as there can be useful clues there); the second time in more detail, looking at the questions on the way; and finally a third time when you will be dealing with the detail required for the answer to each question.

The questions are set out in the order in which the answers will be found in the text, and that is how they should be answered. The final question in the Reading paper is the Translation, and its location as the final question is an indicator as to when it should be addressed — after the completion of the Reading questions. By the time the Reading has been completed, the candidate will have a very clear idea of the subject matter of the text. The answers to the Reading questions can be expressed in many ways, as long as the detail is there. In the Translation, accuracy and precision are essential and in that respect it is an entirely different exercise from the Reading questions.

The location of the translation passage in the text varies. It can be early on, in the middle, at the very end. Indeed it can be, and has been, the opening sentences of the passage. It should not be addressed according to where in the text it is located but where in the questions it is located (ie last).

It is not just in the Reading element of the paper that some candidates respond to the questions in random order; some address the tasks themselves in random order. The

question paper presents the passive skill first for a very good reason — so that the candidate spends an hour becoming comfortable reading the language before having to go on to the much more demanding task of writing in the language. Sometimes there may actually be vocabulary in the Reading paper that could be recycled in the Directed Writing. In the 2015 paper it was a city name — in the reading text there was reference to Köln and in the Directed Writing the family car broke down at Cologne.

In Paper 2 there is no opportunity for the candidates to respond to the tasks in reverse order — the Listening is very clearly the first part of the paper and takes up the first 15 minutes of the examination. Paper 1 should be approached in the same way — complete the Reading Comprehension questions first, then the Translation, and finally the Directed Writing.

Details

Our second piece of advice for all future examinations is also something that has featured in many previous reports: please pay attention to detail. Marks will be lost through the omission of detail. At Higher Level every word counts; detail is required. These are examples from the 2015 Reading paper where some candidates lost marks:

- fast jeden Camper — **almost** every camper
- fand er nicht herausfordernd genug — he did not find it demanding **enough**
- noch einmal die Schulbank zu drücken — to go **back** to school
- muss unbedingt Cityluft schnüppern — must smell city air **regularly**

Four marks can make a significant difference to a final result.

Translation

The third piece of advice centres on the translation. This is worth 10% of the total marks available in the whole course assessment, so it is worthy of having a significant amount of time and practice spent on it.

To gain full marks in any sense-unit, everything has to be translated — miss out a word and the translation is incomplete; change the tense and the translation is inaccurate; translate 'der' with 'a' or 'ein' with 'the' and you cannot gain full marks, these words are not the same. Check every word; make sure that you have omitted nothing — and just as importantly, do not add in phrases that are not there.

Expect one or two sense units to be harder than the other three or four and do not give up, when you find this. The opening unit of the 2015 Translation was: *Leo Hermes, der ein Restaurant auf dem Campingplatz betreibt*. This is not simple but it is of an appropriate standard for Higher. In fact it contains a relative clause — Leo Hermes, who runs a restaurant on the campsite.

Candidates should have a working knowledge of countries in Europe, and certainly those that have borders with Germany. 'In den Niederlanden' should be understood by learners at an early stage, for example.

In the same way, candidates are advised to learn the German names of places that English has different names for — München, Nürnberg, Köln. At the same time they should have the

opportunity to research places in Germany as this wider knowledge underpins successful language acquisition.

Directed Writing

This leads to advice about the Directed Writing. Candidates are urged to address the bullet points with which they are presented, not ones they have learned by heart and wish to use even if they are not relevant to the task set. The aim of the Writing tasks is to give candidates the opportunity to display their ability to manipulate the language and to respond to the task set.

A common bullet point over the years has been 'How long the journey took'. The response 'Die Reise war lang' does not answer the question. A number of hours is required. Candidate should check flight times and ferry times.

Listening

This is the most demanding skill being assessed in the examination. The sounds disappear into the air all too quickly, which is why it needs to be practised throughout the course and at home. Apart from tackling this in school and college in class, candidates should be strongly encouraged to listen to German radio or watch German television at home — it makes learning fun — www.sendungsverpasst.de gives us ready access on the internet to current television programmes, all day, every day. There are German language radio channels for every taste in music — even allowing that to wash over you while you do something else is a wonderful way of absorbing German. Finally, consider spending 100 seconds a day listening to 'Tagesschau in 100 Sekunden', the day's TV news in 1 minute 40 seconds.

Personal Response

Finally there is the Personal Response Writing, where the advice once again is to make sure that the tasks set are addressed. This was a strength in the 2015 examination and it proved that by giving candidates clear topics to address they were able to use the language in the rubric and build it into their responses. Long may candidates continue to do this. Well done!

Centres must advise candidates wisely on whether to progress to Higher or seek to improve a weak National 5 C grade. Some of this year's presentations were inappropriate. In 2014 31.2% of the candidates gained an A pass; in this final paper 34.5% of the candidates gained an A pass and 76% attained an A–C pass, 0.7% less than in 2014.

There can be no doubt that quality learning and teaching makes the difference, and it is clear from the results in this examination that this is to be found in many centres in Scotland. In addition, there are encouraging signs that the uptake for Higher German has risen slightly and it is to be hoped that this continues, as the New Highers establish themselves. There is excellent work being done in teaching German across Scotland; long may this continue.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	1006
Number of resulted entries in 2015	477

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	34.6%	34.6%	165	70
B	21.4%	56.0%	102	60
C	21.2%	77.1%	101	50
D	6.7%	83.9%	32	45
No award	16.1%	-	77	-

The Course assessment functioned as intended therefore grade boundaries were benchmarked to 2013 notional boundaries.

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.