



External Assessment Report 2013

Subject(s)	Gaelic (Learners)
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

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

Most candidates performed well this year, with a few outstanding performances. The number of candidates at the Grade Boundary stage was 119, of whom 90.8% were awarded Grade A–C.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Reading

Responses to the Reading section were generally of a high standard, despite misunderstandings by some candidates. Most candidates understood the passage well, and responded to the questions accordingly, although with insufficient attention to detail.

Writing

Despite mixed performances, there was continued improvement in the Writing section. The improvement was particularly noticeable with regard to orthography – it was evident that candidates continue to become more familiar with the orthographic recommendations of Gaelic Orthographic Conventions.

Most candidates wrote on the theme of Holidays with evidence of good preparation. There was quite a variety in the length of writing in this section, but with some good usage of idiomatic phrases in some pieces.

Literature

Most candidates attempted the question on poetry, while a significant number responded to the short story question. Quite a wide variety of texts were used. Very few candidates responded to the question about the novel and drama. Generally, literature responses showed evidence of extensive preparation, and at times the impression was that some candidates went into the examination with prepared responses.

Candidates in one or two centres wrote about the same text in a very similar manner, but generally responses showed that candidates had had exposure to a commendably wide range of texts throughout their course.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Listening

There was some improvement this year, although generally candidates struggled to do well. Most attempted to answer all questions, but a number of candidates did not attempt some of the questions.

Examples of difficulties:

- ◆ Q1: Most candidates recognised 'slàinte' as relating to health, but some did not pick up on 'bodhaige' and 'inntinne'.
- ◆ Q2: 'Deugairean' seemed to be a problem for some candidates.
- ◆ Q6: Most candidates recognised 'Dèanaibh e cho luath 's a thilleas sibh bhon sgoil', but some did not include 'Chan eil e math ... a dhèanamh anmoch air an oidhche' as being relevant to the question.
- ◆ Q14: Some candidates had difficulty in identifying 'smaoinichibh air rudan ciùin, cofhurtail'.
- ◆ Q16: Many candidates identified 'sàmhach' etc, but not many recognised 'duvet', 'pillows' 'curtains' etc. Several did not recognise 'na leig solas a-steach' which should not have represented any vocabulary difficulties at this level.
- ◆ Q17: A number of candidates did not understand 'a' chòigeamh agus an t-siathamh bliadhna'

Reading

Some unexpected errors were made, which could have been avoided with more attention to detail.

Examples:

- ◆ Q1: 'Teisteanas' caused problems for some candidates, resulting in a variety of responses to this question.
- ◆ Q3: A number of candidates failed to provide 'much more/more' in their answer.
- ◆ Q8: Candidates often failed to give sufficient detail to fully demonstrate their understanding.
- ◆ Q 11b): Many candidates did not correctly identify '*live* music'.
- ◆ Q 12a): Some inadequate responses were given here.
- ◆ Q15: As for Q12a.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Listening

Greater emphasis must be placed on preparing candidates for the Listening. It might be that many candidates have insufficient exposure to the language, and they should be

encouraged to use radio, television programmes and CDs to increase their awareness of the spoken word. This is the weakest section of the examination.

Reading

Some candidates could benefit from paying greater attention to detail, and to some extent being guided by the number of marks on offer for various questions. For example, unfamiliarity with common, everyday words will result in loss of marks. While the Reading section was well done, candidates can gain more marks by looking closely at the questions and responding with according levels of detail.

Writing

While there was a continued improvement in Writing this year, there is still room for further improvement. Confusion between the verbal noun and the infinitive should also be avoided. Particular care should be paid to tenses when writing about specific themes. Candidates should respond the questions as set in order to maximise their performance.

Literature

While the thorough preparation of candidates in respect of Literature is to be commended, there is an impression that responses are prepared with the intention of being reproduced on the answer page. Many centres' candidates wrote similar essays on the same text, giving this impression. It is important that the set question is answered, without too much focus on re-telling the poem or short story and too little on analysis and evaluation. There should be greater focus on analysing and evaluating the author's work in responses to the short story question, rather than spending too much time re-telling the story. Quotations should be used effectively as support for points raised in responses, and not 'at random' — quotations must be relevant to points being made.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	110
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	119
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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 220				
A	35.3%	35.3%	42	154
B	29.4%	64.7%	35	132
C	25.2%	89.9%	30	110
D	1.7%	91.6%	2	99
No award	8.4%	100.0%	10	-

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.