



External Assessment Report 2009

Subject	Gaidhlig
Level	Higher and Advanced 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

The standard of the Higher examination remained largely unchanged from 2008 although some candidates continue to find the reading section of the paper very challenging. Performance in other sections of the paper was variable with some very good responses and also some very weak answers from a number of candidates. It is clear that there is great variation in the way in which centres prepare candidates for the external examination. Time management continues to be an issue and centres must prepare pupils to enable them to complete the examination in the allocated time. A large number of the candidates were handicapped by their choice of question in the literature section as they chose to answer a question that was not suited to the poem/short story chosen. The quantity approach to answering questions is still favoured by a number of candidates – it would be wiser to produce shorter answers of quality and in turn this would free up time to tackle other sections of the paper. It is apparent that some candidates are being presented at the wrong level; they would have been better suited at Intermediate 2 level.

The small number of entries in the Advanced Higher was disappointing and overall performance of candidates was of relatively poor quality. The literary criticism and the translation provide significant challenge. Answers in the literature section need to show more insight with regard to the writer's craft.

The number of entries at both levels was disappointing.

Higher

Reading

The general standard of response in 2009 showed that some candidates continue to have problems with the interpretative style of the questions that were set. The language in the passage was very accessible but the concepts that the questions attempt to tease out prove to be very elusive. It should be noted that the Higher paper provides a different challenge to S Grade and Intermediate 2 in the style of question that is set. The style of the paper remains consistent. Candidates should be taught the requisite skills so that they will be able to tackle the type of questions set. One of the intended benefits of removing the folio and report was that centres would have additional time to teach additional skills but this does not seem to be happening. There were some good responses but it is clear that a number of candidates do not have the required fluency to tackle abstract concepts and answer questions in their own words.

As mentioned in previous years centres must, in their teaching, refer to themes and techniques used by authors in developing a storyline and this will help candidates deal more effectively with the reading paper as they can identify nuances and themes being highlighted in the passage.

Writing

There was little change in the overall performance of candidates in this section of the paper and comments made over the year are still valid. There were some good answers but they were very much in the minority. The hoped-for improvement in the quality of writing is not materialising and this is a question that all involved in Gaelic medium education must engage with. The lack of quality in terms of syntax, grammar and fluency must be addressed. There is a wide range of mastery of language evident in responses and it is equally clear that candidates from some centres are not aware of the most basic grammatical concepts. The weakness in the writing component from some centres is worthy of note.

The choice of question in an examination is important. The most effective essays were about 600 words long, had a plan prepared prior to being written and they showed a degree of fluency and accuracy. Too many candidates appeared to be writing as they thought and their essay showed no development of theme or plot and conclusions were weak. For instance some wrote on question 3 but the end product showed no resemblance to newspaper report. It is essential that the question is answered in terms of what the question asks. Presumably all centres teach candidates the format for newspaper reports.

Most candidates wrote their answers on questions 2, 3 and 5 but showed no evidence of a plan prior to the essay being written. It is extremely difficult to develop a coherent theme in a discursive essay without some forethought and a plan. It is accepted that time management is an issue but planning will assist, rather than hinder, the final product.

Literature

There were some good responses in the literature section of the paper but the variation from centre to centre is too variable. The number of candidates being handicapped for choosing the wrong question continued to grow. Questions must be read carefully prior to answering and candidates must think about what the requirements of the question are. A number of candidates answered question 6 and used the poem *Ùrnaigh na Ban Thigrich* to support their answer. This poem might have been suitable for another question but was not suitable for question 6 as there is very little in the way of imagery in the poem. This was just one example of a candidate being penalised for trying to dovetail an unsuitable source to answer a question.

The best answers were evaluative with personal responses coming from the candidates. There was good awareness of critical terminology and the main themes were identified and supported by the effective use of quotations. Answers were well structured in some instances and were of appropriate length. There are still a number of candidates that insist on retelling the story with little or no reference to the question.

Listening

The listening paper was well done by the majority as in previous years. One candidate was penalised for answering the listening paper in English. All questions must be answered in Gaelic. It is clear that some centres need to spend more time giving continued exposure to the spoken word and this will help candidates meet the demands of the listening paper. Some words that gave candidates difficulty were surprising given that this was a Higher level paper. If pupils listened to the Gaelic news on a regular basis their listening skills would benefit.

The following words proved challenging – gabhail brath, conaltradh, saor, gnìomhachas, ciorraim.

Advanced Higher

Writing

The standard of writing was variable. Some candidates had very good ideas and expressed themselves well. All that prevented these pieces from being excellent was that they lacked fluency in some areas. Other examples of writing were disappointing with candidates producing bland, discursive essays with little evidence of insight or imagination. Candidates need to be encouraged to avoid discursive essays unless they have the relevant information to give both sides of the argument and it would also help if they had strong views on these topics. Some candidates also need to write at greater length. It was interesting to note that the easier essay titles in questions 6, 7 and 8 were avoided. The comments made in relation to Higher writing are also relevant for Advanced Higher candidates. It would appear that the amount of teaching time allocated to candidates varies considerably from centre to centre.

Literary Criticism

It is evident from this section of the paper that texts were not as adequately prepared as they should be. Some candidates are still quoting from the text in the Rosg section of the paper instead of answering questions in their own words as is clearly instructed in the foreword to the paper. Teachers need to highlight this point to their pupils.

The response to this section of the paper was weak. The texts were readily accessible in terms of language and the nuances should have been within the scope of candidates at this level. The texts were mainly straightforward and there were no trick questions. Pupils do not seem to have the tools to tackle this section of the paper. It was evident that schools need to spend more time in the teaching of pupils in terms of dealing with literature in a critical manner.

Comments made in 2008 relating to this section of the paper still apply.

Literature

The answers produced in this section of the paper showed a great degree of variation. Some answers were of a high standard but others were disappointing. In common with the Higher a number of candidates did not answer the question that they claimed to be answering. They wrote plenty about their chosen poem or short story but made little or no reference to the question. The skill required to evaluate texts and make critical comments had not been developed to any meaningful extent for most candidates. The literary and linguistic techniques were not well handled. It would appear that a number of candidates are not being taught but are attempting to work on their own. This will not provide them with a positive experience and schools and authorities need to review the way in which Advance Higher Gàidhlig is taught. It is important that candidates are responsible for their own learning but guidance and help is also required from teaching staff.

As mentioned in previous years, answers with a degree of personal response will score better marks. Bland responses that retell the story and do not refer to the specific question will not gain high marks.

Translation

Some candidates coped reasonably well with this section but on the whole it was not well done. The text was accessible and the vocabulary used is in everyday use on the Gaelic news. Candidates have been made aware in previous years that the spirit of the text is what is required and not a translation of every individual word. It was clear from responses that some candidates did not have the richness of language to cope with the translation.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Higher – some candidates – listening, writing

Advanced Higher – some candidates – writing, literature.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Higher - reading

Advanced Higher – translation, literary criticism

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

The comments produced in previous years are still relevant.

Literature

Some centres need to review the way in which they teach literature in order to improve the quality of candidates responses. The quality of response is far more important than the quantity. Markers always look for the personal response from candidates and an awareness of critical terminology and literary techniques must be evident. The responses must be personal and should not be a reflection of teachers' notes appearing in all candidates responses. Candidates must also be careful in their choice of question during the examination – the question set must be answered in order to gain high marks.

It would be helpful for centres to refer to the guide to teaching literature on the LTS website.

Writing

Presenting centres must work in collaboration with their feeder schools in order to facilitate the required improvement in writing. These writing skills should be mastered at early stages to ensure mastery. This would dovetail well with CfE and transition requirements. Many candidates have significant weaknesses in their language skills and it would appear that many require a formal introduction to Gaelic grammar. Unless these basic concepts are mastered at an early stage the development of writing skills will always be hindered.

Higher

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	99
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	84
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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 - 150				
A	26.2%	26.2%	22	105
B	38.1%	64.3%	32	90
C	26.2%	90.5%	22	75
D	3.6%	94.0%	3	67
No award	6.0%	100.0%	5	-

Advanced Higher

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2008	26
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Number of resulted entries in 2009	14
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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 - 200				
A	21.4%	21.4%	3	140
B	28.6%	50.0%	4	120
C	7.1%	57.1%	1	100
D	0.0%	57.1%	0	90
No award	42.9%	100.0%	6	-

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.