



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Gaelic (Learners)
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

Overall it was interesting to note areas in which performance has improved this year, such as Listening. Good use of idiomatic Gaelic indicates perhaps that there is now greater opportunity to listen to and view Gaelic speakers on national media services.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Listening

There was an improvement in the performance of candidates in this section of the exam this year. There were still a significant number of candidates who did not pass this section of the exam, but generally they had slightly higher marks than in previous years. Most candidates attempted to answer all the questions, with some seeming to take clues from the questions themselves or from key words in the passage which they recognised when they did not fully understand a section of the passage. Some answers seemed to be educated guesses on the general theme of holidays.

Literature

Generally, the Literature section was executed well, with evidence of prior preparation. There was a variety of texts used. It was very pleasing to note that in some of the packs from centres the candidates had written on a variety of pieces, showing that they had exposure to a wide range of texts throughout of the course. In one or two cases however, candidates had all written about the same text, in a very similar manner. (Interestingly, these were notably from areas where Gaelic is perhaps more prominent in the community outside of school. Candidates from these areas gained the majority of their marks from the Listening, Reading and Writing sections, whereas candidates from areas where Gaelic is less prominent in the community seemed to pick up valuable marks in this section.)

Writing

There was generally a marked improvement in candidates answering the question set, rather than adapting a previously learned essay. For example, many of the answers referred to the 'impact' the piece had on them. Many candidates chose to refer to the question in the introduction and conclusion only, but there were a few very good responses which continually referred back to the question. Within the Careers questions candidates chose only questions 1 and 2, and there were some excellent responses to these questions. Within the Food & Health questions candidates chose only questions 2 and 3, and again answered these questions very well.

There were some excellent pieces which displayed a natural use of language, and it was evident that candidates had tried to include some idiomatic phrases in their writing. Where candidates seemed to be writing about a holiday from memory, using the past tense, they did so very well. Where they had to be more creative with language to fit the question there were more mistakes, but it was a positive sign that these candidates had read and understood the question they were answering.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Reading

Candidates did not perform as well in the Reading paper as they have in previous year. Most attempted to answer all questions, but there were a number of candidates who did not provide any response. Some candidates attempted to infer understanding from the questions themselves or from key words in the passage which they recognised when they did not fully understand a section of the passage. A number of candidates did not pass this section of the exam, some with marks as low as 1/40, which is surprising for this level. The first page of questions was generally executed well, but some candidates appeared to struggle as they progressed through the paper.

Literature

In a couple of instances candidates chose the incorrect question for their chosen text, and this caused them to drop valuable marks, their essays being marked out of 20 instead of 40. As with the writing section, centres should stress to candidates that they need to answer, and refer to, the question set.

Writing

Often in the short story responses there was not enough focus on analysing or evaluating the author's work, and too much time spent re-telling the story. In relation to this there was often a lack of critical terminology, and candidates need to look more at techniques used by the authors. Although some responses were well written and detailed, it is on the personal response, analysis, evaluation, etc that they are marked. Also, despite having the texts in the exam, some candidates did not have sufficient evidence from the text to support the points raised.

Most candidates chose to write about Holidays, and most chose question 2. Here, many candidates failed to answer the question fully, ie the **idea of a perfect holiday**, and wrote instead about a holiday they had been on in the past, which caused them to lose marks. Centres need to stress to candidates that they need to answer the questions set.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Continue to encourage candidates to access the spoken word to build natural language competences. Candidates should also be encouraged to access a wide variety of texts to broaden their exposure to contemporary literature.

In developing techniques for examination performance, candidates should be cautious when inferring understanding of content from context and/or key words. It can be a very effective technique, and is a natural process in language acquisition, but it can also lead to inaccurate understanding and responses.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	119
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	103
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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	41.7%	41.7%	43	154
B	26.2%	68.0%	27	132
C	17.5%	85.4%	18	110
D	1.9%	87.4%	2	99
No award	12.6%	-	13	-

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.