



## External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	<b>Gaelic (Learners)</b>
Level	<b>Higher</b>

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. However, there were no outstanding performances. Of the 127 candidates, 90.6% were awarded Grade A–C. Grade D and No Award accounted for 9.4% of candidates.

The performance this year reflects the strong performances by Standard Grade candidates in 2010, and the support of the Understanding Standards event organised by SQA during that year.

## 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 some unexpected errors were made. (See 'Advice to Centres' below).

### Writing

There was a marked improvement in responses to the Writing section. This was particularly noticeable with regard to orthography — it was evident that candidates are now more familiar with the orthographic recommendations of GOC (*Gaelic Orthographic Conventions*). Most candidates wrote on the theme of Holidays. There was some very good use of idiomatic phrases in some pieces. (See 'Advice to Centres'.)

### 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, while none responded to the drama question.

Generally, Literature responses showed evidence of extensive preparation, and at times the impression was that some candidates went into the examination with prepared responses. (See 'Advice to Centres'.)

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### Listening

Generally, candidates did not perform well in the Listening paper. Most attempted to answer all questions, but some candidates did not attempt a significant number of the questions.

Examples of difficulties:

**Q3** – Many did not identify 'aittire' correctly, and this had an effect on their understanding of the rest of the passage.

**Q5** – ‘Mura còrd’ presented difficulty, although this is a phrase with which candidates should have been familiar at Standard Grade.

**Q6** – ‘Am biodh’ was often misunderstood.

**Q7** – Some candidates did not identify ‘obair làn-thìde’ correctly.

**Q11a** – Marks were lost for inadequate answers. Candidates identified that the speaker was involved in building houses, but not houses which were ‘suitable for the Highland climate’.

**Q16** – Candidates generally did not identify ‘bho chionn’ correctly.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

### **Listening**

Greater emphasis should be placed on preparing candidates for the Listening section. It might be that many candidates have insufficient exposure to the language, and they should be encouraged to use radio and television programmes to increase their awareness of the spoken word. This continues to be the most challenging section of the examination.

### **Reading**

Some candidates should pay greater attention to detail, and to some extent be guided by the number of marks on offer for various questions. For example, in the Reading section, many candidates identified ‘Albannach agus Èireannach’ as ‘Scotland and Ireland’ — this type of confusion is not expected at this level. Also, identifying a plural as a singular 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 respond in detail accordingly.

### **Writing**

While there was a marked improvement in Writing, there is still room for further improvement. Candidates should ensure that their sentences make sense, and avoid the omission of simple words such as *ann(s)*, *aig*, *air* and the definite article. Confusion between the verbal noun and the infinitive should also be avoided. Tenses are important, particularly when writing about specific themes.

### **Literature**

While the thorough preparation of candidates in respect of Literature is to be commended, there is an impression that responses are, in some cases, over-prepared. Many centres’ candidates wrote similar essays on the same text, giving this impression. It is important that the question set is answered appropriately, without too much focus on re-telling the poem or short story and too little on analysis and evaluation.

Candidates should not refer to authors by their first name. Quotations should be used effectively as support for points raised in responses.

**General comments**

Some very good candidates took part in the 2011 examination diet, and it is hoped that the points highlighted in this report will encourage candidates and centres towards further improvement in forthcoming examinations.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	131
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	127
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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	33.1%	33.1%	42	154
B	26.0%	59.1%	33	132
C	31.5%	90.6%	40	110
D	4.7%	95.3%	6	99
No award	4.7%	100.0%	6	-

## **General commentary on grade boundaries**

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

Each year, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.