

Research and Information Services

Monitoring Standards Report



Comparison of Gàidhlig Higher 2005 and 2007

Information about Monitoring Standards

Since 1998 SQA has been monitoring a sample of qualifications annually to determine whether standards in the level of demand in the syllabus and question papers are being maintained year on year and whether any changes to marking instructions have had an impact on candidates' examination results.

NQ teams are asked to compare the Arrangements, Question papers and Marking Instructions for the years in question and consider whether there have been any changes to these which have resulted in any change to the level of demand or difficulty. Teams decide whether the breadth and depth of the syllabus has remained the same and if not, how these changes have altered the level of demand in the question papers in the years being compared. The clarity of instructions and allocation of marks in the marking instructions across the years is also considered. The candidate evidence is compared and the teams decide whether or not the evidence is demonstrating the same standard of performance across the years.

NQ Monitoring teams comprise a subject specialist from Higher Education or a Professional Organisation, who is the chair of the group, the Principal Assessor for the subject, who is the SQA expert in the group and a practicing classroom teacher who can be an SQA marker.

Summary of findings

The panel, which comprised a University lecturer (chair and report writer), the Principal Assessor (Gàidhlig) and a practising teacher of Gàidhlig concludes the overall level of demand for Gàidhlig Higher has remained more or less unchanged for 2007, in comparison with 2005. However, there has been one great change in that the removal of the folio and the report from the assessment package as it was in 2005 and the corresponding greater emphasis on exam-condition assessment in 2007 meant that it was harder for candidates to achieve an 'A' grade in 2007 than it was in 2005. Overall this change to the syllabus seems to have resulted in a broadly similar level of demand but a much more robust assessment package that produced a more accurate picture of student ability in 2007 than was possible under the 2005 arrangements.

◆ Cohort of candidates

The cohort of candidates is broadly similar in the papers from the two years examined here. The number of candidates was slightly lower in 2007, but it is anticipated that this will increase in future years due to increased demand for and uptake of Gaelic Medium Education.

◆ Level of demand of Arrangements/ syllabus

The level of demand in the arrangements is broadly similar over the two years under consideration. The removal of the folio and the report (2007), however, means that students are not subject to the same level of demand in terms of developing research skills and in-depth report writing skills as they were in 2005. On the other hand there is a slightly increased or very different level of demand in 2007 as an end of course exam has now effectively replaced the folio and report. This change has freed teachers from concentrating on the production of folios and reports during class time,

allowing them more scope, potentially, to broaden the range of what they can teach, and to develop a broader spectrum of student skills.

◆ **Level of demand of Assessment instruments**

The level of demand in the assessment instruments of *Leughadh*, *Sgrìobhadh*, *Èisteachd* and *Labhairt* (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) has remained broadly the same as it was in 2005. However, the report writing component has been greatly diminished, and the folio assessment has been abolished. Literature is now assessed under exam conditions. In some senses this may be seen as an increased level of demand, and in other senses this may be interpreted as a reduced level of demand. In any case the exam component, as opposed to the redrafted and polished folio, is a very different assessment. This panel felt that the new arrangement had produced a more rigorous assessment instrument which provides a clearer indication of student performance.

◆ **Level of demand of Marking instructions**

The marking instructions are now (2007) much more detailed and user friendly than they were in (2005). They provide more detailed guidance for markers and should ensure greater consistency.

◆ **Grading of scripts**

The grading of scripts is at the same level as it was. However, while demand and grading might be broadly similar the shake up of the methods of assessment (abolition of the folio and the diminution of the report) with a greater emphasis on exam condition assessment mean that this it is now effectively 'harder' for students to achieve an 'A' pass in 2007 than it was in 2005. Similarly, students who achieved a low B in 2005, would probably achieve a 'C' under the 2007 set-up.

1. Introduction

General changes

In 2005 there was a lot of duplication of the assessment of skills, particularly in the report and the folio. The research element was well done in these exercises but the exam element of assessment showed that candidate writing skills were not being sufficiently developed. Production of the report and the folio placed great time pressure on staff which hindered their freedom to develop other skills. There was a fear that the nature of the production of such folios and reports produced generic responses which placed too great a reliance on teachers' notes (and even, perhaps, external help in some cases) rather than individual reactions to the literature in the case of the folio which was produced at home and in the school and counted for some 22% of the final mark. Similarly, the report which comprised another 22% of the total final mark of the award was the result of a year's research: internally generated and externally assessed. This resulted, it was felt, in a system where it was perceived that it was 'too easy' to get a Gàidhlig higher. In order to address these issues it was felt that the assessment process needed re-alignment. From 2007- the folio was abandoned and students were examined instead on literature under

exam conditions. The report is still produced by candidates but is not now assessed other than the content of such reports being used for NAB (National Assessment Bank) tests. This is the biggest change between the assessment of Gàidhlig at higher level in 2005 and 2007 which, it was hoped, would produce a more robust assessment instrument providing a more accurate gauge of candidate ability.

As a result of these changes (especially as a result of being freed from overseeing the production of the folio) teachers have had more time to concentrate on developing other pupil skills. Approaches to education are now increasingly informed by AiFL (Assessment is for Learning) and WALT (We are learning to) and WILF (What I'm looking for) strategies - which it is hoped will result in more time being freed up to develop candidate skills rather than pushing folios through the system. It is intended that this will place an even greater emphasis on individual learning and allow for a wider range of literature, such as the new *Ùr Sgeul* series, to be studied.

The number of candidates fell slightly in 2007 in comparison to 2005, but it is anticipated that the number of candidates in future years will rise due to the spread in Gaelic Medium Education (GME) and the increase in the number of centres which offer the Higher assessment package (from 7 centres focused on the Highlands in 2000 to 20 centres in a wider spread across Scotland in 2007). The profile of candidates has shifted greatly mirroring the uptake of GME on a wider Scottish basis. This has resulted in an increasingly urban profile of Gaelic speaking candidates. Patterns of old-style fluency are no longer as prevalent and teaching has had to adapt to new-style fluency (pupils having come through the GME system) and to non-traditional topics.

It was also felt that there may be a danger that the derived grade system (the consideration of which is outside the scope of this exercise) may have worked positively for pupils from larger schools or centres, while disadvantaging borderline candidates from smaller centres. This factor was at play in 2005 but the practice has now been discontinued.

2 Level of demand of arrangements/syllabus

It is felt that the syllabus is now (2007) less demanding than in 2005 in one way due to the removal of the folio element, which has freed teachers to concentrate on developing core skills. However, this has also resulted in a more robust assessment package, which has, perhaps, introduced a differently weighted set of demands.

2.1 Breadth of syllabus

2.1a Level of demand in 2007 in comparison with 2005

It was felt that that the syllabus was more demanding in that there was more breadth in 2007 than in 2005 due to the lifting of folio and report pressure. Teachers were able in 2007 to discuss a wider range of topics and develop more skills than they were able to in 2005. In 2005 some 20 % of teaching time could be devoted to researching a folio and many subsequent periods spent drafting and re-drafting, and similarly another 20% of teaching time could be devoted to directing the production of student reports. More time can now (2007) be spent on developing language skills. Language skills other than those

employed in report writing are now given a more equal weighting, and this is reflected in the assessment weighting of the new arrangements. (See appendix 1.)

2.1b New additions to recent arrangements

Although the new arrangements (2007) appear much more voluminous than the previous arrangement (39 pp. in 2007 as opposed to 12 pp. in 2005) the difference is more apparent than real as there is much repetition in each section of the new arrangements and the new arrangement is much more explicit in what is required from candidates. There is in general a much more detailed set of clearer guidelines, helpful to teachers, accompanying the new arrangements which include the following:

- ◆ Guidance to Learning
- ◆ Teachers' notes
- ◆ AiFL approaches
- ◆ Advice on additional support needs
- ◆ More detailed guidance to approaches on assessment
- ◆ Gaelic in a broader context
- ◆ Estimates and appeals
- ◆ A much fuller yet succinct grade structure and performance criteria

2.1c&d Removals from and changes to the new arrangements

The biggest change in the new syllabus is the removal of the folio arrangements that were present in the 2005 syllabus (together with the diminution of the role of the report). Other removals are listed below:

- ◆ A detailed breakdown into component parts of the assessment instrument in the old arrangements has been removed. This had a very useful grid (p. 5 of the 2005 syllabus) which was easy to interpret at a glance. This is missing from the new syllabus which is clearer but lacks such grids/diagrams.
- ◆ Another change is one of terminology from 'Special Needs' to ASN (Additional Support Needs).

2.2 Depth of syllabus

The removal of the folio and the downgrading in status of the report means that it is possible that some topics may not be covered in quite the same depth. However, it is felt that the time freed up by abandoning such a labour intensive process allows for more depth to be developed in other areas of the curriculum allowing a greater development of core skills.

2.2a The amount of detail covered in the syllabus

In one sense the amount of detail covered by candidates in the syllabus was less demanding in 2007 than it was in 2005, due to the scrapping of the literature based folio and the downgrading of the report. Both of these had required in-depth research, report and essay writing skills. However, in another sense the demand and the 'depth' of syllabus were greater due to the removal of the 'three term dash' to complete the folio and the report. This allowed for greater time to embed candidate skills in a wider range of

literature and the exploration of different genres. The new arrangement also offers teachers greater flexibility in the range of materials they can work with. The assessment instrument that gauges candidate skill is now more robust.

2.2b The emphasis on the integration of skills and content

There is a different emphasis on skills and content in the assessment package. There is now a more equal weighting given to all of the core skills, *Leughadh*, *Sgrìobhadh*, *Èisteachd*, *Litreachas*, *Labhairt* than had been the case formerly. (See appendix one) All the core skills that were covered in the past are still covered and it is felt that this is now a more streamlined overall package than the old system. Some uncertainty remains over the role of NABs within the overall package, and the way in which this is integrated with the rest of the course. However it is felt that the new scheme allows for more flexibility of content. The core skills, *Leughadh*, *Sgrìobhadh*, *Èisteachd*, *Litreachas* and *Labhairt* (reading, writing, listening, literature and oral skills), while given different weightings in the new arrangements are, nevertheless, unchanged in terms of overall demand.

3 Level of demand of examination questions

The questions have remained at more or less the same level of demand as they were at in 2005. However, the change in structure of the assessment instrument means that more weight is now placed on exam condition assessment (formerly a folio & report accounted for 44% of the overall final mark). (See appendix one and points 2.1a, 2.2a and 2.2b as discussed above.) Other than that *Leughadh*, *Sgrìobhadh*, *Èisteachd* and *Labhairt* are all largely unchanged in terms of the level of demand.

3.1 General approach in the assessment instruments

There was, in 2007, a greater emphasis on equal weightings for all the language skills than had formerly been the case. (See appendix one.) Whereas two-thirds of the assessment instruments had been directly controlled by the school, this has now been reduced to one fifth. The unsupervised redrafting of assessed folios and reports in the old system gave rise to fears that the assessment process could, potentially, be adversely affected by plagiarism and led to fears that work produced in these conditions may not always have been entirely the candidate's own work. The move towards exam condition style assessment has removed this concern. However, this move away from the report and the folio has removed the opportunity such assessment afforded for extended and detailed research and the development of related skills.

3.2 Coverage of the syllabus

One effect of the move away from folio and report assessment is that potentially a greater range of the syllabus can be covered. Folio and report approaches tended to have a 'history' component to them. The reduction of this has increased the coverage of language and literature covered in the syllabus.

3.3 Structure of the total assessment task

The structure of the total assessment task has changed considerably, largely due to the abandonment of the folio and the report no longer being assessed. The weightings

assigned to each of the separate skills are considerably different. (See appendix one). The exam is now (2007) more challenging in that more is now expected of candidates.

3.4 Demand of assessment tasks

The level of demand in the assessment tasks has changed somewhat inasmuch as the format of the assessment instrument itself has changed. This new arrangement puts new pressures on students, including that of time management for a two hour paper which assesses three skills in separate sections. (See appendix two) Whereas the old assessment structure (folio) gave candidates more time to reflect upon and polish their responses, the *litreachas* (literature) component is now assessed (2007) in an exam setting. It is recognised that the demand is greater in terms of the assessment of the literature component and candidates are allowed to take four unmarked texts into the exam with them to help them structure their answers. Literature apart, the demand of the assessment tasks for the other skills remains largely unchanged despite these changes to the arrangements.

4 Level of demand of examination marking

One major change in terms of examination marking is that it is no longer permitted for markers to give candidates half marks. Other than this there has been no substantive change to the level of demand of examination marking.

4.1 Different type of instructions

The marking instructions in 2007 were much clearer and more helpful to markers and teachers. The expectations for each set of grade results were given detailed descriptors, making them easier to follow. It was felt that these descriptors should be available in Gàidhlig too.

4.2 More or fewer examples

The literature component (2007) is new and therefore cannot be directly compared to the arrangements of 2005. It places a different level of demand on students than that set in the former folio assessment. It was felt that this new, very different approach of 2007 produced a healthier more personal reaction and response to literature in that there was more scope for student self-expression as opposed to the formulaic, polished and rehearsed responses elicited by the folio and report assessment exercises of 2005.

4.3 More or less detailed marking schemes

The biggest change in students achieving the same grades (see appendix three) was caused by moving from a folio and report produced in students own time to a more robust form of assessment under exam conditions, which it is hoped will provide a more accurate gauge of student abilities than the old system. (See 3.1 above) Any such change was almost certainly not caused by approaches in examination marking.

4.4 Treatment of half marks

The abolition of half-marks has, in the case of the scripts considered here, if anything slightly benefited students with marginal marks. In some cases in the past where a marker

would have wished to award 1½ marks, the marker now (2007) has had to elect to give whole marks: either 1 mark or 2 to such a candidate's script. It was felt that overall the marker would tend to give the benefit of the doubt where possible, and that candidates might benefit slightly from this change.

5 Grading of candidates' performance

There are some big changes in candidate performances between scripts of the same grades between 2005 and 2007. While the level of demand in terms of content and expectation did not change, the removal of the folio and the report (the unsupervised continuous assessment element) had a great impact on student attainment. (See appendix three.) Formerly (2005) candidates might, theoretically, have achieved good grades in their folio, report and speaking assessment (amounting in total to 66% of the total available marks) within the centre of study before entering the external examination at the end of their course. (See appendix one) In such a scenario, a candidate whose scripts were examined here, and who had a very good folio and report was able to achieve an 'A' pass with as little as 41 marks out of 90 in the exam component. The perception in 2005 was, as a result of performances such as this, that it was too easy to achieve an A in Higher Gàidhlig. Clearly the move to a greater weight being placed on an exam based system has had a big impact on the patterns of candidate performance. The literature section (2007) in the exam has replaced the old folio. In the literature section therefore, it is not really possible to compare like for like as the arrangements for 2005 and 2007 are quite different. Nevertheless the other sections are more comparable in demand despite the alterations to the arrangements, the folio and the report in particular, which have resulted in similar candidates achieving different grades over the two years examined here.

5.1a Comparison of Grade A / band 2 scripts, 2005 and 2007

The candidate scripts are, broadly, a response (showing the same levels of ability) to tasks set at the same level of demand over the two years sampled here. However, the syllabus, as noted elsewhere, has changed significantly. One candidate was able to achieve an 'A' pass in 2005 despite scoring only 41/90 in the exam component, on the strength of a very strong performance in the candidate's folio, report and speaking assessment. The performance of such a candidate (low 'A' in 2005) would probably have been at a 'B' in 2007 as such candidates now no longer have a strong folio or report with which they can enhance their performance. It was harder to achieve an 'A' in 2007, and this is felt to be a more accurate measure of student ability. This is also reflected in the lower number of 'A' awards achieved in 2007. Although the level of candidate performance against demand seems to have been the same, it was 'harder' for candidates to get an 'A' in 2007 due to the absence of the folio and report sections although the student performance was more or less the same (See appendix 3).

5.1b Comparison of Grade C scripts, 2005 and 2007

Some of the 'C' scripts in *Leughadh*, *Sgrìobhadh*, and *Èisteachd* for the candidates who achieved a Grade 'C' in 2005 are not of as high a standard as the work of comparable candidates in 2007. The scripts of the candidates in 2005 examined for the purposes of this report only achieved a 'C' on the basis of their folio and report performances. Such 'C' candidates in 2005 would be graded at 'D' on this level of performance in 2007.

(Many candidates who achieved a 'C' in 2007 may have been able to achieve a 'B' in 2005 with the help of a strong folio.) Candidates who achieved a 'C' in 2005 had, in some cases, marks of as low as 3/30 (Leughadh/Reading) and 3/30 (Èisteachd /listening) in some of their exam assessments, and nevertheless scraped a 'C' pass on account of their classwork. It is felt that the new arrangement provides a more accurate assessment of student ability. The performance of 'C' candidates in 2007 is much stronger than the performance of 'C' candidates in 2005.

5.2 Specific weaknesses or strengths, 2005 v 2007

Level of demand

Where it was possible to compare scripts directly 'like for like' the level of demand was similar over the two years under consideration here and it seems that they elicited very similar levels of performance from students. The absence of the folio and the report meant that weaker candidates did not benefit from their classwork in their overall final mark in 2007 as they had done in 2005. In this respect the level of demand increased. However, less demand was placed on candidates in 2007 in terms of the development of research skills which they had been able to pursue and develop more fully in the folio and report elements (2005).

Observation

Answer booklets

Having the candidates write their answer on the same sheet on which the question is set (in 2007) is thought to be a good idea but there is a danger that this does not leave the candidates sufficient room to amend their answer in the event that they were to make a mistake.

Appendix 1 — Arrangements, 2005 & 2007

<u>2005 Arrangements</u>		<u>2007 Arrangements</u>	
Sgrìobhadh	30 (11%)	Sgrìobhadh	30 (20%)
Leughadh	30 (11%)	Leughadh	30 (20%)
Èisteachd	30 (11%)	Èisteachd	30 (20%)
Labhairt	60 (22%)	Labhairt	30 (20%)
Folio	60 (22%)	Litreachas	30 (20%)
Aithisg	60 (22%)		
<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
<u>Total Marks</u>	<u>270</u>	<u>Total Marks</u>	<u>150</u>

Remarks

66.66 % of the Higher assessment was completed in school in the classroom (and possibly at home), controlled by the presenting centre. 33.33 % of the Higher Gàidhlig assessment of 2005 was produced under exam conditions.

Remarks

Equal weighting was placed on each component of assessment in 2007. Only labhairt (speaking), consisting of 20 % of the final mark, was conducted internally, controlled by the presenting centre. All other elements (80%) were assessed under exam conditions.

Appendix 2 – Exams, 2005 and 2007

<u>2005 Exam</u>	
1. Leughadh	45 minutes (11%)
2. Sgrìobhadh	45 minutes (11%)
3. Èisteachd	40 minutes (11%)
4. Labhairt	10 minutes (22 %)
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<u>Total Time</u>	<u>2 hours 20 minutes</u>

In 2005 the exam (excepting labhairt) comprised 33.33 % of the total assessment.)

<u>2007 Exam</u>	
1 Leughadh, Sgrìobhadh agus Litreachas	2 hours (60%)
2 Èisteachd	40 minutes (20%)
3 Labhairt	10 minutes (20%)
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<u>Total Time</u>	<u>2 hours 50 minutes</u>

In 2007 the exam (excepting labhairt) comprised 80% of the total assessment..

Appendix 3 — Candidate grades, 2005 & 2007

2005 Gàidhlig Higher

A grade 63 %

B grade 30 %

C grade 7 %

2007 Gàidhlig Higher

A grade 48 %

B grade 27 %

C grade 22 %

D grade 3 %