

Principal Assessor Report 2005

Assessment Panel:

Gaelic

Qualification area

**Subject(s) and Level(s)
Included in this report**

Gàidhlig Higher
Gàidhlig Advanced Higher

Statistical information: update

Higher

Number of resulted entries in 2004	91
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	102
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Advanced Higher

Number of resulted entries in 2004	11
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Number of resulted entries in 2005	23
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General comments re resulted entry numbers

Higher

The numbers of entries at Higher Level increased for a sixth consecutive year with the number rising to over 100 candidates for the first time. 19 centres presented candidates.

Advanced Higher

The numbers for the Advanced Higher showed a marked increase rising from 11 to 23. Although these numbers are very small the upward trend is encouraging.

Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of awards including grade boundaries

Higher

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 270	-	-	-	-
A	62.7	62.7	64	189
B	30.4	93.1	31	162
C	6.9	100.0	7	135
D	0.0	100.0	0	121
No award	0.0	100.0	0	-

Advanced Higher

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark- 300	-	-	-	-
A	47.8	47.8	11	210
B	30.4	78.3	7	180
C	21.7	100.0	5	150
D	0.0	100.0	0	135
No award	0.0	100.0	0	-

General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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

- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

Comments on any significant changes in distribution of awards/grade boundaries

Higher

The grade boundaries were in line with those set in previous years. There were more A passes awarded in 2005 but the quality of candidate response was markedly improved in most areas of the course.

Advanced Higher

The grade boundaries were set in line with those set in previous years. There were some excellent candidates and this is reflected in the number of A grades awarded.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

Higher

Folio

As in previous years the folio continues to be well done with a wide range of literature being studied. The best answers were from candidates that were given a specific task in relation to the texts studied. This made their responses more specific and assisted markers considerably as they could see clearly what candidates were attempting to do in their answers. The majority of the folios related well to the requirements of the course. One or two centres still need to read the course documentation more closely as their pupils are being penalised for producing non specific evaluations on any three pieces of literature.

At Higher Level one expects more than simply writing about three poems by the same author. This type of response limits able candidates. Some centres have all their candidates writing about the same poems, short story etc. and there is still some evidence of over reliance on teachers' notes. Some responses are too short and as a consequence candidates are losing marks unnecessarily.

The best answers showed a high degree of personal response and were reflective in showing the impact that the specific piece of literature had on the reader.

Report

The reports were, in general, very well done with some excellent responses being submitted. There was a wide range of topics studied and it was clear that many candidates had put a great deal of effort in to the compilation of their final document. Some were superbly presented and were a joy to read. Conversely, it is disappointing to see some good candidates being penalised for submitting reports that fall well short of the requirements outlined in the unit specification. This has been outlined for a number of years but has still to be fully addressed by one or two centres.

Some centres are still allowing candidates to produce reports based on literary texts and these are not permitted in this section of the course.

Paper I Reading

The overall response from candidates was good. It was encouraging to note that most candidates attempted to answer the questions in their own words and better interpretative skills were evident. Most candidates found the level of language in the passage accessible and a number scored high marks. There are a few candidates paraphrasing from the passage and as in previous years they have been penalised for that. The average mark was at its highest for a number of years.

Paper II Writing

The standard of response in the writing paper was in line with performance of candidates in previous years. There were a number of very good essays but there were also some very weak responses. Bad spelling and poor grammar are still prevalent and there is a disparity between the quality of submitted coursework and work produced under exam conditions. The standard of the written work is a major cause for concern and needs particular focus in the classroom if candidate performance is to improve.

All questions were attempted with *Eagal* and *Toileachas* being the most popular themes.

Paper III Listening

Some candidates found the listening paper challenging which was surprising as the theme was very similar to the theme in 2004 as was the level of language. Some candidates scored very high marks but unfortunately a few candidates had very low scores. As mentioned in previous years exposure to the spoken word is essential if candidates are to improve their listening skills. The overall performance was good.

Advanced Higher

Folio

The standard of response was higher than in previous years. Some candidates produced outstanding pieces of work that were refreshing and encouraging to read. Most submissions showed considerable potential although usual errors in spelling and grammar appeared. Some centres can still do more to develop candidate potential by giving them designated tasks in the literature section of the folio. Responses are difficult to mark if markers are unsure or unaware of the given task. Centres should ensure that it is evident what the candidates are attempting to do in their submissions.

Report

The best reports were imaginatively and beautifully presented showing ample evidence that topics had been carefully chosen and well researched. This research had been carefully interpreted to form the basis of reports that were professionally done and the standard of written Gaelic was excellent. There are still some mediocre reports being submitted with the final report looking like a glorified essay without references, bibliography, supporting material etc. There is still some room for improvement in choice of topics and teachers need to give candidates clear guidance on this based on the advice given in the course documentation.

Paper I Writing

The standard of writing was better this year with more evidence of idiomatic language. Most answers were of good length enabling candidates to demonstrate their fluency and creativity. There were some outstanding essays showing fluency, creativity and a high degree of originality.

Paper II Literary Criticism

Candidates find this section of the paper extremely challenging but the average mark showed considerable improvement. They are coping better with a prose passage and there was better understanding of the passage but there are still some very low scores. It is clear that candidates need more instruction in dealing with this paper as most of them appear not to have been taught the skills that would equip them to tackle the practical criticism section. Setters have made conscious effort to help candidates in this paper by including more short questions and by increasing the number of questions but these have only had a marginal effect on performance. Markers continue to mark positively giving candidates credit for any reasonable interpretation of the passage.

Paper III Reading

In some cases responses were disappointing but there were some very satisfactory responses as well. Candidates find the time element of this section challenging but marks would improve if they concentrated on quality rather than quantity. Too much time is being spent on the shorter questions and the questions requiring longer answers are not being done well. This paper should engender good responses since candidates can prepare for it throughout the session. There is still evidence that pupils are not adequately prepared for this paper. The format of the paper remains the same each year and candidates know what to expect so should be adequately prepared but one or two centres showed little evidence of having read any genre other than poetry.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well

Some very good responses in Higher Level Reading, and there were some excellent pieces of writing at the Advanced Higher Level.

Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty

Higher - some very poor responses in the listening section.

Advanced Higher - the Practical Criticism still causing significant problems for some candidates and the Reading section was not very well done.

Recommendations

Feedback to centres

Please refer to the general comments section as areas for improvement are outlined there and strategies for improvement are suggested.