



Course report 2023

Higher Gaelic (Learners)

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 70

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 63

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	35	Percentage	55.6	Cumulative percentage	55.6	Minimum mark required	79
B	Number of candidates	10	Percentage	15.9	Cumulative percentage	71.4	Minimum mark required	66
C	Number of candidates	9	Percentage	14.3	Cumulative percentage	85.7	Minimum mark required	54
D	Number of candidates	5	Percentage	7.9	Cumulative percentage	93.7	Minimum mark required	41
No award	Number of candidates	4	Percentage	6.3	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

The content of the course assessment covered all four contexts: society, learning, employability, culture, across all four components, which offered flexibility, personalisation, and elements of choice to candidates. The question papers and marking instructions offered an appropriate level of challenge at Higher, although the listening aspect of the paper proved challenging for some candidates. The assignment–writing was removed from the course assessment this year, which affected the overall performance as this is an area where candidates perform well. The grade boundary decision compensated for not having the assignment–writing mark.

Question paper 1: Reading

The reading question paper was accessible to all candidates and the level was appropriate for Higher. The subject explored the experience of leaving home for the first time. The topic was very relevant to candidates. The balance of accessible and more challenging questions, especially the overall purpose question and the translation, helped differentiate candidate performance in line with expectations. Some candidates performed particularly well in the translation element and achieved high marks, especially those who translated in comprehensible English rather than in a literal translation. The translation comprises five sense units and each unit contains different challenges and complexity.

The overall purpose question tested candidates' inferential skills and proved challenging for some candidates. A small number of candidates did not attempt this question. In general, there was a good response to the comprehension questions and many candidates understood most of the main points.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

In this question paper, candidates were given the choice of two stimuli from the contexts of employability and learning, each with six bullet points to address. Most candidates addressed all the bullet points, although the quality of grammar and syntax varied. This discriminated between A and C candidates. The question paper performed in line with expectations.

Question paper 2: Listening

The listening question paper consisted of a monologue and a dialogue. The monologue consisted of a podcast about the Highland Cross and the dialogue was a radio presenter interviewing a German student about the links between German students and the Gaelic language. Questions varied in level of demand and were well signposted to help candidates locate answers.

Assignment–writing

The requirement to complete the assignment–writing was removed for session 2022–23.

Performance–talking

This assessment task performed as expected.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper 1: Reading

Overall, many candidates performed well, and few poor performances were evident in the reading question paper. Many candidates achieved more than half of the available marks, with some managing to achieve an excellent mark, even with challenging questions. A few candidates struggled with what seemed like relatively accessible questions, for example 4(a) where a few candidates mentioned sausages instead of chips. Candidates' dictionary skills sometimes led to incomprehensible answers and candidates should always look over their answer once written to ensure it makes sense. A few candidates found questions 1 and 4(a) and (b) challenging. A few candidates found difficulty in areas that you would not expect at Higher, for example plurals and numbers.

The translation was of a reasonable standard and some candidates achieved high marks. However, few received full marks, which can only be achieved if there is a very good translation of the text into English. Most candidates attempted to translate most of the translation although a few did not manage to finish it. A few candidates did not translate the plural form when required, which is an essential skill at this level, as well as using the incorrect pronoun and poor use of the negative *gun* and the comparative.

Most candidates received marks for the overall purpose question although, with more practice in class, candidates could further improve their marks here. Candidates sometimes focused on minor details in the passage rather than considering the whole article. Many responses contained irrelevant information and lacked 'detail from the text'. Candidates tended to quote from answers that were already given, and they should not do this. Some of the answers were too vague and general and lacked details from the text to justify the answer.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Many candidates evidenced a high level of performance in the directed writing question paper. Most candidates opted for scenario 2, which required them to write about a school or college exchange visit to Canada. Candidates coped very well with the two-part first bullet point in both scenarios. Most of the candidates covered all the bullet points. Some candidates achieved high marks for responses with a high degree of accuracy and a variety of structures.

Candidates who did less well tended to have difficulty with more basic aspects of grammar, syntax, plurals, and tenses. Another area that candidates performed less well in was inappropriately using the conditional like *bhithinn mi*. Markers were particularly impressed with the variety of idiomatic expressions used in responses. It was evident that candidates were well-prepared for the question paper and confident with its requirements. The candidates who chose scenario 1 tended to struggle with the fifth bullet point as they had trouble in describing the atmosphere when the bands performed.

Question paper 2: Listening

Candidates continue to find the listening paper challenging. The monologue proved challenging for candidates and a wide range of marks were evident in candidates' performances. A few candidates only attempted to answer one or two questions, and some gained high marks and attempted most questions. It was good to note that most candidates attempted a response to the questions in the dialogue rather than leave it blank.

In general, candidates found the dialogue more accessible than the monologue although candidates would benefit in attempting to answer most of the set questions rather than leave them blank. Many candidates struggled with qualifiers and numbers which detracted from their overall performance.

Performance–talking

Candidates performed well in this assessment task, in line with performance in previous years.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ focus on the main point of the question to ensure they are answering the question
- ◆ note the importance of plural nouns in the translation
- ◆ are encouraged to develop their comprehension skills holistically: this will be helpful in answering the overall purpose question. Ensure that a clear, concise answer is provided, with justification from the text that shows an accurate reading of the text
- ◆ are not vague or too general in the overall purpose question and do not re-state answers to previous questions for which they already gained marks
- ◆ are guided in practice to identify areas of the text from which no marks have been gained as these areas often contain information that can be useful for answering the overall purpose question
- ◆ make good use of their dictionary when required to translate words. Often, the omission or mistranslation of these results in marks being missed
- ◆ look over their answers at the end of the paper
- ◆ are aware of the importance of qualifiers and quantifiers

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ are able to proofread and edit their work, and are advised to factor in time for this during the exam as this would further enhance their marks
- ◆ practise using forms of reported speech, dative case, conditional, plurals and verbs correctly
- ◆ practise word order, verbs and tenses to further enhance their opportunity to gain higher marks
- ◆ ensure they address all bullet points
- ◆ make use of the productive grammar grid in the Higher Modern Languages Course Specification to show the type of language use that is expected at Higher level
- ◆ attempt to write six distinctive paragraphs addressing all six bullet points to the same extent and length

Question paper 2: Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ use the time allocated to study the questions in advance; this is helpful in anticipating the information required
- ◆ are aware when the plural is used, and be well-practised with numbers, dates, months, days and years as many mistakes are made here
- ◆ practise listening exercises frequently and use Gaelic in class as often as possible to further develop their listening skills

Performance–talking

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ continue to practise speaking in Gaelic on a weekly basis in class. This should include everyday routine language, while bringing in elements of vocabulary and grammar to help them when talking about their chosen contexts, and to deal naturally with the speaking task
- ◆ familiarise themselves with the productive grammar grid and the detailed marking instructions

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).