

**Lárionad na Gaeilge: Taighde, Teagasc agus Tástáil**  
**Maynooth University**



***Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1 (A1)***

**Chief Examiner's Report**  
**2019**



## Background

*Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1 (A1)* is a general proficiency examination for Irish, aimed primarily at adult candidates. It is suitable for people in Ireland or abroad who are studying Irish at night classes or attending other similar courses and who would like a qualification to attest to their ability in Irish. The specifications which form the basis for *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1(A1)* are broadly based on the descriptors for level A1 of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (2001). It is estimated that candidates who have not studied Irish previously will be able to undertake this examination after approximately 80-100 hours of study. The examination itself is not tied to any particular course of study. It is not appropriate for those who speak Irish as a native language or for those who already hold educational qualifications in Irish.

## Number of candidates

The table below shows the number of candidates who sat the *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1* since it was first held in 2005.

| Year | Number of candidates |
|------|----------------------|
| 2005 | 7                    |
| 2006 | 10                   |
| 2007 | 121                  |
| 2008 | 115                  |
| 2009 | 107                  |
| 2010 | 85                   |
| 2011 | 78                   |
| 2012 | 71                   |
| 2013 | 41                   |
| 2014 | 33                   |
| 2015 | 33                   |
| 2016 | 52*                  |
| 2017 | 45*                  |
| 2018 | 53*                  |
| 2019 | 68*                  |

\* Includes candidates who did Partial Accreditation.

## Feedback from candidates

All candidates are invited to give feedback to Lárionad na Gaeilge about the examination they sat. They are asked to complete a questionnaire and share their opinions about the administration and layout of the examination. This valuable feedback helps Lárionad na Gaeilge to continually improve the examination system for Teastas Eorpach na Gaeilge.

## Candidate profile

Background information about the candidates is collected through the application forms. Depending on candidature number, this data is periodically analysed to help us create a profile of the candidates that undertake the examinations at each of the different levels.

Please note that the information in this section relates only to candidates who undertook full accreditation in 2018. The information in all other sections of this report relates to 2019 candidates.

### *Age, gender and nationality*

Approximately 71% of the candidates were female in 2018. 38% of candidates were in the 26-45 age-group, nearly 24% were under eighteen and 19% were between 46-64 years of age. 48% of candidates were Irish, nearly 17% were French and approximately 19% were from the United States of America.

### *Brief description of employment profile of candidates*

The table below shows the employment profile of candidates in 2018.

| <b><i>Employment profile</i></b> | <b><i>Percentage</i></b> |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Students                         | 21%                      |
| Working                          | 62%                      |
| Retired                          | 12%                      |
| Unemployed                       | 5%                       |

### *Candidates' reasons for sitting the examination*

Candidates were asked why they were sitting *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1*, and many gave more than one reason. The findings for 2018 are below.

| <b><i>Candidates' reasons for sitting the examination</i></b> | <b><i>Percentage</i></b> |
|---|--------------------------|
| To help me progress in my employment                          | 5%                       |
| To help my children's education                               | 57%                      |
| For love of the language                                      | 60%                      |

### *Candidates' prior knowledge of Irish*

Candidates were asked if they had previously studied the language in the Irish education system. The findings for 2018 are shown below.

| <b><i>What is the highest level at which you studied Irish in the education system?</i></b> | <b><i>Percentage</i></b> |
|---|--------------------------|
| I did not study Irish at school   | 55%                      |
| Primary school  | 2%                       |
| Second level school   | 43%                      |

| <b><i>For how many years have you been studying Irish, since you left the education system (school/college)?</i></b> | <b><i>Percentage</i></b> |
|--|--------------------------|
| Less than one year   | 59%                      |
| 1-2 years  | 29%                      |
| 3-5 years  | 12%                      |

### *Preparation for this examination*

More than half the candidates, 57%, attended a preparatory course before attempting *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1* in 2018.

## Examination centres

*Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1* is held in the following centres (depending on demand):

- Maynooth University
- An Spidéal (Spiddal), Co. Galway
- Gaoth Dobhair (Gweedore), Co. Donegal
- Letterkenny
- Castlebar
- Limerick
- Cork
- Killarney
- Kilkenny
- Belfast
- Charles University, Prague
- Centre Culturel Irlandais, Paris
- University of New York, New York
- University of Toronto
- University of Ottawa
- Washington DC

## The examination

Marks in *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1* are allocated as follows:

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Speaking                | 40% |
| Listening comprehension | 25% |
| Reading comprehension   | 25% |
| Writing                 | 10% |

## Grading

The final mark the candidate receives in *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1* is the combined total of the marks attained in each of the four examination components (speaking, listening comprehension, reading comprehension and writing). A minimum pass mark is not required in the individual components.

The following table shows the grading of marks in the examination.

| <i>Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1</i> |                       |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>80-100%</b>                | Pass with Distinction |
| <b>65-79%</b>                 | Pass with Merit       |
| <b>50-64%</b>                 | Pass                  |
| <b>0-49%</b>                  | Fail                  |

The grades that were achieved in the 2019 examinations are shown in the table below. (a)

Full accreditation

| <i>Grade</i>          | <i>Percentage of candidates</i> |
|-----------------------|---------------------------------|
| Pass with Distinction | 29%                             |
| Pass with Merit       | 29%                             |
| Pass                  | 21%                             |
| Fail                  | 21%                             |

(b) Partial accreditation (oral exam)

| <i>Grade</i> | <i>Percentage of candidates</i> |
|--------------|---------------------------------|
| Pass         | 53%                             |
| Fail         | 47%                             |

***The listening comprehension examination***

The first part of the examination consists of listening comprehension. Candidates are allowed five minutes to read the questions before the audio texts are played. This part of the examination lasts about 25 minutes in total. The layout of the listening comprehension examination is outlined in the table below.

| <i>Question</i> | <i>Number of items</i> | <i>Type of text</i>               | <i>Format of answer required</i>                    | <i>Focus of the task</i>  |
|-----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1               | 12                     | 2 informal monologues             | Short one-word or numerical answers                 | Listening to identify appropriate information about personal matters (for example, type of job, number of children, hobbies etc.) |
| 2               | 6                      | 3 short semi-formal announcements | Short answer. Multiple choice (four options)        | Listening for simple factual information (for example prices, numbers, dates.)  |
| 3               | 6                      | 3 short informal messages         | Short answer. Multiple choice answer (four options) | Listening for simple factual information (for example, arrangements, places, descriptions.)                                       |
| 4               | 6                      | 3 short informal conversations    | Short answer. Multiple choice answer (four options) | Listening to identify simple factual information.   |

***Marks in the listening comprehension examination***

The table below shows the marks candidates achieved in the listening comprehension examination in 2019.

| <i>2019</i>                                     |     |
|---|-----|
| Number of candidates who obtained 50% or higher | 79% |
| Number of candidates who obtained less than 50% | 21% |

*Listening comprehension examination – advice and suggestions for candidates and teachers*

In the listening comprehension examination candidates must find simple factual information (for example telephone numbers, days of the week, time, places etc.), or identify the correct answer from three or four choices. Candidates are not penalised for incorrect spelling, as long as the answer is intelligible. In general, candidates did well in the listening comprehension component of the examination. It would be useful, however, to focus on the following points:

- Candidates should use the five minutes before the recording is played to read the questions carefully. They should underline key words and important phrases in the question. This should help them to identify the required information when they are listening to the track. For example, ‘*Cén t-am a mbeidh an dráma ar siúl?*’ [At what time will the drama be shown?] Candidates are advised not to translate the questions into Irish as this may result in them not having enough time to listen carefully to the recording.
- Sometimes, candidates state in the questionnaires that they did not have enough time to write the answers. There are a number of ways to deal with this problem:
  - (1) Numbers do not need to be written out in full. For example, if a question asks ‘*Cé mhéad páiste atá ag Seán?*’ [How many children does Seán have] it is sufficient to write the correct number, for example 3.
  - (2) There is no need to write complete sentences. The answer alone is sufficient. For example, to answer the question ‘*Cá bhfuil Máire ag dul?*’ [Where is Máire going] the words ‘*Ag siopadóireacht*’ [shopping] are adequate as an answer.
  - (3) Many candidates have a tendency to try to write down long pieces of the audio texts before they attempt to answer the actual questions. There is not enough time for this. Each track is played twice, and there are enough breaks to allow candidates to write the answers or tick the correct box.
- Candidates should continue to concentrate on the audio text even if they do not understand everything or if they have difficulty with a particular part of it. When candidates are required to tick a box as part of a task, if they do not know the answer they can guess. The most important thing is that candidates do not spend too long on something that they do not understand. They should move on to the next question in the examination booklet and be ready to listen to the next item.
- When a question requires a box to be ticked, candidates are reminded that they should tick **one box only**, unless they are told that there can be more than one answer. In cases where only one answer is required marks will not be awarded to candidates who tick more than one box.
- Candidates are advised to listen carefully to the audio text before they attempt to answer the question. If a question such as ‘*Cá bhfuil Seán ina chónaí?*’ [Where does Seán live?] is asked, candidates should not automatically write down the first place that is mentioned in the text. It is likely that a few places will be mentioned and Seán will be living in only one of these places. They might hear ‘*Is mise Seán agus is as Gaillimh mé. Tá mé pósta agus tá mé i mo chónaí i gCorcaigh anois le cúpla bliain...*’ [I’m Seán and I’m from Galway. I’m married and I’ve been living in Cork for a few years now...]

- Teachers are advised to use a wide variety of texts and listening tasks to help candidates with listening comprehension in general, to expand their vocabulary and develop appropriate listening comprehension strategies.

### ***Reading comprehension examination***

When the listening comprehension examination is complete, candidates have ninety minutes to attempt the reading comprehension and writing examinations. The layout and details of the reading comprehension examination are shown in the table below.

| <i>Question</i> | <i>Number of items</i> | <i>Type of text</i>  | <i>Format of answer</i>  | <i>Focus of the task</i>   |
|-----------------|------------------------|--|--|--|
| 1               | 5                      | Sentence completion<br>(The sentences relate to one theme/topic) | Multiple choice<br>(four options)                                  | Reading and identifying appropriate lexical items.                   |
| 2               | 5                      | Complete 5 short conversations                                   | Multiple choice<br>(three options)                                 | Reading to identify appropriate responses.                           |
| 3               | 5                      | Complete (finish) a longer conversation                          | Multiple choice matching (choose 5 items from a selection of 8)    | Reading to identify appropriate responses.                           |
| 4               | 7                      | Email/letter/note etc.   | Multiple choice question (three options:<br>true/false/not stated) | Reading for details and to identify key ideas of a very simple text. |
| 5               | 7                      | Email/letter/note etc.   | Multiple choice matching (choose 7 items from a selection of 12)   | Reading to find the appropriate lexical items.                       |

### ***Marks in the reading comprehension examination***

The table below shows the marks obtained by candidates in the reading comprehension examination in 2019.

| <i>2019</i>                                     |     |
|---|-----|
| Number of candidates who obtained 50% or higher | 62% |
| Number of candidates who obtained less than 50% | 38% |

*Reading comprehension examination – advice and suggestions for candidates and teachers*  
 Thus far, candidates have done reasonably well in the reading comprehension examination. Nevertheless, attention is drawn to the following points:

- In Question 3, candidates should focus on the meaning of the complete conversation. It is important that candidates read what comes before and after the all the gaps (blank spaces) before they write an answer.
- In Questions 4 and 5, candidates read a short text. They are advised to read the complete text a number of times before attempting the questions. Candidates find this part of the reading comprehension examination challenging, and they should be given lots of opportunities to practise these types of tasks in the classroom.
- Candidates should not be overly concerned if they come across words that they do not understand. Sometimes they may be able to use the context to work out the meaning and may even be able to answer the question without understanding every word.
- If a candidate is asked to tick a box, or to choose one answer from a number of choices, they should choose **one answer only**. Marks cannot be awarded to candidates who choose more than one answer. In cases where there could be more than one correct answer, this is clearly indicated in the question.

***The writing examination***

Details of the writing examination are laid out below.

| <i>Question</i> | <i>Number of items</i> | <i>Type of text</i>    | <i>Format of answers</i>              | <i>Focus of the task</i>                            |
|-----------------|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1               | 10                     | Email or informal note | Cloze test (open)                     | Providing appropriate lexical item, spelling.       |
| 2               | 8                      | Email or informal note | Cloze test (multiple choice question) | Grammatical accuracy and basic language structures. |

***Marks in the writing examination***

At this level only 10% of the total marks are allocated to writing. The table below shows the marks attained by candidates in the writing examination in 2019.

| <i>2019</i>                                     |     |
|---|-----|
| Number of candidates who obtained 50% or higher | 62% |
| Number of candidates who obtained less than 50% | 38% |

*Writing examination – advice and suggestions for candidates and teachers*

In general, most candidates do reasonably well in this section in *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1*.

Teachers and candidates should note the following points:

- In Question 1 and Question 2, candidates should understand that the answer depends on the grammatical context. It is very important, therefore, that candidates read what comes before and after each blank space.
- In Question 1 (open cloze test) candidates are penalised for spelling errors. Many candidates did not use the ‘*síneadh fada*’ [accent to indicate long vowel sounds] when required. It might help if candidates were reminded that the accent on the vowel can change the meaning of a word, for example, ‘*féar*’ [grass] and ‘*fear*’ [man].
- Candidates often have difficulty with parts of the examination that require a knowledge of noun gender. For example, a good many candidates chose ‘*mór*’ [masculine form of big] instead of ‘*mhór*’ [feminine form of big] to fill the gap in the following sentence: ‘*D’ith me lón i mbialann \_\_\_\_\_ sa chathair. [I had lunch in a \_\_\_\_\_ restaurant in the city]*’. Candidates at this level should know that most nouns ending in ‘*lann*’ are feminine *leabharlann* [library], *amharclann* [cinema], *bialann* [restaurant] etc. It is important that candidates understand noun gender as it influences the adjectives used. It may be useful for learners to check the gender of any new words they learn on a regular basis. It is easy to check the gender of a noun in a dictionary.
- It appears that candidates have difficulty using the definite article with nouns. A common error is writing ‘*an t-amharclann*’ (Correction: *an amharclann* [the cinema]), ‘*an athair*’ (Correction: *an t-athair* [the father]) ‘*an bialann*’ (Correction: *an bhialann* [the restaurant]) srl. The effect of the definite article on nouns should be explained to candidates.
- Candidates often have difficulty recognising the difference between the question and affirmative form of verbs in the past tense. For example, many candidates wrote ‘*D’fhan*’ instead of ‘*fhan*’ in the following gap: ‘*Ar \_\_\_\_\_ sibh in óstán? [Did you \_\_\_\_\_ in a hotel?] (Correction: Ar fhan [did you stay?])*’ This is a common error using questions in the past tense.
- Teachers are advised to use a wide variety of language awareness activities so that candidates know the basic rules of Irish grammar, as described for this level.

***The oral examination (speaking)***

Each candidate is examined individually. There are two examiners present, one of whom interacts with the candidate, asking questions and directing the conversation. The oral

examinations are recorded for monitoring purposes, and also for training and research. The oral examination in *Scrú dú Bhonleibhéal 1* is outlined below.

| <i>Part</i> | <i>Length of time</i> | <i>Type of task</i>  | <i>Language functions</i>   |
|-------------|-----------------------|--|---|
| 1           | 3-4 minutes           | The candidate is asked a number of questions about his/her daily life (home, family, hobbies, holidays, travel etc.)   | Giving information  |
| 2           | 2-3 minutes           | Role-play<br>(a) 5 minutes before the examination begins, the candidate receives a card with key words relating to night classes, a restaurant, renting a house etc. The candidate answers questions posed by the examiner about date / time / place / price / telephone number etc.<br>(b) Then the candidate asks the examiner questions about a place or event similar to that shown on the role-card. (No cues are given.) | Giving information<br><br>Asking for information<br><br>Expressing very simple opinions |
| 3           | 2-3 minutes           | Description of a scene in a picture. Candidates are given a picture and have one minute to study it. They are then asked to describe what is happening in the picture. The picture shows people involved in ordinary daily activities – for example shopping / taking a bus / watching television / working etc.   | Describing a picture and what is happening in it.                                       |

#### *Marks in the oral examination*

The table below shows the marks attained by candidates in the oral examination in 2019.

##### (a) Full accreditation

| <i>2019</i>                                     |     |
|---|-----|
| Number of candidates who obtained 50% or higher | 82% |
| Number of candidates who obtained less than 50% | 18% |

(b) Partial accreditation (Speaking)

| 2019  |                          |
|-------|--------------------------|
| Grade | Percentage of candidates |
| Pass  | 53%                      |
| Fail  | 47%                      |

*Oral examination – advice and suggestions for candidates and teachers*

Thus far candidates have been doing very well in this section of *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1*. It should be noted that in relation to those undertaking partial accreditation, the numbers achieving a pass was much reduced in comparison to other years. Our analysis indicates that this relates to one particular cohort of candidates who were deemed by the examiners to be very unprepared for the examination.

Candidates should note the following points:

- In general, candidates do best in the first part of the examination. The questions posed by the examiner relate to the candidates' daily life (for example where they live, their family, hobbies, work, holidays and travel). It appears that candidates are, in general, well prepared for this part of the examination and are used to answering simple questions such as '*Cad as duit? [Where do you come from]*' or '*Cén obair atá agat?*' [*What work do you do?*]
- It is clear from feedback from the oral examiners that many candidates are not well prepared for the role-play. Candidates themselves often state in the questionnaires that they did not have any, or much, practice in role-play in the classroom. Oral examiners also say that candidates have major difficulties with even the most basic question forms. It is important that candidates are taught to compose and ask simple questions, and it is recommended that teachers spend more time on this in the classroom. They should use a wide range of activities to ensure that candidates have practice in asking and answering simple questions.
- In Part 3 candidates are given a picture. They have one minute to think about what they will say, before they begin to describe the picture. At this level, candidates are only asked for five or six simple sentences. For example: '*Tá an teaghlach ag dul ar saoire*' / '*Tá nuachtán ag an fhear*' / '*Tá an traein ag dul go Baile Átha Cliath*'. [*The family are going on holiday. / The man has a newspaper. / The train is going to Dublin.*] In general, candidates do well in this part of the examination.
- Learners should be helped to extend their answers somewhat. It is very difficult to assess the ability of candidates if they only say '*ní hea*' or '*níl*' [*no/it isn't*]. The example below illustrates this problem:

**Example**

Examiner: *An maith leat spórt? [Do you like sport?]*

Candidate: *Ní maith [No, I don't.]*

Examiner: *An éisteann tú le ceol? [Do you listen to music?]*

Candidate: *Ní éistim [No, I don't.]*

It would greatly aid communication with the examiner if candidates made an effort to extend and develop their answers, as in the following examples:

**Example 1**

Examiner: *An mbreathnaíonn tú ar an teilifís? [Do you watch television?]*  
Candidate: *Ní bhreathnaím. Ní maith liom an teilifís ach is maith liom ceol. Éistim le popcheol. [No. I don't like television but I like music. I listen to pop music.]*

**Example 2**

Examiner: *An maith leat ceol? [Do you like music?]*  
Candidate: *Níl suim dá laghad agam sa cheol ach is breá liom dul go dtí an phictiúrlann. Téim go minic le mo chairde. [I have no interest in music, but I love going to the cinema. I often go with my friends.]*

- At this level, candidates are not expected to take part in a long conversation. Only one or two short sentences are expected as answers. However, learners should be able to deal appropriately with particular situations. For example, candidates should be able to tell the examiner if they did not understand something, ask him/her to repeat a question, or to say a word more slowly.
- Below are some of the most common errors made by candidates in the oral examination at this level:

(1) Omitting the definite article or using it incorrectly. For example,  
'an athair' (Correction: an t-athair [the father])  
'an máthair' (Correction: an mháthair [the mother]).

(2) Using *ba mhaith liom* [I would like] instead of *is maith liom* [I like]. For example,  
Examiner: *Cén caitheamh aimsire atá agat? [What are your hobbies?]*  
Iarrthóir: *Ba mhaith liom ceol. (Correction: Is maith liom ceol.)*  
*[I would like music (Correction: I like music)]*

(3) Answering questions incorrectly. For example,  
Examiner: *An imríonn tú galf? [Do you play golf?]*  
Candidate: *Tá / Is ea. (Correction: Imrím / Ní imrím).*  
*(Tá/Is ea mean Yes it is/Yes. Imrím/Ní imrím mean I play/I don't play, and are the correct form of the answer in Irish).*

At this level, it is sufficient to re-use the verb to express a positive or negative answer. Regular practice on how to answer questions is needed from the very beginning of the language learning process in order to direct learners to use 'Tá / Is ea' correctly.

(4) Omitting the ‘*séimhiú*’ or lenition in nouns (soften the initial consonant) after the possessive adjective ‘*mo [my]*’. For example, ‘*Mo post*’ (*Correction: mo phost [my job]*), ‘*mo mac*’ (*Correction: mo mhac [my son]*).

### General suggestions

- Most candidates who sat *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1* are adults. Most are Irish, who studied Irish as a compulsory subject in primary and second level school. In some cases, they studied Irish when the grammar and translation methods were being used. As a result, this group has a passive residual knowledge of Irish. *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 1* is aimed at total beginners who have completed about 80-100 hours of study time. As such, it is not appropriate for those who learned Irish in primary or post-primary school. Candidates who studied Irish at school and who now wish to start again from the beginning should begin preparing for the examination at the next level *Scrúdú Bhonnleibhéal 2*.
- Teachers and candidates are strongly advised to study carefully the two sample examinations and the information and guidelines on the website at <http://www.teg.ie/exam-levels/-bonnleibhéal-1-a1.307.html>
- Sample teaching materials that have recently been updated and are suitable for this level can be found on the website at <http://www.teg.ie/links-resources/teaching-materials.290.html> It is also recommended that teachers add to those resources, in line with the needs and aims of their own group of learners.
- Candidates are advised to read in detail the information and suggestions on the website at <http://www.teg.ie/info-advice.148.html> and <http://www.teg.ie/faqs.150.html>