

Output: A review of options used to assess competence in other countries

Author: Smiths Gore

1 Background:

In 2005 the DCS asked whether deer hunters should 'demonstrate a degree of competency'. The response to this question in the Close Seasons consultation was 'general agreement that competence should be demonstrated' in order to enable the public to have confidence in hunters' handling of issues of public safety, deer welfare and food safety. However there was divergence on what competence meant and how it should be assessed.

In this report competence means that an individual has "sufficient skills and knowledge to carry out their job to an acceptable standard"¹. In the case of deer hunting, competence encompasses a range of skills including ensuring public and hunter safety, deer welfare, food safety and hygiene and an understanding of deer biology and habitat. At present the existing systems that assess competence in Scotland, through the Fit and Competent Register and the Deer Stalking Certificates, have gaps in who is assessed and what skills are assessed².

The objective of this report is to report on existing and new ideas and measures³ used in different countries to assess deer hunters' competence.

2 Method:

Representatives of hunting organisations from twenty countries⁴ were surveyed by phone and written questionnaire between October and December 2007. They were questioned on how hunters in their countries are tested or assessed. The ten European countries selected were mainly northern and central European and so had some similarities with Scotland in terms of hunting history, culture or ethics. The six American states and four Canadian provinces were selected as they all had relatively high numbers of deer hunters. The survey results are presented below and in the table in the Annex.

All of the countries surveyed require people to pass a test or assessment to be allowed to hunt with a firearm⁵. The countries surveyed have very different methods of assessing competence. This is due to the purpose of the assessment. In America and Canada the primary issue that lead to hunters being assessed was safety and many tests still focus on safety. In contrast, European assessments tend to cover a wider range of issues associated with competence, reflecting wider concerns in the countries about animal welfare, food safety and hygiene and also issues like hunting ethics.

Although some of the tests had been introduced a long time ago (for example 1964 in Alberta and 1978 in Belgium), a common characteristic of all of them is that they are regularly reviewed. Some countries consider the contents of their tests annually and others less frequently.

¹ Findlay, J. A draft definition of competence including the scope, standard and measures required. Undated. Reference: Competence C2.1.1

² Daniels, M and Findlay, J. A report on the limitations and costs of current systems and identify needs in terms of testing competence for welfare and safety. Undated. Reference: Competence C1.1.1

³ The term measure is taken to mean a way of judging something.

⁴ The term 'country' is used to include countries, American states and Canadian provinces.

⁵ This is in addition to any firearms test, licence or hunting ground permit they may also need.

Many of the tests are one part or measure of a wider assessment of hunters' competence, which is often agreed and implemented jointly by national governments or authorities, local authorities and hunting organisations. Also, although all the tests are compulsory, the joint implementation recognises the importance of having stakeholder involvement in deciding how competence is measured and assessed. For example, the Hunters' Test was introduced in Sweden in 1985 after a three year trial. In Ontario, it is reported that some hunters would like an assessment of shooting accuracy to be added to the test.

All of the tests include hunter safety and most included public safety, deer welfare, and deer biology and management. Most of the European tests also included food safety and hygiene. Many of the American and Canadian tests were primarily introduced to improve hunter and public safety but now the majority of countries also include training and assessment on deer welfare, biology and management. Training on food safety and hygiene is now provided in most countries but particularly those where the shot deer might enter the food chain. The Danes require only hunters who sell meat to take a hygiene test – a good example of a light touch approach based on need. A number of the European countries, for example France, Denmark and Sweden, consider hunting ethics and ethos as an important element of training competent hunters. In France, an underlying principle of the hunting organisation and the test is that if hunters are more responsible, they will be given more rights. Tests therefore vary between countries and test elements of competence that are relevant to the country.

Who assesses hunters' ability? National or regional authorities were responsible for setting the tests in most countries. Quite often responsibility for running or administering was devolved to local authorities and hunters' associations. In Canada, the tests were often run by not-for-profit or private organisations but set by provincial authorities. Despite this joint approach in setting and administering tests, there was often little joint work in monitoring competence, which is usually the responsibility of government bodies. Some countries do link assessment with monitoring and then feedback findings from the monitoring programmes to improve the assessment system. For example the Danish assessment system is annually reviewed, based partially on data from monitoring.

All of the countries require hunters to pass a formal test or assessment rather than use other assessment methods, such as self-certification. All 20 countries carried out a theoretical written test with five European countries having an oral test as well. The written tests vary greatly, from a short national test of 21 questions in France to 90 questions in Belgium. Quite often different tests are set for different types and standards of hunting. The Danish theoretical test of 40 questions must be passed before the practical test can be taken. If this is passed, a hunter can hunt with a shotgun. Rifle hunting requires additional training and a firearm shooting test to be taken. This type of hierarchical system has the advantage of reducing the testing burden on hunters – someone who only intends to hunt with a shotgun does not need to take the additional rifle training and shooting test.

Most countries also require hunters to pass practical tests on quarry identification, safety and handling of a firearm. About half of the countries included distance estimation tests, with the aim of reducing wounding, with others considering their introduction. A detailed case study of how wounding of geese has been reduced in Denmark is presented in the Next Steps 7 and 8 reports; the Danish approach was to carry out detailed scientific research to assess wounding incidence in geese and then agree an action plan to reduce wounding, which was endorsed by hunting organisations and the Government. The plan relied on hunters voluntarily complying with the maximum 25 metre shooting distance for geese with the threat of reducing hunting opportunities and ultimately protection for geese if the voluntary approach did not work within an agreed period.

Although many training materials are now on-line or available for home study, most tests require a hunter to go to an assessment centre. This was identified as an issue in some countries (most notably in Belgium) due to the distance a hunter has to travel for assessment. It may be possible to avoid candidates travelling to assessment centres by using modern communication and employing techniques used by correspondence courses.

It was also clear that some tests were set up to assess the core competency of hunters with more specialist skills assessed by separate tests or training, for example for hunting with bows or with dogs.

In Norway and Hungary, a shooting proficiency test must be passed annually to hunt big game, such as deer, and a number of other countries were also considering introducing this (Denmark, Hungary, New York and Ontario). Failure to test the accuracy of a hunters' shooting was seen as a weakness by some respondents. A number of countries monitored shooting accuracy and shot placement through wounding monitoring, which was often done through game dealers and veterinarians rejecting carcasses. However, there are a number of dangers with this. Firstly, a hunter who presents a 'badly shot' deer is not necessarily incompetent. Secondly, poorly shot deer may not be presented if hunters know that their competence is being assessed on them. Therefore this approach is unlikely to provide an accurate measure of shooting accuracy and shot placement across the whole population of deer killed or the hunting population.

Most countries exempted people who currently hunt from having to pass the test; this was often termed granting 'grandfather rights' to them. Granting such rights makes introducing an assessment system more acceptable to existing hunters. However this approach does have the weakness that a significant proportion of hunters may not have been assessed; this concern is reduced if there is a suitable monitoring system in place that allows key areas relating to competence to be accurately measured and remedied by training or education if necessary. In some countries hunters are requested to provide information to allow deer numbers and welfare to be monitored.

A number of countries, most notably those with public shooting grounds, require hunters to hold a permit that shows that they have passed a competence test and a permit to hunt, which often specifies the area and species that can be hunted. Other permits, for using rifles or other weapons, may also be required.

Links between assessment and monitoring of hunters' competence. From the survey, there appears to be less monitoring carried out than assessment of competence. Few countries attempt to formally monitor deer welfare or food safety and hygiene and link it to the tests of hunters' competence. The Danish system for assessing and monitoring competence is one of the most detailed. The assessment test is annually reviewed and is likely to be updated to utilise on-line and home study training materials, so that the training materials are as widely used as possible. Deer populations are managed based on information received from hunters who voluntarily submit annual shooting reports. About 60% of hunters provide the reports. Deer welfare is assessed through wounding rates, which are calculated by the Forest and Nature Agency, who shoot a number of deer with identifiable ammunition and then X-ray the carcass to look for shot or bullets from wounding incidents. Therefore the Danish approach relies on a mixture of hunter and government co-operation, and scientific research.

The most useful systems appear to have close links between assessment and monitoring. In Norway, the monitoring system is one of the most comprehensive. Dedicated officers monitor hunting safety. Deer welfare is actively monitored through anonymous questionnaires completed by hunters, and people must pass an annual shooting proficiency test before they can shoot large game. Deer biology, behaviour and habitat is

also monitored based on compulsory submission of annual hunting reports, which 90-94% of hunters provide. The Norwegian hunters' organisation noted that this system relies on trust and co-operation between the hunting authority and hunters. It is assumed that hunters provide accurate information on their game bags. This is a major strength of the system as, because they provide some of the data, hunters have greater trust and acceptance of it.

How much does it cost a hunter to take the test or assessment? The cost of taking the test was typically over €100 (£70) in Europe if it included training. Tests are mostly free or less than €25 (£18) in America and Canada to encourage testing and retesting at regular intervals. In Canada and America, most training was delivered and hunters assessed by volunteers. This has the attraction of reducing the cost of tests but many areas reported practical difficulties in finding enough trainers in the right place at the right time.

In almost all cases, passing the test granted hunters the right to hunt indefinitely. In France and Lichtenstein, hunters must apply annually for their permits but renewal is almost automatic. The advantage of this is that it allows the number and characteristics of active hunters to be monitored and it is also income generating.

The international portability of tests. Most countries allowed hunters who had passed a test in another country or state to hunt. There is therefore a widespread acceptance or portability of tests around the countries surveyed, particularly if they conform to International Hunter Education Association standards (which are currently being revised and are likely to be raised) or an equivalent. However, some countries did note that there was not perfect portability of tests. Foreign hunters are generally allowed to hunt overseas but some countries impose restrictions such as Sweden, which only recognises the tests taken in Germany, Austria and other Scandinavian countries. The tests in these countries were the only ones cited by respondents as exemplars or as the 'gold standard'. As hunting is an international pastime and an important economic activity in Scotland, if a system is introduced, it should be accepted in all other countries and tests of a suitable standard passed in other countries be accepted in Scotland.

Strengths and weaknesses of testing systems. The most commonly cited strength was having a comprehensive or standardised system, which was often linked to reducing hunting accidents and reducing wounding of quarry. Some countries have also been making training materials available on-line or for home study, improving the visibility, convenience and use of training. Other strengths are making the training and assessment easily accessible and requiring regular testing of shooting proficiency using firearms shooting tests.

The main weaknesses cited by respondents are no regular testing of shooting proficiency as the hunting test is a one-off and needing to add new subjects to the curriculum.

Weaknesses in systems were also reviewed by seeing what changes are being proposed to them. There is a culture of continuous improvement of tests as about half of the countries were anticipating changes being made to their testing systems. The changes varied according to what was currently included in the test with the main changes being making training more accessible through on-line and home study training materials. In Norway, the assessment system is continually being updated to reflect changes in society, such as internet-based modules and exams. This use of technology makes the test more accessible to hunters and probably more fun to study for and take. A number of countries were also considering regular testing of shooting proficiency using firearm shooting tests.

3 Implications and options:

All countries surveyed had a test or assessment which hunters had to pass to demonstrate their competence and be allowed to hunt. Some common subjects were included in all tests and some tests are more demanding than others. A number of respondents suggested that any test should comply with International Hunter Education Association standards to reduce restrictions between countries.

A key finding and question for any Scottish assessment system is that the type and scope of tests should be tailored to the purpose of the assessment. For example, if the purpose of assessing hunters' competence is to reduce hunting accidents, a Canadian or American style approach has the strength of using short courses (typically 8-16 hours long) provided locally by volunteers who are hunters. The Manitoba Hunter Education Programme is 8 hours long and half the time is spent on safety. The province considers the programme to be successful as hunting accident rates are as low as in other areas with longer courses.

Other tests have broader purposes, such as improving deer welfare, food safety and ethics and ethos. This type of assessment requires more lengthy training (e.g., one year in Germany) and has higher costs. There are also more countries using (and introducing) practical tests on distance estimation and firearm shooting, mainly to reducing wounding incidence.

In many countries the reasons why hunters' competence is being assessed is clearly defined to ensure that a suitable type of assessment system is being used.

4

Study of tests or assessments for people who hunt ungulates (deer, moose and wild boar)

[illegible]

Key: ● = yes; blank = no ; DK = don't know

1 Do people need to pass a test or assessment to be allowed to hunt with a firearm in your country? (Yes/No/Don't know)

1 Since 1978; 2 National Hunting Exam; 3 Hunting Proficiency Test; 4 Hunter's Test introduced 1985 after three year trial; 5 Since 1979; 6 Since 1964; 7 Two tests required to hunt and hold an unrestricted firearm; 8 Hunters Education Course combines federal licensing of weapons and hunter education; 9 Since 1981.

2 If yes, does the test or assessment including the following subjects?

Hunter safety

1 Safety accounts for 50% (4 hours) of Hunter Education Programme; course has been criticised as too short at 8 hours but safety statistics are good compared to provinces with longer courses.

Public safety

Food safety / hygiene

1 Handling of game acknowledged as could be improved; 2 To sell meat to butchers, which is not common, a hygiene course must be taken; 3 Optional training can be provided.

Deer welfare

Deer biology and management

Other subjects

1 Regional shooting laws and gun laws; 2 Ethos and ethics of shooting, notably hunting for eating, and hunting with dogs; 3 Hide building, dog handling, animal diseases, agricultural and game crops and law; 4 Plant ecology, butchery and 'hunters' language'; 5 History of hunting and how society views it; 6 Emergency preparedness, wilderness survival, law, public image, ethics, wounding reduction, use of vehicles; 7 Role of the hunter and wilderness survival.

3 Who assesses their ability?

National authority

1 Organised by state examination board ; 2 Small country and hunting area so the Government 'knows' all hunters.

Regional / state / provincial authority

1 Practical / in-field assessment by Fish and Wildlife Service.

Local authority

Hunter organisation

1 Tests organised by the Belgium shooting organisations, and supervised and checked by a government body; 2 Tests are delegated to the Dutch Hunters' Association and monitored by national government; 3 Tests are delegated to the Chamber of Hunters.

Other (e.g., private and not-for-profit organisations)

1 Standard curriculum set by state which is taught and assessed by local volunteers.

4 Does the test or assessment include any of the following?

Theoretical test (oral)

1 Oral test available for people with reading difficulties.

Theoretical test (written)

1 90 questions, including 20 about meat handling and hygiene, and 20 slides; 2 40 questions requiring 88% correct answers. Theoretical test must be passed before practical test, which includes 6 distance estimation questions. If this is passed, can hunt with a shotgun. Rifle hunting requires additional weapon handling and firearm shooting tests to be passed; 3 National test of 21 questions set by national authority and hunter organisations, with the tests run at 'departement' level; 4 50 questions and oral exam; 5 70 questions requiring 86% correct answers; 6 50 multiple choice questions requiring 96% correct answers.

Practical test (quarry identification)

1 Optional.

Practical test (safety and handling a firearm)

1 Automatic fail if safety questions answered incorrectly; 2 Optional.

Practical test (distance estimation)

1 Practical test has reduced deer wounding (and public concerns); 2 Considering introducing Advanced Hunter Clinics with firearm shooting; 3 Added to new curriculum; 4 Optional Advanced Hunter Education Programme but taken by less than 1% of hunters.

Practical test (firearm shooting)

1 Firing test to assess accuracy and safe gun handling; 2 Three separate practical gun tests combined in 2005. Hunters are encouraged to take an annual shooting proficiency test and some landowners require it to reduce wounding; 3 Considering introducing Advanced Hunter Clinics with firearm shooting; 4 Added to new curriculum; 5 Optional Advanced Hunter Education Programme but taken by less than 1% of hunters; 6 Some hunters would like shooting proficiency test for big game.

Other

1 An optional extended hunting programme is also offered which @ 10% of hunters take. It covers live firing, distance estimation and shot placement.

5 When the test or assessment was introduced in your country was there an exemption for hunters with a hunting permit from having to pass the test? (Yes/No/Don't know)

1 Existing hunters exempted unless hunting on state land, so many have taken test; 2 Hunters born before 1960 exempted; 3 Introduced in 1964 and made mandatory in 1969 for over 12s but hunters with a previous licence 'grandfathered' in.

6 How much does it cost a hunter to take the test or assessment?

0 euros

1 Test free but Hunter Safety Course is charged for.

less than 25 euros

1 €16 for the permit (incrive) plus variable price stamp depending on where and what is hunted.

25-50 euros

1 €33 and €17 for rifle test; 2 Test part funded by course fee plus provincial government funding.

50 – 100 euros

1 €84-106; 2 Two tests required to hunt (\$70) and hold an unrestricted firearm (\$65).

more than 100 euros

1 Costs €1,500-1,800 for normal test including training or €3,500-6,000 for two week full-time fast track course and test. The test must be passed before a hunter can buy a licence which certifies eligibility to hunt (annually renewed, costs €80); 2 @ €2,000; 3 €100-300 (\$150-500).

Don't know

7 How long is the certificate of passing the test or assessment valid for?

1 year

1 Renewal is almost automatic but hunters must be a member of a hunter organisation; 2 Introducing annual shooting proficiency test for big game; 3 Annual certificate required but no retest required; 4 Shooting proficiency test required each year for big game.

1 to 5 years

5 to 10 years

more than 10 years

indefinite / lifetime 1

1 Most certificates are indefinite / lifetime unless a criminal or serious hunting offence is committed; 2 Renewal is almost automatic but hunters must be a member of a hunter organisation; 3 Once test is passed, an outdoors card is purchased (valid for three years) and used to purchase licences to hunt.

Other

8 If a hunter from your country passes a test or assessment in another country, is he allowed to hunt in your country? (Yes/No/Don't know)

1 Foreign hunter can be required to pass practical firearm shooting test if their national test does not include one; 2 Only for 9 days; 3 A Dutch person can pass the German or Danish test and hunt in Holland; 4 Hunters from countries approved by the International Hunter Education Association.

9 If a hunter from another country passes a test or assessment in another country, is he allowed to hunt in your country? (Yes/No/Don't know)

1 Only for 9 days; 2 Foreign hunters can apply for a permit to hunt for 3 days at a time but can apply for multiple permits; 3 Foreign hunters do not need guest licence if accompanied by a local hunter and if he has passed his country's test; 4 Only from Germany, Austria and other Scandinavian countries; 5 An experienced foreign hunter can sit the test without taking the Hunter Safety Course; 6 Hunters from countries approved by the International Hunter Education Association; 7 Hunters allowed from countries not approved by the International Hunter Education Association.

10 What are the strengths of the method used to assess hunters ability in your country?

11 What are the weaknesses of the method used to assess hunters ability in your country?

12 Are changes to the current system of testing or assessing hunters' ability in your country foreseen? (Yes/No/Don't know)

1 The International Hunter Education Association is currently revising its standards and testing standards are likely to be raised; 2 Test is 30 years old but annually updated. Acknowledged as requiring further changes, particularly on technological improvements and nature / wildlife. Considering introducing five-yearly accuracy and safety testing; 3 Planning to introduce an annual Scandanavian-style shooting proficieny test, where licences to shoot big game are renewed annually following a shooting test on a moving target. But not implemented due to lack of capacity at shooting ranges to carry out this type of test; 4 Test is changed to reflect changes in society, such as internet-based modules and exams; 5 New text book developed; 6 Live firing test mandatory from Jan 2008; 7 Considering introducing Advanced Hunter Clinics with firearm shooting; 8 On-line training material has increased visibility, use and convenience of training opportunities; 9 Continual improvement and recent introduction of on-line hunters' exam; 10 Home study version of theoretical test is being developed to allow contact time with instructor to concentrate on gun handling; 11 Some hunters would like shooting proficiency test for big game; 12 On-line training materials

End