



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Spanish
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

It is encouraging to see that the number of candidates studying Spanish at Advanced Higher level has increased from 228 in 2011 to 240 this year. The number of centres presenting AH Spanish has also gone up to 74, with 15 new centres coming on board in 2012.

There were no significant setting issues for the 2012 paper and no changes to the experienced setting and vetting teams.

Speaking

As in previous years, candidates did very well in this skill area, managing to achieve an average mark of 37.3 out of 50.

Folio

A reasonable range of texts and topics were attempted, and candidates performed slightly better in this component as compared to last year, averaging a score of 17.9 out of 30, an increase of 0.5 of a mark. There were no Language in Work reports this year.

Paper I Reading and Translation

In general, candidates responded favourably to this paper, especially when answering the comprehension questions. The vast majority engaged well with the subject matter of the text, which related to emigration. It was pleasing to note that, overall, candidates found the passage for translation fairly accessible. However, many still had difficulty with the inferential question.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates seemed to find the Listening component challenging (especially Part A) with few candidates scoring really high marks overall.

In Discursive Writing, the standard was broadly comparable to previous years with the more able tending to excel in this area.

The Examining Team were again pleased to note that **all** essay titles were attempted, the most popular choices being Q2 on technology/online dating, Q4 on climate change and Q5 on young people leaving the family home.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Speaking

Most candidates were comfortable and confident in the language, with only a minority failing to score 30 or more out of 50. Fluency and readily taking the initiative were features of good performances this year. The vast majority of candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared. Many candidates appeared motivated to do well, made good use of learned

material, were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses, and also incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into their conversation with the Visiting Assessor. Candidates were at ease with the method of assessment.

Folio

Presentation of Folio work was excellent. As before, the study of literary texts was generally tackled more successfully than background topics. The best essays were those that had a question/title which genuinely led candidates to adopt an analytical approach or allowed for two sides of an argument to be developed. Reliable bibliographies containing three or more references to sources were also a feature of good practice.

Paper I Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to the comprehension questions, especially Q1, Q2 (a) Q3, Q4 and Q5, providing detailed and accurate responses. They also performed reasonably well in the Translation section, especially in sense units 2, 3, 4, 6, 8 and 10.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

Overall, candidates attempted all questions in both parts of the Listening component but performed better in Part B – in Q1, Q2 and especially Q8.

On the whole, essays were well structured and written in paragraphs. Candidates generally achieved good results when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their answer and when their essays were relevant to the question. Candidates who, for instance, chose to write on climate change, bullfighting or Europe occasionally came up with interesting and original ideas. There was also appropriate use and accurate treatment of subjunctive clauses by some candidates.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Folio

Many candidates continue to find it difficult to select a title or essay question that generates debate or critical analysis. Some candidates provided no title at all, or just had the name of the text/topic underlined at the top of their page. Disappointingly, large numbers again this year adopted an obvious approach which tended to generate a one-sided argument with a predictable conclusion.

A significant number of candidates do not proof-check their work effectively in English and especially when quoting in Spanish from a literary text.

Often, particularly when tackling background topics, there was too much of a narrative approach taken and insufficient critical analysis or evaluation.

Paper I General comments

In the Reading passage, candidates experienced some difficulty, perhaps through misuse of the dictionary, with expressions like 'tanto ... como..', 'dejar de ...' , 'encontrar', 'fuentes' and 'raíces'.

In Q2(b) there were difficulties relating to the 'failure' of political projects and the distinction between Capitalism and left wing politics.

Q6 Inferential question

As in previous years, many candidates mostly provided information from the text rather than attempting to draw inferences. Some misread the text when attempting this question and found it difficult to express their ideas through the use of 'inferential' type language (eg 'this suggests that ...' etc — see below). This was exacerbated on occasion by poor English and candidates mixing up 'immigration' and 'emigration'. There were also issues relating to the lack of understanding of the word 'Utopia'. Some candidates included quotes from the text in their answer but just repeated these in English instead of using them to develop their argument. Alarming some candidates, albeit a small minority, did not attempt this question at all.

Translation

No single sense unit in particular was found to be overly demanding by candidates. However some had problems with rendering the following words or phrases into good English:

Unit 1 'se han establecido' was translated by many as 'have established themselves' rather than 'have settled'.

Unit 5 'definitivamente' was incorrectly rendered as 'definitely' or 'definitively' rather than 'permanently' or 'once and for all'.

Unit 7 The majority of candidates did not translate 'lo suyo' correctly.

Unit 9 'Esa' was often mistranslated as 'this'.

Listening Part A

A number of candidates did not get full marks for Q1 as they misunderstood the phrase 'un 7 por ciento' and wrote 1.7% or 17% as their response. Not enough detail was provided by some candidates for Q2 who did not answer 'almost every country' for this question and therefore lost a mark. In Q4 a significant number of this year's cohort did not capture the idea of 'promoting' training or 'subsidising' programmes for the unemployed.

Listening Part B

In Q1 there was some confusion re the distinction between temporary and part-time work. Q4 presented candidates with the figure 350,000 and, disappointingly, a substantial number did not get this correct. In Q6, the fine detail of a 'small beer' was missed by many.

Discursive Writing

As in previous years, candidates ran into difficulties when going beyond prepared material. This led, in many cases, to some unidiomatic translation from English into Spanish and poor control of tenses/verbs, sometimes also involving inappropriate use of the infinitive.

Other major errors related to the misuse of 'Ser' and 'Estar', and failure to employ the subjunctive mood when required.

Mistakes relating to adjectival agreement, genders of nouns and the omission of pronouns were also apparent in performances in Discursive Writing this year.

Some candidates started well but failed to sustain accuracy consistently throughout their essay. Misuse of the dictionary was evident in the essays which achieved Satisfactory or less. There was occasional other tongue interference (French, Italian and English).

For Q2, unfortunately, there were some 'learned' essays produced on the advantages/disadvantages of the Internet, which resulted in a maximum mark of only 16 being awarded for irrelevance.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

- ◆ Share all criteria/GRC/pegged marks/performance descriptors etc and SQA documentation with candidates.
- ◆ Incorporate Exemplification of Standards and Professional Development Workshop materials into lessons.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to make full use of the SQA website, especially by referring to External Assessment reports for AH Spanish from the last couple of years as well as the Marking Instructions for specific past question papers.

Speaking

- ◆ Sustain the good work in preparing candidates for this assessment but perhaps with an increasing focus on grammatical accuracy, particularly with regard to use of verbs (especially the preterite and the perfect), gender of nouns, adjectival agreements, use of 'Ser' and 'Estar' and the subjunctive.
- ◆ Continue to train candidates in discussion techniques in the language to enable them to deal with any question they may be asked which goes beyond their 'comfort zone' of learned material. If a candidate speaks about a background topic in the assessment, it would be more interesting if ideas were presented in a Spanish context (eg role of women in Spain as opposed to just in Scotland).

Folio

- ◆ The choice of title for two Folio pieces for the ERV unit continues to be of crucial importance. The title should not be vague or general or obvious but should generate a discursive/evaluative approach.
- ◆ It would be advisable to offer students a choice of essay titles to ensure more individual responses if they are studying the same text or background topic.
- ◆ For the ERV unit, try either to encourage the candidates to study two literary texts or to tackle their background topic in a manner that is appropriate to Advanced Higher (ie less information and more evaluation).
- ◆ A 'compare and contrast' approach (this year a few centres did this with a selection of poems or short stories) usually meets with some success, provided that the focus of the comparison and contrast is rooted in Hispanic literature and/or culture.
- ◆ Discourage candidates from choosing to study only **one** poem or song as a literary text or only **one** film as a background topic. Many candidates did not score well in essays of this type as their approach tended to be limiting, mostly narrative and one-dimensional.
- ◆ Centres whose candidates study Lorca for the ERV unit must make students aware that no aspect of his work can represent Franco or his regime as the writer died near the beginning of the Spanish Civil War. Essays which tended to infer this were therefore misleading and results were often poor.

Candidates should avoid undertaking background topics such as Spanish football, flamenco, Spanish cooking and the study of a Spanish city. The treatment of these is almost always inappropriate to Advanced Higher. The theme of bullfighting as a Folio background piece also tends to generate a one-sided and superficial argument, very often anecdotal with not a lot of evidence to substantiate ideas.

Submitting a Folio with both essays on the same literary text/film is unacceptable.

Candidates should develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies overall. For example, Wikipedia (without mention of a website), a reference to a newspaper (on its own with no article noted), and 'teachers' notes' do not constitute appropriate items for a bibliography.

More care and attention is needed when proof-checking in relation to the use of English, spelling, typing errors and punctuation, as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts. Candidates should avoid the use of inappropriate register and expressions. The quality of English in Folio pieces is very important, as is an appreciation of how to structure an essay, as well as what is meant by an 'analytical' approach. Candidates should be made aware that plagiarism is penalised.

Paper I General comments

Time should be divided appropriately between the comprehension questions, the inferential question and the passage for translation.

Q6 Inferential question

Centres should encourage candidates to draw inferences from the passage and not just provide factual information or repeat the answers to their comprehension questions when doing this task. A balanced approach in answering the 2012 question, which took into account both sides of the argument about patterns of emigration/immigration generally got better results. Answers to the inferential question should be well structured and have a rounded conclusion. Any quotation from the text should be appropriate and relevant, not just a repetition of what has been argued in English.

Phrases such as 'this implies that...', '...would seem to suggest ...', 'thus it can be claimed that ...', '... backs up the idea that ...', 'by stating this, the writer makes it clear that ...' may help to generate the level of sophistication required to achieve good results.

SQA's exemplification of performance in this question should be used by teachers to assist candidates in developing inferencing skills.

Translation

More attention should be given to the development of translation skills and, in particular, ways of converting idiomatic expressions from Spanish into English. Special care should be taken with recognising and accurately translating tenses. Centres should ensure that all candidates at this level have developed their skills in the use of a dictionary.

Paper II

Listening

- ◆ Candidates at this level should be familiar with recognising numbers (high or low) in any Listening text at this level. They should also be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible.
- ◆ It may be a good idea to suggest to candidates to access Listening materials on the Internet, especially short news items on Spanish radio.
- ◆ Teachers could advise candidates on how they should use the time they have when looking at questions before they hear the recording on the day of the examination.
- ◆ Strategies for note-taking while they are listening to the recording could also be discussed.
- ◆ It goes without saying but obviously the teacher using the target language as much as possible in class will help develop Listening skills.

Discursive Writing

- ◆ More grammatical accuracy is required (see 'Areas which candidates found demanding').

- ◆ Ensure candidates address the question at all times and do not reproduce a well rehearsed essay that may not be entirely relevant (see above in relation to Q2). Try to address all aspects of the title.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to avoid high frequency language and adopt a strategy to incorporate sophisticated language appropriate to Advanced Higher level and to the subject matter of the essay.
- ◆ Impress upon candidates that they should set aside some time during the examination to use their dictionary to proof check their essay.
- ◆ Try to get candidates to focus on structure, and to reveal their conclusion at the end of their essay and not in the first paragraph.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	232
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	240
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 200				
A	29.6%	29.6%	71	139
B	24.2%	53.8%	58	118
C	27.1%	80.8%	65	98
D	9.2%	90.0%	22	88
No award	10.0%	100.0%	24	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). 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 management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ 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, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry this 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.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.