



External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Spanish
Level(s)	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

Again there was a considerable rise in the number of presentations in Higher Spanish, from 1,488 in 2011 to 1,593 in 2012. These came from a total of 180 centres, 20 of which were presenting for the first time. The mean marks for each component were:

- ◆ Paper 1 Reading and Directed Writing 26.0 out of 35 (25.2 in 2011)
- ◆ Paper 2 Listening/Writing 17.8 out of 30 (19.1 in 2011)
- ◆ Speaking 21.9 out of 25 (21.7 in 2011)
- ◆ Overall total 65.7% in 2012 (66% in 2011)

Almost half of candidates (49.3%) gained an A award, with a remarkable 259 candidates gaining an upper A, and 68.85% gaining either an A or B award. One candidate achieved 100%. 85.4 % of candidates passed the examination. These marks are very pleasing and give evidence of a very well prepared cohort presented at the appropriate level. Centres can be justifiably proud of the success of their students in this year's examination, as can the candidates for their excellent efforts. 146 candidates (9.3%) failed the exam and a further 84 (5.3%) received a D award. A small proportion of these candidates seemed to have been poorly prepared for this exam and were, perhaps, presented at a level to which they were not suited.

The pass mark for 2012 for a C was set at 48%, a B 58%, and an A 68%.

The content of the exam clearly related to the teaching syllabus as indicated by the prescribed themes and topics for Higher, and was of the appropriate level of difficulty. Markers commented that it was a fair and well-balanced paper throughout and that the questions were specific, concise, clear and distinct.

The Reading text dealt with youth unemployment in the Malaga area, a topic which was relevant and engaging, and one which candidates could readily relate to in our own current economic climate. The Directed Writing topic, staying with a Spanish family for a month, presented few surprises in terms of the scenario. Fewer candidates incurred penalties for the omission of bullet points, an encouraging and continuing trend. Overall, the responses to Paper 1 were good to very good, with a range of marks representative of ability within the field.

The Listening text was about a woman's ideas on keeping fit and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, a topic which centres should cover in class and one which candidates should be able to cope with both in the context of listening and the short essay. The pace and clarity of the recording was very fair. The listening script contained familiar language suitable to this level, but with sufficient challenges to allow for a good range of marks. Markers commented that it was a very fair paper that was generally well attempted by most candidates.

Areas in which candidates performed well

There were many very good performances in **Reading**, with very few candidates scoring less than half marks. Most candidates attempted all questions, and candidates showed good comprehension skills in locating answers from the passage, thus avoiding the translation of large sections of Spanish. Questions 1, 3, 4(b), 7(c) and 9 were all done particularly well.

Performance in **Translation** was also encouraging, especially in centres where it is obvious that translation is taught as a discreet skill and not just as another comprehension question. The **Directed Writing** was well done with an average mark of over 9 out of 15.

Listening was generally well done, with the average mark around 12 out of 20. Questions 1, 6, 7(a) and 8 were particularly well done by most candidates. There were many extremely good performances.

Likewise quality was evident with the **short essay** where the average was over 6 out of 10. There were many examples of well structured and highly accurate pieces of writing which addressed all three questions in the stimulus and which contained an excellent range and variety of language structures.

Areas which candidates found demanding

As was stated earlier, the vast majority of candidates performed well and to their ability in all parts of the paper, and they and their centres are to be congratulated on this.

In **Reading** too many candidates provided insufficient detail in their answers. At Higher level it is important that candidates provide the necessary detail. Questions 1 and 2 and the Marking Instructions exemplify just how detailed answers have to be at this level.

- 1 According to the first paragraph, why do these young people feel no need to go out to look for work. Give details of **three** reasons. (3)

En casa, tienen la comida puesta en la mesa y la nevera llena, Internet y teléfono para hablar con los amigos, una habitación propia donde disfrutan de intimidad e incluso una paga semanal para salir de fiesta.

Marking key

- dinner on table and fridge full
- internet and phone to speak with friends
- a room of their own where they have privacy
- pocket money to go out and enjoy (3 from 4)

- 2 Give details of the numbers and ages of the 'ni-ni generation' in Malaga. (1)

...son ya más de quince mil jóvenes de entre dieciséis y veintinueve años

Marking key

- more than 15,000 between the ages of 16 and 29.

In other words if a candidate were to answer that 'they have the fridge full, they have internet and the phone and a room of their own', they would gain **no** marks. The punctuation in the passage can also help candidates determine the detail required for each mark, as it does above for Question 1 above. Likewise if candidates were to miss out 'more than' or any of the other numbers in Q2, they could not be awarded the mark. Candidates at this level must also get their numbers right.

A number of candidates were penalised for poor English expression and/or poor dictionary skills. Some candidates translated 'intimidad' in Question 1 as intimacy. Surprisingly in Question 1, 'su propio dormitorio' caused problems for some, being translated as proper or clean. In Question 3, 'la escasa presión social' and 'el fracaso escolar' both caused problems, being translated as scarce or rare social pressure and failure of school/failing schools respectively.

Likewise, many candidates failed to grasp the meaning of 'paga semanal' in Question 1, 'mercado laboral precario' in Question 5, and 'hasta las tantas de la noche' (Q 9) also caused problems. In Question 5, for 'sufren una gran explotación' many candidates included 'a' great exploitation, and often translated 'pocas posibilidades' as 'a few possibilities' or 'little possibilities'. In Question 6 'ambas cosas a la vez' caused problems for some candidates. In Question 11, with 'Nunca es demasiado tarde para volver a empezar' many candidates did not know or could not figure out volver a.

Many candidates struggled with sense groups 1 and 5 of the **Translation**. 'Por suerte' was often translated as 'by chance' or 'with luck', which are not appropriate in the context of the passage, and candidates thus lost the two marks for this sense group at a stroke. 'Se dio cuenta' was not recognised, and 'a tiempo' was wrongly translated as 'on time' or 'at the time'. The second, third and fourth sense groups were well tackled by most, but in the final sense group, many candidates failed to recognise the third person of 'ha mejorado mi autoestima', translating it as 'I have improved my self-esteem'.

The **Directed Writing** scenario caused few problems and the only real issue was with Bullet Point 3, 'What you and your friend did to help out in the house', where a considerable number of candidates addressed this in the first person singular, making no reference at all to the friend, and thus incurring a penalty.

In **Listening** Questions 3, and 7b were found to be challenging but more discriminatory questions are to be expected at Higher. In Question 3, 'muchas empresas gastan mucho dinero en publicidad ... cada vez hay más jóvenes que quieren comida barata,' several candidates missed out on spending on publicity/advertising, electing for 'they get a lot of publicity' and candidates elected for 'fast food' instead of 'cheap food'. Perhaps more

surprisingly, less than half of candidates managed to get two activities correct in Question 10 from 'ir a correr un rato, darte un paseo o un poco de bici'.

As ever with the Listening section, candidates must give sufficient detail in their answers. Thus in question 5, candidates were giving incomplete answers by writing 'she eats kebabs' instead of 'she is always eating kebabs' for 'siempre come kebabs'. Likewise, in 'pasa todo el tiempo delante del ordenador' missing out all her time; in 'siempre está cansada' missing out 'always' in their answer.

In Question 9, 'van a todas partes en coche', 'everywhere' is required for the mark. At this level candidates should be aware that these words and phrases matter. In Question 4, many candidates failed to recognize the comparative 'peor', and indeed 'Estados Unidos'. In Question 6 'odiaba la educación física', 'she did not like PE' is not enough to convey the sense. For Question 7(a) 'What was the first thing she did to help her lose weight', 'fue dejar de fumar' several candidates wrongly guessed 'she started smoking'. For Question 2, 'tiene muchos conservantes', some candidates seemed to think that preservatives and conservatives were the same thing!

The topic for the **Short Essay** was one all candidates should have been familiar with, yet it was evident from some responses that some centres had not covered the topic in detail, if at all. However, most candidates were well prepared and answered the three questions of the stimulus in an accurate and balanced way. There were some candidates whose grammatical awareness was lacking and who relied on the dictionary, ending up with English word order and putting infinitives eg 'ir' instead of 'voy' for 'I go'. Some candidates struggled with 'mantenerse' in response to '¿qué haces para mantenerte en forma?'

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

- ◆ Candidates should read over all their answers to ensure that they make sense and that their English expression is clear.
- ◆ When writing in Spanish they should make sure that they thoroughly check over their work for accents, spelling and grammatical accuracy.
- ◆ Likewise, they should try to present their work as neatly as possible. If handwriting is illegible, points can be lost.
- ◆ Please stress to candidates that they are not allowed to write alternative answers, for example by using an oblique or brackets, be it in Reading, Translation or Listening. If one of the answers is incorrect, they will lose the mark, even if the other one is correct.
- ◆ It is recommended that centres share this Report with candidates, along with the Marking Instructions for the 2012 paper, to demonstrate to them the correct amount of detail

required for a mark at Higher level in both Reading and Listening, as well as the precision required for Translation.

- ◆ Likewise, Extended Writing Criteria for both Directed Writing and the Short Essay should be shared and discussed with candidates.

Reading

- ◆ Candidates should read the title and introduction in English, as well as reading **all** of the questions, prior to attempting their answers.
- ◆ Candidates should be aware that there are many mechanisms in the passage to help them locate their answers — the introduction in English, sub-headings and people's names, the questions themselves, and line references in the questions and in the passage are all there to help the candidate. The 2012 paper is divided into three different sections, each highlighted by sub-headings and three separate groups of questions indicated by line numbers, and candidates can manage their time better by concentrating on each of these sections in turn.
- ◆ Answers will always appear in the passage in chronological order.
- ◆ Candidates should give detail in their answers. At Higher level, full and detailed answers are a must. Punctuation in the passage often helps candidates to identify discreet points.
- ◆ Candidates should be discouraged from writing anything that does not make sense! If it does not make sense to the candidate, it will not make sense to the marker.

Translation

- ◆ Markers stated that many candidates were well prepared for the Translation and centres are to be congratulated on this.
- ◆ Translation must be taught as a discreet skill, and not as just another part of the Reading comprehension. Although short, the Translation is worth 10% of the examination — the same as the Short Essay — and perhaps a good 10 minutes must be devoted to it in the exam.
- ◆ Candidates should be taught subject and tense recognition, and be aware of Spanish word order, eg in the 2012 paper, 'Puedo hacerle un regalo a mi novia', 'Aprecio más el dinero', and 'También ha mejorado mi autoestima' all caused problems for a number of candidates.
- ◆ Candidates should carefully look at every word in the Translation and pay particular attention to tenses and structures in it. Also words which are not there should not be added! Candidates must not paraphrase or give alternatives, nor should they translate direct speech into indirect speech.

- ◆ It should be made clear to candidates that a clear, precise and accurate translation of the section is needed.

Directed Writing

- ◆ It is very important that candidates read the introductory scenario as well as the six bullet points, being aware too that some bullet points **will** have two parts to them. This will be highlighted with the word 'and' in bold type. To fully address the bullet point, they must deal fully with these two parts.
- ◆ In 2012, bullet points 1 and 2 had two parts to them, and bullet point 3 asked 'What you and your friend did to help out in the house'. If a bullet point is not fully addressed, there is an automatic penalty of minus 2 marks.
- ◆ It is a good idea for candidates to tick the different things they must cover in the scenario and bullet points, then cross off once covered.
- ◆ While it is appropriate for candidates to use learned material, they should avoid reproducing it unaltered. They must carefully address the demands of each bullet point (which do, of course, change from year to year).
- ◆ It is important that candidates address all bullet points in a balanced way. It is a good idea, and adds a sense of the structure to the essay, if candidates leave a blank line between their attempt at each bullet point. This will also help them keep track of how they are coping with the demands of the task.
- ◆ Candidates should be advised to use the dictionary only to check for accuracy in spelling and accents — not to invent new sentences in Spanish.

Listening

- ◆ Before they listen to the recording, candidates should study the heading and questions and the marks allocated to them. This will help them anticipate the type of information that will be required of them.
- ◆ Candidates should give full and detailed answers, including adverbs and adjectives where appropriate, eg from the 2012 paper, 'playing tennis **with her friends**', '**a lot of** cholesterol', '**always** eats hot dogs', 'she spends **all her time** in front of the computer', 'the **basic** ingredient is olive oil — it doesn't contain **much** fat' all of these words in bold were required for the marks allocated.
- ◆ Candidates should put a line through any notes that they do not wish to be marked.
- ◆ As with the Reading, candidates must not give alternative answers by using an oblique or brackets.

Short Essay

- ◆ Again candidates should be reminded to use the dictionary only to check for accuracy in spelling and accents — not to ‘invent’ new sentences in Spanish.
- ◆ Some ‘short’ essays are unnecessarily long! Centres should encourage candidates to be more succinct, as in very many cases candidates do themselves a disservice by grossly exceeding the word count, often sacrificing accuracy for length.
- ◆ Grammatical accuracy is very important in the short essay, and candidates should look out for verb tenses, gender agreement, spelling and lack of accents, which can be checked through appropriate use of the dictionary.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	1498
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Number of resulted entries in 2012	1593
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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	49.0%	49.0%	781	68
B	19.3%	68.3%	307	58
C	16.7%	85.0%	266	48
D	5.2%	90.2%	83	43
No award	9.8%	100.0%	156	-

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.