



External Assessment Report 2013

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

The Examining Team is pleased to see that the number of candidates being presented for Spanish at Advanced Higher level continues to increase – from 240 in 2012 to 248 in 2013, the highest in the last four years.

There were six new centres presenting in 2013, and eight returning centres.

There were no significant setting issues for the 2013 paper and no changes to the experienced setting and vetting teams.

Speaking

As in previous years, candidates did very well in this skill area. This year's cohort managed to achieve an excellent average mark of 39.7 out of 50.

Folio

A reasonable range of texts and topics were attempted. However, candidates performed slightly less well in this component compared to last year, averaging a score of 17.2 out of 30, a decrease of 0.7 of a mark. As in 2012, 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 rules governing smoking in the workplace in some private hospitals.

It was pleasing to note that more candidates performed well in the inferential question this year. However, a number of them found the passage for translation fairly demanding.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

The performance of candidates in the Listening component was broadly comparable with previous years. On average this year, Part A appeared to be slightly more accessible to candidates than Part B.

In Discursive Writing, the standard was generally better than in 2012, with fewer candidates being awarded a mark of 8 or 0. A good number are becoming increasingly confident in their use of learned material.

Once again the Examining Team was satisfied to observe that **all** essay titles were attempted, the most popular choices being Question 3 on immigration and Question 4 on young people saving energy.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Speaking

Most candidates were again 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. 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 good overall. 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, eg a focus on a particular scene in a play/novel and its effect on the work overall. Folio pieces also often worked better when there was an element of comparing and contrasting, eg two characters in a novel/play, or two aspects of the same character or of two poems.

Essays that stood out from the others were those which displayed a good level of English and accurate/justified quotation from the text.

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 Questions 2a, 3a, 3b and 4, providing detailed and accurate responses. Many fared better with Question 6, the inferential question, 'How does the writer succeed..?' by picking up on techniques used by the writer as well as focusing on both perspectives of the text.

Sense units 1, 3, 6, 7 and 10 in the Translation section seemed more accessible than the others to this cohort.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening

Overall, candidates attempted all questions in both parts of the Listening component. In Part A, candidates generally had success when answering Questions 4, 5a and 5b. In Part B, Questions 1a, 1b, 2, 3, 4 and 7 were answered well.

Discursive Writing

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 immigration, energy and stress occasionally came up with interesting and original ideas.

There was also appropriate use and accurate treatment of subjunctive clauses by some candidates eg *no pienso que ninguna opción sea/tenga.../si tuviera que dar mi opinión...* etc.

Appropriate linking structures and phrases relating to expressing opinions were features of good practice eg *me inclino a creer/cabe destacar que.../en este sentido.../debo añadir* etc.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Folio

Many candidates continue to find it difficult to select a title or essay question which generates debate or critical analysis. Titles are often over-ambitious or too general. There continues to be a large number of candidates who adopt an obvious approach that tends 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, the content is (almost exclusively) factual and not analytical.

This year some background topics such as Festivals, Tourism and the Spanish Monarchy struggled to get into the Satisfactory category due to their inability to reflect a level of demand appropriate to Advanced Higher.

Paper I Reading and Translation

General comments

In the Reading passage, candidates experienced some difficulty, perhaps through misuse of the dictionary, with expressions such as 'sea cual sea la fuente', 'pagada por', 'en el puesto de trabajo' and 'tarde o temprano'. In addition language such as 'publicidad' (mistranslated as publicity), 'seguros médicos' and 'lista larga' caused problems.

Overall, when answering the comprehension questions, although candidates were spotting the 'hooks' in the questions, they quite often were unable to identify the piece of text that contained the answer and were let down by poor English expression. Some answers did not contain enough detail.

Question 6 Inferential question

As in previous years, candidates who did less well provided information from the text rather than attempting to draw inferences. Some found it difficult to express their ideas through the use of 'inferential' type language or to focus on the writer's techniques eg use of rhetorical questions, use of quotations, engaging the reader's sympathy, case studies, short, punchy sentences etc.

A disappointing performance in this question was characterised by poor English.

Translation

Sense units 2, 5, 8 and 9 in particular were found to be demanding by candidates. In addition, some had problems with rendering the following words or phrases into good English:

- ◆ Unit 2 'hubieran sido más' was poorly translated by many, who failed to grasp the appropriate sequence of tenses.
- ◆ Unit 5 'consultora' was wrongly translated as 'consultancy'.
- ◆ Unit 7 'un cigarro' was occasionally mistranslated as 'a cigar'.
- ◆ Unit 8 the majority of candidates did not translate 'tabaco' correctly.
- ◆ Unit 9 caused problems with tenses and led to candidates writing clumsy English.

Verb forms, on the whole, presented candidates with difficulties in this section.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening Part A

A surprising number of candidates did not get full marks for Question 1 as they submitted '70%' as their answer for *un sesenta por ciento*.

Questions 2 and 3 in this section also presented candidates with problems as they did not provide sufficient detail in their answers.

Occasionally candidates' general knowledge let them down. Some clearly thought that catalán was an area of Spain.

Listening Part B

In Part B, Questions 5, 6 and 8 caused difficulties. Language such as 'tiene su propio nombre', 'liberarlos de la tortura' and 'la grandeza de una nación' was found to be challenging. The latter was at times wrongly answered as 'the nobility of a nation'.

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. Misuse of the dictionary was evident in the essays that achieved Satisfactory or less. There was occasional other tongue interference (mostly French).

Essays that were repetitive rarely did better than Satisfactory.

Regrettably, some candidates had learned generic phrases that could fit any essay and took too long to make the content relevant to the question.

For Question 4, there were a number of learned essays on the environment that did not always fully address the question.

In Question 5, the subtlety of meaning behind 'manipulación total' was beyond some candidates.

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.
- ◆ Candidates should be reminded that handwriting needs to be clearly legible to ensure marks awarded equate to content.

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 a title for the two Folio pieces for the Extended Reading/Viewing (ERV) Unit continues to be of crucial importance. The title should not be over-ambitious, or vague, or too general, or obvious (eg 'Symbolism in *Bodas de Sangre*', 'La Fiesta de San Juan', 'The Civil War in Spain' etc) but should generate a discursive/evaluative approach.
- ◆ It would be advisable to offer candidates 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 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).
- ◆ Candidates should be advised against tackling background topics where they make sweeping generalisations that are not substantiated regarding eg bullfighting, same-sex marriage, immigration to the USA, and Spain's economic crisis. It may be more appropriate for candidates to study a second literary text.

- ◆ 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.
- ◆ 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. '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. They should vary their expression throughout their essay and avoid the repetition of words and phrases. 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.

Paper I Reading and Translation

General comments

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

Question 6 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. An approach in answering the 2013 question that took into account the literary techniques used by the writer, generally got better results this year. Answers to the inferential question should be well structured and have a rounded conclusion, preferably at the end of the answer. Any quotation from the text should be appropriate and relevant, not just a repetition of what has been argued in English.

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

Translation

- ◆ More attention should be given to the development of translation skills, and in particular to 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 and Discursive Writing

Listening

- ◆ Candidates at this level should be familiar with recognising numbers (high or low) in any Listening text. They should also be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible.
- ◆ It may be a good idea to suggest that candidates access Listening materials on the internet, especially short news items on Spanish radio.
- ◆ Teachers/lecturers 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/lecturer 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 that candidates address the question at all times and do not reproduce a well rehearsed essay that may not be entirely relevant (again see 'Areas which candidates found demanding' in relation to Questions 4 and 5). Candidates should 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 2012	240
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	248
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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	34.3%	34.3%	85	139
B	26.6%	60.9%	66	118
C	24.2%	85.1%	60	98
D	4.8%	89.9%	12	88
No award	10.1%	100.0%	25	-

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.