



## External Assessment Report 2013

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

There was a small though still very welcome increase in the number of presentations, from 1,593 in 2012 to 1,645 in 2013, from a record total of 193 centres.

Overall candidate response was very positive, much as in recent years, reflected in the high attainment by most in what was considered by Markers to be a very fair but robust examination. The majority of candidates performed well in all parts of the paper, a reflection on their ability and on how well they have prepared and been prepared by their centres for the examination.

69.3% of candidates received a B pass or better, and almost half of candidates (48.9%) achieved an A pass. Four candidates scored 100% in the examination. There were no real areas of contention in the examination, and the grade boundaries for C and B were set at 49% and 59% respectively, and 70% and 85% for an A and Upper A. 84.6% of candidates achieved grades A–C, 6% a D, and almost 10% or 156 candidates received a No Award.

The **Reading** passage dealt with *Fútbol para la Vida*, a project in Honduras which uses football as a means of improving the lives of young boys and girls. The topic appeared to be of interest and candidates found the passage accessible, coped very well with the comprehension questions, and answered them in a full and precise manner. As in 2012, the **Translation** was done not so well in relative terms. Performance in the **Directed Writing** was generally good, with very few example of missing bullet points.

The **Listening/Writing** Paper was done very well this year. It concerned a girl discussing the importance of technology in her life and covered such things as mobile phones, e-books, the internet, Skype and Messenger and their advantages and disadvantages, with the follow-up topic based on the same areas of interest. Both sections were well done. Candidates used the Listening stimulus well, and generally rose to the challenge of the topic very well. Candidates also engaged fully with the Writing topic.

The mean marks for each component were as follows, with the marks for 2012 in brackets.

- ◆ Paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing 26.1 out of 45 (26.0)
- ◆ Paper 2: Listening/Writing 19.0 out of 30 (17.8)
- ◆ Paper 3: Speaking 22.1 out of 25 (21.9)

## Areas in which candidates performed well

The entire examination was felt by Markers and Examiners to be accessible to the majority of candidates.

On the whole, candidates answered the **Reading Comprehension** questions well, taking the time to read them carefully before answering. Answers were mainly clear and there was little evidence of candidates trying to translate whole sections of the passage. The passage

was well received and was on a topic of interest to young people. There were practically no examples of candidates missing out answers or not completing the paper. Questions 1, 2a, 2b, 3a and 5a were done exceptionally well.

There were some excellent performances in the **Translation**. It was obvious in these cases that candidates had taken their time to analyse the sections, and had been taught the skills and demands of translation.

In the **Directed Writing**, Markers noted better use of language and fewer errors, and that candidates were well prepared, especially for the more predictable bullet points. Some essays were of a very high standard, with an excellent range of language structures.

The content of the **Listening** paper was of special and real interest to young people, who performed well in this part of the paper. Markers noted that the CD was of good speed and quality, and that the level of language was appropriate to Higher.

Good candidates coped very well with the **Short Essay** topic and were obviously writing about their own experiences and feelings. There was a good response overall, and only a couple of candidates struggled to write more than a few lines. Most candidates addressed all three questions of the stimulus. Some Markers felt that this paper was done better than last year. There were many very good technology essays, with really personal responses and mature opinions expressed. There was virtually no irrelevant material in any essays.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### Reading

Some of the later questions caused problems for some candidates.

- ◆ Question 4b How do the children react to the workshops? *Los niños atienden sin pestañear. Escuchan y asienten.* Answer: 'They pay attention without blinking' OR 'They listen and agree (nod)'. Candidates did not recognise the radical changes of 'atender' and 'asentir' and also confused 'asienten' with sitting down.
- ◆ In Question 6 many candidates could not cope with the word order and passive of *se multiplican las posibilidades* and translated it as 'They multiply the possibilities...'
- ◆ Question 8a 'What does Zelaya say is the most important thing about the project?' *Lo más importante consiste en educarles para que sean útiles a nuestra sociedad* Answer: 'educating them/bringing them up so that they can be useful to society'. Several candidates could not grasp the meaning of *para que sean* and answered as 'teaching them that they are useful'.

Candidates at Higher level must give full and detailed answers to achieve the marks allocated, and lack of detail often leads to candidates losing marks unnecessarily. Although the following questions were answered very well by most candidates, these examples from early in the Reading passage demonstrate where marks were needlessly lost by some:

- ◆ Question 2a 'According to the third paragraph, what was Zelaya's main objective in founding *Fútbol para la Vida*? (1)' *Su objetivo principal era crear equipos y torneos de*

*fútbol infantil y juvenil en los barrios pobres.* 'To create children's and youth teams and tournaments in poor areas.'

- ◆ Question 3a What does Zelaya say about sport in underprivileged areas? (1) *Según dice Zelaya, en barrios desfavorecidos el deporte es un imán para los niños y niñas, y también para los adultos.* 'It's like a magnet for boys and girls and also for adults.'
- ◆ The first point of Question 3b 'What figures does he give to show the success of the programme? (2)' *En estos momentos tenemos más de quince mil niños matriculados en este programa* 'More than 15,000 children (currently) enrolled in the programme'.

At Higher level, all of the above information is required for the mark. In other words, if candidates omit some of the above detail from these answers, eg **tournaments**, **adults** or **more than**, they will not be awarded the mark.

### Translation

This will always pose problems for some candidates and this year proved no exception.

- ◆ In sense unit 1, *El fútbol es vital para aumentar la asistencia a clase* 'asistencia' proved to be a false friend for many, and many candidates wrote 'The football'.
- ◆ In sense unit 2, *Además, consigue que los chicos se porten mejor* 'consigue que' posed problems for some, again perhaps through not recognising its root in conseguir.
- ◆ Sense units 4 and 5 caused most problems. In sense unit 4, *Hasta hemos visto*, many translated hasta as *until*, and many retained the Spanish word order into English 'Even we have seen', which is clearly incorrect. In addition, some candidates did not recognise the irregular past participle 'visto'.
- ◆ In sense unit 5, *que mejoran las notas de los alumnos*, some candidates translated notas as notes.

### Directed Writing

'Last summer, you went on a coach trip to Barcelona along with your Spanish class and teacher'. A disappointing number of candidates used pre-learned material and travelled 'en avión', subsequently losing two marks for bullet point one: 'How you travelled to Spain **and** what you did on the journey'. There were occasions, though not many, where candidates failed to complete the two-part bullet points, thereby incurring the same penalty in bullet point 2 'food and accommodation' and bullet point 3 'How you got on with the people in your group and the Spanish people you met'.

Common grammatical errors in the Directed Writing highlighted by Markers were inconsistent use of the imperfect and preterite tenses; the use of 'ser/estar'; substituting 'era' for 'había'; gender of definite and indefinite articles; the incorrect use of 'por' in past tense for periods of time; adjectival agreement and expressions of time, such as 'last summer', 'in the evenings' and 'on my last day'.

### Listening

All of the earlier questions in the Listening were answered well by most candidates, but Questions 6, 7a, 7b and 9a were more discriminatory and the only ones where the mean mark overall was less than 50%.

- ◆ Question 6 *conozco a un chico que, durante una entrevista de trabajo, empezó a escribir un mensaje*. Here some candidates missed out *started* in their answer and lost the first mark for this question.
- ◆ Question 7a ‘What does Raquel think about her e-book?’ *creo que es el mejor invento del siglo*. Several candidates did not understand ‘best’ and/or ‘century’ and in Question 7b ‘When **exactly** does she use it?’ *lo uso todos los días cuando voy al trabajo en metro* some candidates missed out ‘every day’ in their answer.
- ◆ In Question 9a ‘What does her father use Skype for?’ *mi padre usa Skype para llamar gratis a mi hermano que está estudiando en Dinamarca* surprisingly many candidates did not catch ‘llamar’ and some left ‘Dinamarca’ untranslated.

### Short Essay

Some less able candidates, or candidates who were relying on a pre-learned topic coming up, or who could not cope adequately with basic Spanish structures, struggled with the topic of technology.

## 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 again should make sure that they thoroughly check over their work for **accents, spelling and grammatical accuracy**.
- ◆ Likewise, candidates must ensure that their work is presented as neatly as possible. Marks can be lost if handwriting is illegible.
- ◆ It is recommended that teachers/lecturers share this Report, along with the Marking Instructions and Examination Paper for 2013 and the Writing Criteria for both essays, to demonstrate the amount of detail required for marks in Reading/Listening, the precision required for translation, and the standards required for both Directed Writing and the Short Essay.

### Reading

- ◆ It is important for candidates to read the title and introduction in English, as well as **all** of the questions, before they attempt to answer any of the questions.
- ◆ As demonstrated in the examples above, candidates at Higher level must give full and detailed answers to achieve the marks allocated. Lack of detail often leads to candidates losing marks unnecessarily.
- ◆ It is good to see that candidates are not translating long sections of the Reading passage in their answers, as could be the case in the past. Answers should be detailed but succinct.
- ◆ In both Reading and Listening, candidates are not allowed to give alternative answers, for example by using brackets or an oblique. If one of the answers is incorrect, they will lose the mark, even if the other one is correct.

## Translation

- ◆ In Translation, candidates should be fully aware of the difference between translation and interpretation, and should stick closely to the text and give a precise rendering of it. However, a word-for-word translation could result in an imprecise or awkward rendering of the section, so good English expression and awareness of Spanish word order should also be taken into account.
- ◆ Some candidates struggle with tense recognition in the Translation section. There will always be a variety of tenses in the Translation section, and candidates should be prepared for this. The 2013 Translation included examples of the present, future, present subjunctive and perfect tenses.
- ◆ Candidates must be made aware that the Translation section is worth 10% of the whole examination and must accordingly devote to it an appropriate amount of time and care.
- ◆ An omission of one key word can mean a loss of 2%. Likewise words which are not there should not be added! In Translation, candidates must never give alternatives and will only be rewarded if both options are correct.

## Directed Writing

- ◆ It is important that candidates read the introductory scenario as well as the six bullet points. For example, this year's introduction reads, 'Last summer, you went on a coach trip to Barcelona along with your Spanish class and teacher'. This sentence is vital to the relevance or otherwise of the subsequent bullet points.
- ◆ Candidates must be aware, too, that some bullet points may have two parts to them, as did bullet points 1, 2 and 3 in 2013. For separate clauses, these will be highlighted with the word '**and**' in bold type. To fully address the bullet point, they must deal fully with these two parts. If a bullet point is not fully addressed, there is an automatic penalty of minus 2 marks.
- ◆ Candidates should write a balanced response in the form of a paragraph to each of the six compulsory bullet points, with perhaps a blank line between each one. This gives the essay a sense of structure and balance and makes it easy for the candidate to check that he or she has covered all of the six bullet points.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to use the dictionary only to look up single words to check spelling and gender, and not to create whole new sentences.

## Listening

- ◆ Before listening to the passage, candidates should use the two minutes allocated to study the heading, the questions and the number of marks allocated to them to help anticipate the information that may be required of them.
- ◆ As with Reading, candidates must not give alternative answers, and should put a line through any notes they do not wish to be marked.
- ◆ Candidates must give detail in their answers. Please share with them the Marking Instructions for this and other past papers to show precisely the detail required.

## Short Essay

- ◆ Some 'short' essays are unnecessarily long! Centres should encourage candidates to be more succinct, and try to stick as closely as possible to the upper limit of 150 words for their Short Essay.
- ◆ It is always encouraging to see a variety of tenses being used in the Short Essay.

### **Writing in general**

- ◆ Candidates should use the dictionary sparingly in both the Directed Writing and Short Essay, and only to check the accuracy of what they have written in terms of spelling and grammar.
- ◆ Please encourage candidates to learn, and get into the habit of using, co-ordinating conjunctions, expressions of time, and subordinate clauses, which help to make the language flow.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	1593
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Number of resulted entries in 2013	1645
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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 100				
A	48.9%	48.9%	804	70
B	20.4%	69.3%	336	59
C	15.3%	84.6%	251	49
D	6.0%	90.5%	98	44
No award	9.5%	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.