



External Assessment Report 2010

Subject	Spanish
Level	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 very slight decrease in presentations in 2010 to 1361, compared with 1364 in 2009. A record number of 170 centres presented candidates for Higher Spanish this year. The content of the examination related clearly to the teaching syllabus, as indicated by the prescribed themes and topics for Higher level, and was of an appropriate level of difficulty.

The overall response of candidates was good. There was evidence that they had prepared well for the examination and that they had been well prepared by their teachers/lecturers. 70.9% of candidates achieved a B award or better and 52.2% an A pass, which is really commendable. 85.9% of candidates achieved a Grade A–C, leaving 14.1% with a D or a No Award. 9.1% received a No Award, of whom 74 candidates achieved a mark of less than 40%: a higher than normal figure, indicating that more candidates than usual were presented at an inappropriate level.

However, let us commend the achievements of the vast majority of candidates and their centres.

The Reading text dealt with abandoned towns and villages in rural Spain, and how attempts are being made to bring people back to live in them. Although not a topic many candidates would have experience of, it challenged candidates to think about ways of life and societies other than their own, and most candidates seemed to find the passage and questions very accessible.

Candidates coped well with Translation, which included three different tenses. The Directed Writing was generally well done, with less evidence, compared with last year, of missed or incomplete bullet points. The Listening topic centred on a girl speaking about her plan for the future and the importance of money in her life, with the follow-up Writing topic based on the same two topics. Both sections were generally well done. There was virtually no evidence of partly irrelevant or totally irrelevant essays.

The mean marks for each component were as follows, with the marks for 2009 in brackets.

- ◆ Paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing 27.7 out of 45 (27.3)
- ◆ Paper 2: Listening/Writing 18.5 out of 30 (21.3)
- ◆ Speaking: 21.9 out of 25 (21.5)

The marks for Reading and Speaking were very similar to 2009, whereas Paper 2 proved more difficult but similar to 2008. After due consideration, the grade boundaries were set at 49% for a C, 59% for a B, and 69% for an A, with the upper A pass set at 84%.

Areas in which candidates performed well

The majority of candidates responded well to what was considered by all Markers to be a very fair paper. Markers commented favourably on the questions for both papers, which

were clearly worded, and on the comprehensive marking keys, which were clear and very fair to candidates.

Performance in Reading was generally very good, with very few candidates scoring less than half marks. Able candidates, of whom there were many, produced well written, detailed answers, and showed good command of English and a sound understanding of the passage. Almost all candidates attempted all questions, with a fairly good overall degree of success. It was good to see that most candidates were answering the questions and not just trying to translate large sections of the passage.

The Translation section also met with a fair degree of success, with most candidates passing it comfortably. Candidates were on the whole careful with tenses and grammatical detail. There were many very good and good performances in the Directed Writing, and most candidates addressed the topic fully and in a fairly structured way.

The overall response to the Listening section was good. Markers noted the two Spaniards' clear delivery of the conversation, which was very fair and accessible. The Writing topic was considered very fair, and candidates consequently related well to it and addressed both questions in a sound and balanced way.

Areas which candidates found demanding

As stated previously, most candidates responded well to all components of the paper.

In Reading and Translation, poor English expression, writing skills, dictionary misuse and lack of attention to detail led to a loss of marks for some candidates. Some vocabulary caused difficulty for candidates, such as *tener ganas de*, *artesanías*, *eventuales* and *contaminación*.

In Question 1, *los únicos seres* was translated as unique beings; in Question 2 *el campo español* was translated as 'the Spanish field' or 'the Spanish camp'. *Maestro* was mistranslated as 'masters' and 'experts', and so on.

Question 8b, the final question in Reading, was found to be very difficult by many candidates. For the first point, *Es algo diferente sembrar una planta en una maceta que vivir de la agricultura*, many candidates chose 'scatter' for *sembrar* as it was the first meaning given by the dictionary, and hence lost the mark. For the second point, *Si no sabes la diferencia entre un gallo y una gallina, terminarás ordeñando al toro*, there were many and varied renderings, such as 'if you do not know the difference in a cock and a chicken, you'll stop in a computer and a bull'. However, some candidates answered this question well, showing flair and common sense.

In the Translation section, again generally well done, the *hace poco of me divorcié hace poco* caused problems for some, as did *nos encantaría vivir, somos amantes de la naturaleza* and *tenemos muchas ganas de*.

The Directed Writing was generally well done. Most candidates covered the six bullet points, of which two were double bullet points, very well. However, there were still candidates not

addressing or partially addressing the bullets, resulting in a two-mark penalty each time. The last bullet point in particular, 'What you enjoyed or did not enjoy about the experience', was the one which caused most problems, with candidates simply writing that they would recommend the experience, using some memorised material.

Bullet point 2 was not always fully addressed, with candidates omitting to say where the hotel was. Candidates were often careless with basic grammar — verbs, adjectives, agreements, and so on — in Directed Writing, with quite a number for example rendering a Scottish family as *una familia escocés*.

The Listening too was generally done well. Perhaps surprisingly, many candidates however failed to understand *peluquera* in Question 2 (a), which led to their not getting *peinar a mis muñecas* in Question 2 (b).

In Question 5 (a), 'What did they mention in the television programme about her chosen career? Mention **two** things. *Explicaron en qué consiste el trabajo, cuánto dinero ganan, y cuáles son las mejores universidades para estudiar derecho.*' A lack of detail meant that candidates were giving partial answers and not being awarded the marks, for example by writing 'about the job', 'the money', 'the universities for studying law', or 'the best universities'.

In Paper 2, excessive length in the essays, at times two to three pages, meant a deterioration in the accuracy of the language and a lack of control. In writing too much, candidates tended to end up writing nonsense, especially when attempting complex structures.

There was more evidence this year than usual of some candidates not being able to address a relatively predictable topic, such as this one on future plans, and who merely gave more emphasis to incorrect content rather than grammatical accuracy, with reference in particular to verbs, tenses, agreements, noun/verb, noun/adjective, spelling, and accents. There were a number of candidates this year whose marks were so low for Paper 2 (eg 4 out of 30) that it would seem very difficult to justify their presentation at this level. For these candidates, it was not simply a case of finding the Listening difficult: their essays were riddled with serious error to the point where there was no complete phrase correct.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Reading and Translation

For the Reading exercise, candidates should be aware that there are many mechanisms in the passage to help them with the exercise — 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. Also, answers will always appear in the passage in chronological order.

Please discourage candidates from translating long sections of the passage, as this is a waste of their valuable time and can lead to their bringing at times contradictory information into their answers.

Please stress to candidates that they 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.

Candidates should be encouraged to make sure that their answers make sense in English. They must try to avoid dictionary overuse, leading to literal translation of ideas which will not always make sense. If an answer does not make sense to the candidate, it will not make any sense to a Marker.

Candidates must be aware that the Translation section, although short, is worth 10% of the examination, and that an appropriate amount of time — perhaps about 10 minutes — must be spent on it. They 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! It should be made clear to candidates that a clear, precise translation of the section should be given, and that it is a totally different exercise from the Reading questions.

Candidates should be encouraged to attempt the Translation section after completing the Reading Comprehension, as this will give them a better idea as to the content of the Translation.

Directed Writing

It is important that candidates read the **introductory scenario** as well as the six bullet points, being aware too that some bullet points may have two parts to them, as did bullet points 1 and 2 in 2010. 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, then there is an automatic two-mark penalty.

Candidates should read the bullet points more carefully. The impression is sometimes conveyed that candidates see a word in a bullet point, eg 'recommend', then simply write something they have learned by heart, without careful reading of the whole bullet point. This was very much the case with bullet point 6 in 2010. While it is appropriate for candidates to use learned material, they should be discouraged from reproducing it unaltered. They must carefully address the requirements of each specific bullet point, which will of course vary from year to year.

Listening and Writing

Before listening to the recording, candidates should study the questions and the marks allocated to them to help anticipate the type of information that may be required of them.

Please ask candidates to put a line through any notes they do not wish to be marked for the Listening exercise.

Please stress to candidates that they 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.

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.

If there are two questions asked in the Short Essay stimulus, both of these must be addressed. Otherwise a penalty of one pegged mark, two per cent, will be deducted.

Writing in general

It would be a worthwhile learning exercise to share the extended Grade Related Criteria for Writing for the Directed Writing and the Short Essay with candidates, so that they can understand what is expected of them in terms of content, accuracy, range and variety.

In addition, exemplification of unsatisfactory, satisfactory, good and very good essays, with descriptors based on the extended pegged marked descriptors, can be downloaded from the SQA secure website. It would be worthwhile to share one or two of the better essays here with candidates to show them what is required to produce a good essay.

General comments

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.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2009	1364
Number of resulted entries in 2010	1361

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	52.2%	52.2%	710	69
B	18.7%	70.9%	255	59
C	15.0%	85.9%	204	49
D	5.0%	90.9%	68	44
No award	9.1%	100.0%	124	—

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, therefore, SQA 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 Head of Service 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.