



External Assessment Report 2009

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| 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

This year there was a slight increase in presentations from 1,328 in 2008 to **1,335** in 2009. The content of the examination related clearly to the teaching syllabus as outlined in the prescribed themes and topics at Higher level. More than half of all candidates, 722 to be precise, achieved an A award, with 18.6% or almost a fifth of candidates receiving an upper A, a fine achievement indicating very well prepared and able candidates. Both candidates and centres should be justly proud of their achievements overall at Higher Spanish. Some 77% of candidates achieved a B pass or better, 89.7% of candidates received a Grade A-C and 10.3% a Grade D or No Award. Some 45 candidates scored less than 40% in the examination.

The Reading passage dealt with car accidents involving young people in Spain and some of the initiatives being taken to help prevent them in the future. The passage was very accessible and candidates on the whole dealt well with the ideas behind the article and the questions therein. Questions were clearly worded, marking schemes clear and markers commented on the fairness to candidates of these. Candidates generally coped well with the Translation section. The Directed Writing was well done although some candidates did not address bullet points one and six fully. The Listening topic centred on a girl's very busy life and how she copes with stress. Again candidates on the whole related well to this, answered the questions well and coped with the short essay which was more or less their personal slant on the same topic.

The mean marks for each component were as follows, with the marks for 2008 in brackets;

Paper 1 Reading and Directed Writing 27.3 (26.3),

Paper 2 Listening Writing 21.3 (17.4)

Speaking 21.5 (21.3)

This means an average mark in 2009 of 70.1% for the examination, indicating a very able well prepared cohort. These marks were higher-especially for Paper2- than in 2008 but on a par with 2007. The grade boundaries were set at 50% for a C, 60% for a B, 70% for an A and 85% for an upper A.

Areas in which candidates performed well

On the whole, candidates generally performed well in all components of the exam, as demonstrated by the very high percentage gaining a B pass or better. There were some excellent performances in Reading which is very encouraging, with less evidence of dictionary misuse or candidates' awkward use of English through word for word translation. Candidates coped well with the ideas and vocabulary of the passage. The Translation on the whole was done reasonably well, although the average mark was a comparatively low 4.8 out of 10. Given that the translation is worth 10% of the whole exam, centres should spend time preparing candidates in translation skills, and stress on them the need to provide an accurate and precise translation- as opposed to a loose comprehension or paraphrasing- of this short section of the passage. Few candidates scored full marks for the translation yet there were some good renderings of particular sense units. The Directed Writing was generally well done with the average mark more than 9 out of 15. There were many Very Good performances with candidates producing well-structured, accurate pieces of writing containing an excellent range and variety of language structures. The Listening test and ensuing short essay on the topic of stress were very well done and the marks for this section were higher than in 2008 but almost identical to 2007. The average mark for Listening was a high 15/20 and candidates coped well with the short essay with an average score of 6/10. In Good and Very Good short essays, markers were impressed by the range of verbs and verb forms used, the range of vocabulary, idiomatic expressions, use of conjunctions and generally candidates addressing the topic fully.

Candidates who took their time to study the questions in the reading and give detail in their answers, who were cautious and precise with the Translation, and who read both the scenario and bullet points carefully for the Directed Writing did very well in Paper 1. Likewise, candidates who read the questions for the Listening and took time to study the short response essay topic performed well and wrote well structured and balanced essays. There were practically no examples of irrelevant essays.

Areas which candidates found demanding

For the most part, candidates coped admirably with all parts of the examination, and proved to be an able and well prepared cohort.

In Reading, questions 3, 6a, 7b, 8a and 9a proved to be the most challenging, the main reason being candidates' failure to give full and detailed answers. In 3a, poor translation/comprehension of **falta de... destreza al volante**, was rendered as **"lack of steering wheel skill"** and **su comportamiento de alto riesgo** as **"performance of high risk"** or **"high risk and behaviour"** and examples such as these lost candidates points in this question. In 6a, again poor English expression led to candidates losing marks. In question 6^a, which read, **According to Flor, what are the two main messages of her blog "Quiero conducir, quiero vivir"?** Flor says **"Cada día en mi blog, lucho en Internet para que todos conduzcamos con responsabilidad y seamos conscientes de los peligros de la carretera."** This was rendered inaccurately by **"all drivers have responsibilities"** or **"fights for all who drive responsibly"** and the second part by **show the consequences of the dangers of driving or raise consciousness of the dangers of the road**. In 7b, again inaccurate comprehension/expression let down many candidates **está demostrado que el consumo de alcohol afecta mucho más a los conductores jóvenes que a los mayores**. Many candidates translated this as **it affects much more younger drivers than older drivers**. In Q.8a not enough detail was given by some candidates, despite the prompt in the question **"Give details"**. And in question 9a, again candidates while understanding the idea of the designated driver, did not fully explain it as **"one of a group (of friends) who agrees not to drink and takes his friends home safely**. In all of these answers, the average mark scored for each answer was around 50% and as demonstrated by the last example this was often due to lack of detail and precision in the answers. In saying this, it should be noted that the mean mark for the reading section out of 20 was relatively high and candidates should be congratulated on a generally mature response to the questions.

In the translation section, some marks are being needlessly thrown away by lack of precision and accuracy. The first sense group provided many examples of this e.g. **Para los muchos miles de jóvenes** was rendered as **"for the many millions of young people"**, **"for the thousands of young people"**, **"for hundreds of young people"** and **"for a lot of young people"** **que empiezan a conducir cada año** in the same sense group was translated as **"who learn to drive"** and **"who drive"**. This first sense group and sense group 4 which read **tenemos que acabar con esta tragedia y lo haremos** proved to be the most testing.

In the Directed Writing it was disappointing to see that some candidates did not address bullet points 1 **"where exactly in Spain you went and when"** and bullet point 6 **"whether you would recommend holidaying in Spain with friends/family"**. This was due largely to candidates not reading these properly. For candidates with bullet point 1 not to mention a town or resort or area of Spain or a point of the compass and thus lose 2 marks is very careless. This was previously highlighted in the 2005 Spanish PA Report thus **"However, a remarkable number of candidates lost bullet point one, "where exactly you went", by saying simply Fui a España."**

No real issues presented themselves with the Listening exercise, but markers did highlight at times in the short essays the poor use of infinitives, misuse of dictionary, poor control of accents and other tongue interference.

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.
- Candidates should take their time to study the questions in the reading and give detail in their answers, and be cautious and precise with the Translation
- Candidates should be encouraged to give detail in their answers and not to write anything which does not make sense.
- It would be worthwhile to share marking instructions with candidates to show them how answers are acceptable or unacceptable.
- 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. By all means use the dictionary, then stop and think about what the sentence really means in plain English.
- Candidates must be aware that the Translation section, although short, is worth 10% of the examination and that an appropriate amount of time – at least 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.

Directed Writing

- It is vital 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. 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.
- Candidates should read the bullet points more carefully. The impression is sometimes conveyed that candidates see a word in a bullet point e.g. “recommend” then simply write something they have learned by heart, without careful reading of the whole bullet point. While it is appropriate for candidates to use learned material, they should be discouraged from reproducing it unaltered. They must address the requirements of each specific bullet point, which will of course vary from year to year.
- Candidates should be advised to use the dictionary only to check for accuracy in spelling and accents and not to make invent new sentences in Spanish.

Listening /Writing

- Please ask candidates to score out any notes they do not wish to be marked for the Listening exercise.
- 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.
- Again candidates should be advised to use the dictionary only to check for accuracy in spelling and accents and not to make invent new sentences in Spanish.

Writing in general

It would be a worthwhile learning exercise to share the Extended GRC for Writing for the Directed Writing and the Short Essay with candidates. 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 and 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. It was again noted by some markers that candidates’ spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting made marking a more difficult task than would have been the case had more care and attention been paid to these areas.

Statistical information: update on Courses

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| Number of resulted entries in 2008 | 1327 |
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| Number of resulted entries in 2009 | 1364 |
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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 | 53.2% | 53.2% | 726 | 70 |
| B | 22.8% | 76.0% | 311 | 60 |
| C | 12.1% | 88.1% | 165 | 50 |
| D | 4.5% | 92.7% | 62 | 45 |
| No award | 7.3% | 100.0% | 100 | - |

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.