



External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Spanish
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

The statistics used in this report are prior to the outcome of any Post Results Services requests

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 has remained fairly steady despite a slight decrease this year from 248 in 2013 to 239.

There were 12 new centres presenting in 2014 and 10 returning centres.

There were no significant setting issues for the 2014 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 a very good average mark of 37.8 out of 50.

Folio

A reasonable range of texts and topics were attempted and candidates performed slightly better in this component as compared to last year, averaging a score of 17.9 out of 30, an increase of 0.7 of a mark.

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 the transfer of unwanted electronic goods from Europe to Africa.

It was gratifying to note that more candidates tended to perform better in the inferential question this year. Nevertheless, as in previous years, 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, candidates appeared to do better in Part B than in Part A.

In Discursive Writing, the standard was comparable to that in 2013, although a fair number of candidates scored only a maximum mark of 16 as a result of not addressing the question fully and relying instead on the reproduction of learned material.

The Examining Team was satisfied to observe that **all** essay titles were attempted, the most popular choices being Question 1 on the influence of TV, internet, friends and advertising on young people; Question 3 on closing parts of the city to traffic; and Question 5 on new family structures.

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 tackled more successfully than background topics. The best essays had a question/title that 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, two aspects of the same character, or some analysis of poetry. Essays that stood out from the others were those which were well structured, displayed a good level of English, and provided 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 2, 3, and 5, providing detailed and accurate responses.

Question 6, the inferential question, was also fairly well done, with the some candidates providing a good balance in their answers between the writer's standpoint and the techniques used to substantiate this. Sense units 2 and 8 in the Translation section seemed more accessible than the others to this year's 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 Question 1 and in Part B, Questions 1, 2, 3 and 6 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 chose to write on *la revolución familiar*, and those who **fully** addressed the titles on 'what influences young people most' and 'traffic exclusion zones', came up with

interesting and original ideas. Some very good pieces were written by the fairly small number of candidates who chose to write about an independent Scotland within the European Union. There were also some well structured essays on the connection between travel and racism.

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

Areas which candidates found demanding

Speaking

Despite this being the skill area where candidates generally do well, some still have difficulty in manipulating and adapting learned material to cope with questions they are asked.

Folio

Many candidates still find it difficult to select a title or essay question which generates debate or critical analysis appropriate to Advanced Higher level. A small number provided no title at all. Titles are sometimes over-ambitious or too general. There continues to be a large number of candidates who adopt an obvious approach which 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. Candidates should avoid making sweeping generalisations or assertions without evidence to support the argument.

Paper I Reading and Translation

General

In the Reading passage, candidates experienced some difficulty by not checking the dictionary for the meaning of 'false friends' like *residuos* and *pilas*.

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 their poor English. Some answers, like those for Question 4, 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 which reinforced his standpoint, eg use of rhetorical questions, statistics, the irony of *donaciones* etc.

Disappointing performances in this question were characterised by poor English.

Translation

Sense units 1, 5, 6 and 9 in particular were found to be demanding by candidates.

Unit 1: translation of the passive was generally not well done with *se consumen* often mistranslated as 'they consume' or 'they consumed'.

Units 5 and 6: there were problems with the superlatives *los países más ricos y poderosos* and *los países más pobres*. A large number of candidates failed to achieve 2 marks for each of these.

Unit 9: *brecha* was mistranslated as 'breach', and a number of candidates missed translating the word *objetivo*.

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

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening Part A

Question 2 in this section presented candidates with problems as they did not provide sufficient detail in their answers, either by not picking up on *casos urgentes* or by mistranslating *menores de edad* as 'minorities', 'infants' or 'younger generation'. In Question 3, an insufficient knowledge of numbers was a problem with *500 millones* posing difficulties. In Question 4, many lost a mark by confusing *Suecia* with *Suiza* and writing Switzerland incorrectly in their answer. Some candidates also wrote Australia for Austria.

Listening Part B

Questions 4(a), 5 and 7 caused difficulties for candidates.

In Question 4(a), many had problems with the number 1800.

In Question 5(a) some candidates failing to identify the number 710.

For Question 5(b), few candidates gained the mark as they misunderstood *que paguen sus embajadas o países de origen* and rendered this as 'go back to their country of origin'.

In Question 7, a fair number of candidates did not recognise the term 'IVA' as VAT for the second mark.

Discursive Writing

A fair number of essays exceeded the word limit. Although there is no penalty for doing this, overlong essays tend to be self-penalising with candidates making basic errors, especially towards the end, perhaps as they felt they were running out of time.

As in previous years, candidates ran into difficulties when going beyond prepared material and this led on occasion to them not fully addressing the question.

In essays this year, there was some unidiomatic translation from English into Spanish, and poor control of tenses/verbs as well as misuse of parts of the verb *Gustar*. Other major

errors related to poor control of *Ser* and *Estar*, and missed opportunities to include the subjunctive mood when required, eg after *No creo que ...* or *Es importante que ...* etc.

The word *Aunque* was quite often used to begin a sentence when *Sin embargo* would have been more appropriate. Similarly *porque* was used instead of *a causa de* and there was confusion over the use of *influir*, *influye* and *influencia*, especially in Question 1.

Mistakes relating to adjectival agreement, genders of nouns like *tema/sistema/planeta* and *problema*, and the omission of pronouns were also apparent in performances in Discursive Writing this year. Misuse of the dictionary was evident in the essays which achieved Satisfactory or less. There was occasional other-tongue interference (mostly from French).

Negative expressions eg *tampoco*, *sino* etc were not used appropriately.

Essays that were repetitive rarely did better than Satisfactory.

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 that 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, but should generate a discursive/evaluative approach. Try to avoid obvious titles like eg Oppression in *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*, The Comic and the Tragic in *El Coronel No*

Tiene Quien Le Escriba, Magical Realism and Emotions in *Como Agua Para Chocolate* and Disobedience in *Laberinto del Fauno*, all of which tend to lead to a one-sided argument and/or predictable conclusion.

It would be advisable to offer candidates from the same centre a choice of essay titles to ensure more individual responses if they are studying the same text or background topic.

For the ERV Unit, either try to encourage candidates to study **two** literary texts or to tackle their background topic in a manner which provides less focus on information and more on evaluation. The approach to each Folio piece/essay needs to reflect a level of demand appropriate to Advanced Higher.

Candidates should be advised against tackling background topics where they make sweeping generalisations which are not substantiated and with no reference to source.

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.

Conclusions to essays should be given a lot of attention. A weak or poorly articulated conclusion may mean the difference between a Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory performance.

Centres are reminded that candidates who submit two essays on the **same** literary text will be awarded zero for one of the pieces.

Many of the Folio pieces would benefit from the inclusion of more quotations **in Spanish** to support the arguments being developed. English translations of quotations are not required. Quotations from a literary text which are **solely in English** could detract from the content and may even lead to the candidate being awarded zero if it is felt he/she has not read the text in Spanish.

Candidates should develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies overall, eg 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 an understanding of what is meant by an 'analytical' approach.

Paper I Reading and Translation

General

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. Good answers to the 2014 question provided a good balance between identifying the writer's standpoint and the techniques he/she used to exemplify this. 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 the use of passive constructions as well as 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 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.

More focus on subjunctive expressions (eg *que paguen ...* (Question 5 (b)) may be helpful to candidates.

It may be a good idea to suggest to candidates to 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 that 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' above).

Ensure candidates address the question at all times and do not reproduce a well-rehearsed essay that may not be entirely relevant. Candidates should address all aspects of the title and remain within the word limit.

Encourage candidates to avoid high-frequency language and to 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 2013	248
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	239
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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	32.2%	32.2%	77	139
B	25.5%	57.7%	61	118
C	24.7%	82.4%	59	98
D	8.8%	91.2%	21	88
No award	8.8%	-	21	-

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.