



## External Assessment Report 2014

Subject(s)	Spanish
Level(s)	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

There was a substantial increase in the number of candidates from 1645 in 2013 to 1880 in 2014.

This year's **Reading** passage dealt with people being made redundant in Spain, and more specifically with the story of three of these people who had successfully set up businesses of their own. The **Directed Writing** was based on a house exchange with a Spanish family. The **Listening** topic centred on friendship, the importance of friends, and the value or otherwise of online friends. The **Short Essay** focused on this same topic, what makes a good friend, and whether online social networks are a good way of making friends. The examination clearly reflected the prescribed themes of lifestyles, education and work and the wider world and the related topics therein.

The majority of candidates responded well to all parts of the paper and attainment was generally very high. The mean marks for each component, with the 2013 marks in brackets, were:

Reading and Directed Writing 25.7 out of 45 (26.1)

Listening/Writing 19.7 out of 30 (19.0)

Speaking 22.5 out of 25 (22.1)

## Areas in which candidates performed well

The vast majority of candidates responded well to what was considered by Markers to be a very fair yet demanding paper. Markers commented that both the Reading and Directed Writing Paper and the Listening/Writing paper were pitched at the right level and allowed candidates to perform to their full potential.

The **Reading Comprehension** was generally well done, with candidates relating well to a current topic and providing good detailed answers. There were very few examples of candidates scoring less than half marks, and it was encouraging to see candidates giving detailed yet succinct answers without resorting to translating large sections of the text. Most candidates got off to a good solid start and handled Questions 1, 2(a), 2(b) and 3(a) well. Questions 4(a), 6 and 7(a), and 7(b) were also generally done well. None of the other questions were non-functioning.

There were some very good renderings of the **Translation** section which proved to be quite difficult for many candidates yet was a good discriminatory item. Sense units 2, 3 and 4 were on the whole done well.

The response to the **Directed Writing** was on the whole good. Markers commented that there were many examples of Good essays but perhaps fewer Very Good ones this year. The level of language was generally very good, and candidates were well prepared and

coped with most of the scenario. Very few candidates incurred penalties for omitted bullet points, and the scenario was generally well addressed.

The **Listening** section proved to be very accessible, and the overall performance was very pleasing with an average mark of 13 out of 20. None of the questions caused an inordinate amount of difficulty.

The **Short Essay** topic of friendship with the social network perspective was considered to be a good one and engaged candidates fully. Markers noted that there were some excellent essays. Most candidates covered the three questions of the topic fully, with varying degrees of accuracy and success. Many candidates made good use of the vocabulary, structures and ideas of the listening stimulus.

Overall, candidates who took 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 this paper. Likewise, candidates who studied in advance the questions for the **Listening** and took time to study the **Short Essay** topic performed well and wrote well structured and balanced essays. There were practically no examples of irrelevant essays.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

### Reading

The following questions posed problems for just more than half of the candidates, mainly through candidates not providing enough detail in their answers.

Question 3(b) answer: '(She knows) they did/trying everything to save the factory.' Many candidates missed out the 'everything' or 'all they could' of *lo intentaron todo por salvar la fábrica*.

Question 5(a) answer: 'He (found out) they were closing a baker shop (through retirement) and he bought it.' *Me enteré de que cerraban una panadería por jubilación ... y la compré*. Some candidates only wrote that he worked in a baker shop.

Question 5(b) answer: 'the fight for survival' *la lucha por la supervivencia*. This was rendered by some simply as 'survival', omitting 'fight for'.

Question 7(b) answer: 'He can see life passing by in the street. Before he could only see life/time passing.' *En mi trabajo de taxista, veo la vida pasar en la calle. Antes en la fábrica solo veía pasar el tiempo*. Some candidates failed to understand the comparison being made here. However, more testing items are to be expected at Higher level.

### Translation

As in previous years, the **Translation** section proved to be very testing for many candidates. In sense units 1 and 5 the stressed preterites *me puse* and *hubo* were not recognised by many candidates. Likewise the word order of sense unit 3 *Pasaban los meses* confused a lot of candidates. In sense unit 4 *Hice un curso de instalación de alarmas y otro de informática* many candidates translated *hice* as 'I made' and *un curso de instalación de alarmas y otro*

*de informática* as ‘a course on installing alarms and other IT’ instead of ‘and another on IT’. Sense unit 2 *pero desgraciadamente sin éxito* also caused issues for some.

## Directed Writing

Some candidates were too intent on writing a well-rehearsed **Directed Writing** essay without mentioning the idea of this year's scenario of a house exchange. As ever, the more predictable bullet points were handled well, whereas with the less predictable bullet points there can be a tendency to try to translate directly from English.

The main problem areas for many are accuracy of verbs and tenses as well as agreement of adjectives. The best essays were done by candidates whose work showed good structure, were succinct and accurate, and were not over-elaborate. For bullet point 2 ‘Where the house was situated **and** what it was like in comparison to your own’, some candidates did not address the second part of the bullet point.

The last bullet point of the **Directed Writing** can cause issues in that candidates will often merely write a pre-learned paragraph of recommendation without directly addressing the demands of that bullet.

## Listening

In Question 1 (b) some candidates did not recognise *alquilar*. In Question 6(a) *la sinceridad* also caused problems for some.

Some candidates did not give the detailed required at Higher, eg Question 3(a) *es bastante serio* missing out ‘quite’ or ‘rather’. Question 3(b) *es la persona más comprensiva* omitting ‘the most’, and Question 4(a) *Marisa es muy divertida* missing out ‘very’. It should be stressed to candidates that, at Higher level, accuracy and detail are required in their answers.

Only in Question 8 did candidates overall gain less than half marks — *muchos usuarios de las redes sociales tienen listas interminables de amigos, pero solo conocen realmente a unos pocos*. Here again many candidates failed to give enough detail in their answers to gain the 2 marks from a possible 3 — *they have long lists of friends/they only really know a few of them/it's not a true friendship*.

## Short Essay

Markers highlighted at times in the **Short Essays** the poor use of tenses and infinitives, misuse of dictionary, confusion between *ser* and *estar*, poor plural and adjectival agreement, and a lack of control of accents and other tongue interference. In addition, some of the **Short Essays** were unnecessarily long, resulting in serious errors.

# Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

## 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 in relation to **accents, spelling and grammatical accuracy**.

## Reading

Candidates should be aware that there are many mechanisms in the passage to help them — the introduction in English, 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.

It is important for candidates to read the introduction in English and the title, 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.

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

Candidates should be encouraged to make sure that their answers make sense in English

## Translation

It is of key importance that centres share with their candidates the strategies of translation, such as tense recognition, word order, the proper use of a dictionary.

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 that are not there should not be added! In Translation, candidates must never give alternatives — if they do, they will only be rewarded if both options are correct.

Candidates should carefully look at every word in the Translation and pay particular attention to the tenses and structures. It should be made clear to candidates that a clear, precise translation of the section should be given.

## Directed Writing

It is important that candidates carefully read both 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, 2 and 5 in 2014. These will be highlighted with the word '**and**' in bold type. To fully address the bullet point, candidates must deal with these two parts. If a bullet point is not fully addressed, there is an automatic penalty of minus 2 marks.

A good essay will demonstrate accurate handling of all aspects of grammar, spelling and accents, as well as a variety of tenses, adjectives, adverbs and prepositional phrases and coordinating conjunctions.

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

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.

## Short Essay

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 three questions are asked in the Short Essay stimulus, at least two of these must be addressed. Otherwise, a penalty of one pegged mark, 2%, will be deducted.

## Writing in general

It would be a worthwhile learning exercise to share the Extended Grade Related Criteria for Directed Writing and the Short Essay with candidates, so that they are aware of what is expected of them in terms of **Content, Accuracy, Variety** and **Range**.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2013	1645
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Number of resulted entries in 2014	1880
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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	49.0%	49.0%	921	70
B	22.2%	71.2%	417	59
C	15.1%	86.3%	284	49
D	5.2%	91.4%	97	44
No award	8.6%	-	161	-

## 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.