



External Assessment Report 2015

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

In this the dual running year of the current and new Higher, there were 926 presentations in the former, down from 1880 in 2014. However the total presentation for both Higher exams in 2015 was up by more than 500 on 2014.

The examination clearly reflected the prescribed themes of lifestyles, education and work, and the wider world and the related topics.

This year's **Reading** passage dealt with how you can use social networking sites to find cheaper holiday accommodation and travel. The **Directed Writing** centred on a two-month working holiday in a hotel on the coast of Spain. The **Listening** topic focused on Belén and her views on living in Zaragoza, and the **Short Essay** asked candidates about where they lived, the advantages and disadvantages of living there and where they would like to live in the future.

The mean marks for each component (with the 2014 marks in brackets) were:

- ◆ Reading and Directed Writing 26.5 out of 45 (25.7)
- ◆ Listening Writing 19.6 out of 30 (19.7)
- ◆ Speaking 22.6 out of 25 (22.5)

These figures, remarkably similar over the past two years, and indeed over the past four, are indicative of an examination that has been set at an appropriate level of difficulty and a cohort which is able and has been taught well.

The majority of candidates responded well to all parts of the paper. Attainment was generally very high and the paper was very well received by centres and markers alike. There were no contentious areas in the exam, and the grade boundaries for a C and B were accordingly set at 50% and 60% respectively, and 70% and 85% for an A and Upper A.

72.4% of candidates achieved grade B or better, and 50.4% or 467 candidates achieved grade A. 165 candidates achieved an upper A — a really commendable figure. One candidate scored 100% in the examination. 13.2% of candidates were awarded a C, 4.4% a D, and 10% — or 93 out of 926 candidates — received no award.

Areas in which candidates performed well

The vast majority of candidates responded well to what was considered by markers to be a fair paper that allowed challenge for more able, better prepared candidates, as well as allowing practically all candidates to achieve something. Markers commented positively on the questions for both papers, which were clearly worded, and the detailed marking instructions.

The **Reading Comprehension** was generally well done with candidates responding well to an interesting and engaging topic and providing good detailed answers. Very few candidates scored less than half marks. Questions 2, 3, 5(a), 6(a) and 7 were done particularly well. Almost all candidates attempted all questions with a fairly good overall degree of success. It was encouraging to see that most candidates were answering the questions and not trying to just translate large sections of the passage.

The **Translation** section was challenging as is always the case and allowed differentiation of candidates. There were some excellent renderings. Those who were able to identify subject and object pronouns did this very well. It is obvious to markers which centres teach translation as a distinct skill and not as just another part of the Comprehension.

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. There were fewer than ever incomplete or missed bullet points. Most candidates handled the two double bullet points well. Irrelevant or partly irrelevant essays were not an issue this year.

The overall response to the **Listening** was very good. The topic of Belén talking about her home town was well received by candidates with an average mark of 14 out of 20. Markers commented on the clear delivery of the conversation by the two Spaniards, which was very fair and pitched at the right speed.

The **Short Essay** was also done well, with an average score of over 6 out of 10. All pieces of writing addressed the topic. There were no irrelevant essays and only the odd partially-irrelevant essay. Most candidates had well structured essays of three paragraphs, each addressing one of the three questions of the stimulus. Many candidates had learned good, idiomatic phrases and fitted them in well. Some pieces of writing were 'sin palabras', sophisticated and very accurate.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Most candidates performed well in all parts of the papers, a reflection on their ability and on how well they themselves have prepared and been prepared by their centres for the examination. The entire examination was felt by markers and examiners to be accessible to the majority of candidates.

In **Reading**, question 1(b) caused problems for some with candidates translating *enseñar* as 'teach' instead of 'show' in *enseñas tu ciudad a un australiano*.

In question 8 candidates lacked detail in their answers, thus negating the mark. For instance in question 8(a) Other options are available to people who are not home owners. What example does the article give? ...*como por ejemplo cuidar de la casa y las mascotas en ausencia de los dueños cuando ellos quieren marcharse de casa*. All of this detail is required for the mark here. There was also mistranslation of *mascotas*. 8(b) How does Robert Martin benefit from this arrangement...? *Deja a sus tres gatos y su perro en su propia casa y en manos de alguien de fiar*. Again all of this detail ('He leaves his cat and dog in their own home in the hands of someone trustworthy') is required for the mark. There was the mistranslation of *propia* as 'clean'. And in 8(c) *parejas de jubilados amantes de los animales* was often translated as a pair of retired people or pairs of retired people.

Candidates should 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 — should be spent on it. Candidates 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. Some candidates only received 2 marks for the Translation and that by getting the first sense unit correct *Es una experiencia bastante social*.

In the next two sense units *Normalmente vamos a buscarles al aeropuerto* and *les invitamos a cenar y les enseñamos la zona*, many candidates did not recognise the first person plural of the present tense nor the pronoun *les*. *La zona* was translated by many as the zone, losing two marks.

In sense unit 4 *A la vuelta, son ellos quienes nos preparan algo de cena*, ‘a la vuelta’ proved difficult and again the third person plural of the verb was not recognised. However, as always the Translation proved to be a discriminating factor between candidates and there were some excellent renderings of it.

Common grammatical errors in the **Directed Writing** outlined by markers were the incorrect use of *ser/estar*, substituting *era* for *había*, inconsistent use of the imperfect and preterite tenses, gender of definite and indefinite articles, adjectival agreement and expressions of time and the inconsistent use of accents.

In the **Listening**, two questions proved more challenging for candidates. Only a quarter of candidates were able to identify in question 1(b) the number *alrededor de setecientos mil* for the population of Zaragoza; and in question 4(b) ‘What really annoys Belén? Mention any one thing’, candidates were not specific enough in the answer *Hay gente que tira papeles y chicles al suelo (en vez de echarlos a una papelera)*.

Sometimes a minimalist approach to answers meant that candidates lost marks, their answers lacking detail. For example, in question 6 ‘What does Belén say about having coffee with friends?’ *Me ayuda a relajarme, a desconectar por completo del trabajo y a hablar de los planes para el fin de semana*. Here the verbs ‘helps her relax’, ‘switch off from work’, and ‘they talk about plans for the weekend’ are required (2 from 3). It should be stressed to candidates that, at Higher level, detail is required in their answers.

Some **Short Essays** are unnecessarily long and there were many examples of candidates greatly exceeding the word count, more often than not sacrificing accuracy for length. Candidates should be encouraged to be more succinct, and to try to stick as closely as possible to the upper limit of 150 words for their Short Essay.

Grammatical accuracy is very important in the Short Essay and at times candidates did not look out for verb tenses, gender agreement, spelling and lack of accents, which can be checked through appropriate use of the dictionary. There were also occasions where candidates were translating directly from English.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	1880
------------------------------------	------

Number of resulted entries in 2015	926
------------------------------------	-----

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	50.4%	50.4%	467	70
B	21.9%	72.4%	203	60
C	13.2%	85.5%	122	50
D	4.4%	90.0%	41	45
No award	10.0%	-	93	-

For this Course, the intention was to set an assessment with grade boundaries at the notional value of 50% for a Grade C and 70% for a Grade A. The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore the grade boundaries were set as intended.

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.