



External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	Spanish
Level	Advanced 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

It is pleasing to note that the number of candidates studying Spanish at AH level has remained steady, although there was a slight decrease to 228 this year. The number of centres presenting AH Spanish has increased to 68 with 11 new centres coming on board this year.

There were no significant setting issues for the 2011 paper and no changes to the experienced setting and vetting teams.

Speaking

As in previous years, candidates did very well in this skill area, managing to achieve an average mark of 37.9 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 17.4 out of 30.

Paper I Reading and Translation

In general, candidates responded well to this paper, especially when answering the comprehension questions. They seemed to engage well with the subject matter of the text which related to challenges facing the Spanish tourism industry. Candidates also seemed to do well when tackling the passage for translation. However, they still had difficulty with the inferential question.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates seemed to find the Listening component challenging (especially Part B), with few candidates scoring really high marks overall.

In Discursive Writing, the standard was broadly comparable to previous years,

The Examining Team were again pleased to note that all essay titles were attempted, although those on El Papel del Hombre (no 2) and Medio Ambiente (no 4) were the more popular choices.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Speaking

Once again, confidence in the language, fluency and taking the initiative were features of good performances this year. Although understandably a little nervous at the start of the assessment, the vast majority of candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared. Some thrived on the experience. 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 Visiting Assessors. Candidates were at ease with the method of assessment.

Folio

As in previous years, the presentation of essay work was excellent. All pieces were word-processed. However, some candidates this year were penalised for exceeding the word limit.

As in previous years, the study of literary texts was tackled more successfully than background topics.

Paper I Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to all the comprehension questions (1–5), providing detailed and accurate responses. They also performed well in the Translation section, especially in sense units 1, 2, 3, 7, 8 and 9.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates attempted all questions in both parts of the Listening component, and seemed to do well in Part A Q1 and Q4, and in Part B Q2 and Q5.

Overall, 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. Some candidates who chose to write on North American and European culture or on poverty/racism came up with some interesting and original ideas. There was also appropriate use and accurate treatment of subjunctive clauses by some candidates.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Folio

Many candidates found it difficult to select a title or essay question which generated debate or critical analysis. Disappointingly, large numbers this year selected an obvious title which tended to generate a one-sided argument with a predictable conclusion (eg 'to what extent is Bernarda Alba a figure of authority in La Casa de Bernarda Alba?'). Some candidates had difficulty in comparing the film and associated texts.

Some were unsuccessful in effectively proof-checking ERV Folio pieces, especially when quoting in Spanish from a literary text.

Often, there was too much of a 'story-telling' approach and insufficient critical analysis or evaluation, particularly in relation to background topics.

Those who attempted the Language in Work report were often anecdotal in their approach and tended to make a range of unsubstantiated comments. These candidates also tended to make generalised assertions.

Inferential question in Paper I

As in previous years, many candidates mostly provided information from the text rather than attempting to draw inferences. Some misread the text when attempting this question and

found it difficult to express their ideas through the use of ‘inferential’ type language (eg ‘this suggests that ...’ etc).

Some again included quotes from the text in their answer but just repeated these in English instead of using them to develop their argument.

Translation

No single sense unit in particular was found to be demanding by candidates. However some had problems with rendering the following words or phrases into good English: *se ha hecho*; *los últimos años*; *un recurso* (which some translated as ‘resort’); *debería durar* (often incorrectly rendered as ‘should have lasted’); and *motores*.

Listening Part A

Not enough detail was provided by candidates for Q2 (problems with ‘creciendo’); and in Q4 (b) many missed out the words ‘skill/capacity’ for study and research and failed to gain the mark.

Listening Part B

In Q1, a number of candidates incorrectly wrote ‘learn’ instead of ‘speak’ other languages (from an early age). In Q6 (b), some mixed up ‘quantity’ for ‘quality’. Many missed the point in Q7 relating to ‘Internet cable’, and few gained a mark in Q8 about young people using a range of technology.

Discursive Writing

As in previous years, candidates ran into difficulties when going beyond prepared material. This led, in some cases, to unidiomatic translation from English into Spanish and poor control of tenses/verbs. There was inappropriate use of the infinitive, candidates choosing to use this rather than the correct, discrete part of the verb. Other major errors related to the misuse of *Ser* and *Estar*, and of *Gustar* with the third person, and failure to employ the subjunctive mood when required. Use of the present continuous tense was generally poor.

Agreement of adjectives and genders of nouns were also a problem.

Some candidates started well but failed to sustain accuracy consistently throughout their essay.

In Q 2, Q4 and Q5, markers at times had to make considerable effort to find relevance in the candidate’s work to the essay title as a whole (eg Q2 sometimes scant mention given to role of men; Q4 alternative transport only briefly mentioned; and Q5 not a lot of development on books and newspapers being read).

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General

Share all criteria/GRC/pegged marks/performance descriptors, SQA documentation etc. 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.

Speaking

Continue 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. Try to train candidates in discussion techniques in the language to enable them to deal with any question they may be asked which 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 immigration in Spain as opposed to Scotland)

Folio

The choice of a title for the two Folio pieces for the ERV unit is of crucial importance. The title should not be vague or general or obvious (eg 'How important is Bernarda Alba's role in the play?') but should generate a discursive/evaluative approach.

For the ERV unit, when incorporating a background topic, try to encourage candidates to tackle this in a manner that is appropriate to Advanced Higher (ie less information and more evaluation).

A 'compare and contrast' approach usually meets with some success, provided that the focus of the comparison and contrast is rooted in Hispanic literature and/or culture.

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.

Discourage candidates from undertaking background topics on football, flamenco, Spanish cooking, the study of a Spanish city etc. The treatment of these is frequently inappropriate to Advanced Higher. The theme of Bullfighting also tends to generate a one-sided and superficial argument, very often anecdotal with not a lot of evidence to substantiate ideas.

Language in Work reports can read a bit like background topics, sometimes with very little analysis or debate. Perhaps part of the report could provide a focus on how, for instance, a work experience benefited the candidate's knowledge of Spanish.

Candidates should develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies overall.

More care and attention is needed in 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 such as 'laid back' 'not fazed' and 'guts and gumption'. They should vary their expression throughout their essay/report, and avoid the repetition of words and phrases.

Candidates should be made aware that plagiarism will be punished severely and that they may lose their AH award if this is picked up. Advances in technology have ensured that plagiarism can be much more easily detected by examiners these days.

Paper I

General

Candidates should divide their time appropriately between the comprehension questions, the inferential question and the passage for translation.

Translation

More attention should be given to the development of translation skills and, in particular, ways of converting idiomatic expressions from Spanish into English. Special care should be taken with recognising and accurately translating tenses. Centres should ensure that all candidates at this level have developed their skills in the use of a dictionary.

Inferential question (Q6)

Centres should encourage candidates to draw inferences from the passage and not just provide factual information or repeat the answers to their comprehension questions when doing this task. A balanced approach in answering the 2011 question, which took into account both sides of the argument about the challenges facing Spanish tourism, generally got better results this year. Answers to the inferential question should be well structured and have a rounded conclusion. Any quotation from the text should be appropriate and relevant, not just a repetition of what has been argued in English.

The standard of English is crucial in this question and phrases like ‘**this implies that..**’ ‘..**would seem to suggest...**’, ‘**thus it can be claimed that..**’, ‘**... backs up the idea that..**’, ‘**by stating this, the writer makes it clear that ...**’ may help to generate the level of sophistication required to achieve good results.

SQA ‘s forthcoming exemplification of performance in this question should assist candidates and provide teachers with guidance on how to develop inferencing skills.

Paper II

Listening

- ◆ Candidates at this level should be familiar with recognising ‘izquierda’ and ‘derecha’ in any Listening text. (Part A).
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to access Listening materials on the Internet, especially short news items on Spanish radio.
- ◆ Advise/consult on appropriate use of time spent when looking at questions before candidates hear the recording on the day of the examination.
- ◆ Advise/consult on strategies candidates use for note-taking while they are listening to the recording.
- ◆ Make appropriate use of a Foreign Language Assistant (if you are fortunate enough to have one) by timetabling him/her with the AH class and getting him/her involved in recording suitable materials.

Discursive Writing

- ◆ More grammatical accuracy is required (see ‘Areas which candidates found demanding’).

- ◆ Ensure candidates address the question at all times and do not reproduce a well rehearsed prelim essay that may not be entirely relevant (see see 'Areas which candidates found demanding' in relation to Qs 2, 4 and 5 this year). Try to address all aspects of the title.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to avoid high-frequency language and adopt a strategy to incorporate sophisticated language appropriate to Advanced Higher level and to the subject matter of the essay.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to set aside some time during the examination to use their dictionary to proofread 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.
- ◆ Ensure candidates have an appropriate dictionary.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	247
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	232
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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	28.9%	28.9%	67	139
B	31.9%	60.8%	74	119
C	21.6%	82.3%	50	99
D	8.2%	90.5%	19	89
No award	9.5%	100.0%	22	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that 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, though, 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.