



## External Assessment Report 2011

Subject	<b>Spanish</b>
Level	<b>Higher</b>

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

There was a pleasing and substantial increase in the number of presentations, from 1,356 in 2010 to 1,488 in 2011. These came from 177 centres, as compared with 172 last year. On balance, the exam was considered to be a very good paper, challenging and appropriately demanding, and the overall response from candidates was positive. Most candidates performed well in all areas, and they and their teachers/lecturers are to be complimented on the candidates' preparedness for same.

Candidates performed less well in Paper 1 this year compared to last, but scored better in Paper 2. Due to the demanding nature of two questions in the Reading Comprehension and a sense group in the Translation that was not tackled well, the grade boundary for a C was set at 47% (49% last year), 57% for a B (59% last year), and 68% for an A (69% last year). 50.6% of candidates achieved an A pass, (52.2% last year), 21.5% a B pass (18.8% last year) and 13.3% a C pass, as compared with 15.2% last year. This amounts to an overall pass rate of 85.8%, compared with 86.2% last year.

134 candidates (9%) achieved a No award, a very similar percentage to last year's 8.7%. There is still evidence of candidates being entered for Higher inappropriately, or of not being properly prepared for the examination.

In Paper 1, the Reading passage dealt with students in the United States and Spain giving up their holidays to do voluntary work, a topic which most students could relate to, although two questions did cause candidates some problems. This was a fairly testing Reading paper, so a wide spread of marks was encountered. The Translation Section was not done as well as in past years. The Directed Writing was well done, and marks were up on last session.

Paper 2 Listening, in which a girl discusses her studies and her part-time job, was well done as was the follow-up essay. Markers commented on the very clear recording and the appropriate register and speed and clear diction of the two speakers.

Speaking marks averaged 21.7 out of 25 — there as been an almost identical percentage for the past four years. This figure and the excellent pass rates, particularly for an A and B award, are evidence of a very able and well prepared cohort of candidates in Higher Spanish again this year.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

Most candidates performed well in all areas of what was considered a fair yet demanding paper. The topic of the reading passage was relevant for candidates, many of whom are about to become students, and candidates for the most part responded well to the questions, producing well thought-out responses. Candidates displayed a good understanding of the text. Markers commented that they did not mark a single paper where an answer had not been attempted.

The Translation section was reasonably well done, apart from the first sense group. However, the final two sense groups were very well done and made up for what was an unfortunate start to the translation for many candidates.

The response to the Directed Writing task was better than in recent years, with more candidates getting 12 or 15 out of 15. Almost all candidates addressed the scenario accurately and all the bullet points, and very few candidates incurred penalties for omitting bullet points. Bullet points 1, 2, 4 and 6 were particularly well done. There were very few examples of Poor or Very Poor Directed Writing essays. The more predictable bullet points were answered well, with lots of extra details being given. Candidates handled the preterite tense in particular fairly well.

There was an excellent response to the Listening section, the topic of which was relevant to most, if not all, candidates. Very few candidates scored less than half marks, and several candidates achieved full marks. There was practically no evidence of candidates making wild guesses or 'making up their own stories'. There were many examples of Good and Very Good responses to the short essay stimulus, and markers commented on the good overall level of language, with essays containing some 'lovely' expressions. There were a considerable number of writing pieces that were very well written, showing good structure and a good range of connecting words and phrases. Most candidates duly addressed all three questions in the short essay topic.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

Most candidates responded well to all parts of the paper, and they and their centres are to be commended for this.

The marking instruction for the Reading passage was very comprehensive and fair. Questions were clearly worded and candidates did not appear to show any confusion in understanding them.

However, lack of attention to detail led to a loss of marks for some candidates. Often candidates' answers were insufficiently detailed for them to achieve the mark. Some candidates were giving most of the information but missed one point of detail, eg Q2(a) **en vecindarios destruidos por desastres naturales**, missing out 'in neighbourhoods'; Q2(c) *por el SIDA o la pobreza* missing out either 'AIDS' or 'poverty'; Q4(c) *como un país del tercer mundo* omitting 'like'; Q5(b) **tres hermanitos**, translating it as 'brothers' or even 'sisters', and not noticing the diminutive; Q8(a) **de forma gratuita** or *desinteresada* — missing out either of these ideas. Questions 8(a) and 8(c) caused many candidates problems, due in part to the amount of detail required for the mark.

In the Translation section, in the first sense group very few candidates translated *Cada vez más estudiantes* and *e incluso* correctly, despite the fact that both of these expressions/words are to be found in even the smallest of dictionaries. It is perhaps disappointing too that candidates studying Higher Spanish do not appear to recognise *cada vez más* and *cada vez menos*.

There will always be a range of tenses in the Translation section, and many candidates failed to recognise the future tense in *así podrán hacer algo útil*, translating it instead as a present or conditional.

There is still too much evidence of candidates rushing through the Translation section, without due care to word order, tenses, overall precision and general accuracy. Likewise, candidates are paraphrasing parts of the translation, putting alternatives and adding words that are not in the text, all of which amounts to a loss of marks.

Poor English expression and language structure caused difficulty in both the Reading and Translation, and there was evidence that some candidates were not re-reading their answers or their version of the translation to make sure that these made sense. A good example of this in the Translation was *la conservación de la naturaleza* often rendered as 'the conservation of the nature', or 'the natural conservation'.

A very small number of candidates failed to take into account the introductory section of the Directed Writing and wrote in their essays that they stayed in *un hotel* or *una residencia de estudiantes* instead of addressing 'you stayed in the home of one of the Spanish students'. Some markers commented that many of the Directed Writings lacked flair and, although generally accurate, were quite pedestrian. Bullet points 3 and 5 were often thinly covered.

In the Listening Section, many candidates did not understand the negative of *¿No sales mucho con tus amigos?* consequently losing the mark for Question 1. Otherwise the Listening section was very well done. There were some more testing questions, such as Qs 7, 8(a) and 10(b), which were well done by most able candidates. In question 8(a) many candidates missed out the 'more' of *mis padres me respetan más* and thus lost the mark., Likewise with *se dan cuenta de que soy más responsable*, omitting 'they realise' from their answer.

In the short essay, there were a surprising number of candidates who were unable to conjugate the present tense of *tener* and who wrote *tiene* for I have. The topic for the short essay, *Y tú ¿tienes un trabajo a tiempo parcial? ¿Cuáles son las ventajas y desventajas de tener un trabajo mientras trabajas? ¿Tienes bastante dinero para tus gastos?* should have been very accessible and should have allowed candidates to produce good responses without difficulty. It is evident that this is where weaker candidates are struggling. There were a few candidates who produced poor responses, with an obvious inability to handle verbs/tenses and manipulate grammar and language in general.

A small number of candidates wrote a past tense essay on their work experience or a part time job they had and neither of these addressed the stimulus. Candidates must be aware that the short essay is generally written in the present tense, giving their opinion on some topic or other, with the possibility of also using mainly the future and conditional tenses.

Candidates too often exceeded the word limit and consequently were penalised for lack of accuracy. Excessive length in both the Directed Writing and the Short Essay almost inevitably lead to deterioration in the quality of the written Spanish and to a lower mark.

However, in saying this, it must be stressed that the majority of candidates performed well in all components of the paper.

# Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

## Reading and Translation

- ◆ For the Reading exercise, candidates should read the title and introduction in English, as well as reading **all** of the questions, prior to attempting their answers. This will give them a good idea of what the passage is dealing with.
- ◆ The questions on the passage will be divided into different sections, each indicated by sub-headings. The 2011 paper, for example, had the passage divided into three distinct sections, each highlighted by sub-headings, and three separate groups of questions indicated by line numbers.
- ◆ Candidates should be discouraged from translating long sections of the text. Not only is this a waste of time, but can also mean bringing in contradictory, unclear and at times meaningless information into their answer. At the same time, it is important that candidates give **detailed responses** to the reading questions. It is a good idea to share, for example, the marking instruction for the 2011 paper to demonstrate to candidates the correct amount of detail required for a mark at Higher level in both Reading and Listening.
- ◆ 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. Candidates often opt for the first definition to be found in the dictionary, and this is often not the correct one
- ◆ Please stress with candidates the importance of the Translation, which is 10% of the value of the examination. **Precision** and **accuracy** are vital. The impression given by some candidates is that they treat the translation as almost another comprehension question and do not spend an appropriate amount of time or attention tackling it. If necessary, candidates should spend 10 minutes working on the Translation, given its value overall in the examination. It is important that they are taught translation skills and get plenty of time to practise and develop these.
- ◆ Candidates have a dictionary at their disposal and should use it for the Translation, where precision of language is required. It was disappointing to see the majority of candidates in 2011 mistranslating *cada vez más* and *incluso* when the quickest check using even the smallest of dictionaries would have provided them with the correct answer.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to attempt the Translation section after completing the reading comprehension, as this will give them a better idea as to the content of the Translation

## Directed Writing

- ◆ It is important 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, as did bullet points 1 and 2 in 2011. These will be highlighted with the word '**and**' in bold type. In this respect they really had **eight** things to address in 2011 as well as the introductory

scenario itself. If a bullet point is not fully addressed, there is an automatic penalty of 2 marks.

- ◆ Candidates should address all bullet points in a balanced way.
- ◆ Having carefully read each bullet point, candidates if using learned material, should check that any learned material they wish to use is both **appropriate** and **relevant** to that bullet point.

### **Listening/Writing**

- ◆ Before listening to the recording, candidates should study the questions and the marks allocated to them to help anticipate the type of information they will have to elicit from the conversation.
- ◆ Please ask candidates to give detail in their answers and, again, share with them the marking key for this or other past papers to show precisely the detail required.
- ◆ Please stress to candidates that they are not allowed to give alternative answers, for example by using brackets or an oblique, be it in Reading, Translation or Listening. If one of the answers is incorrect, they will lose the mark, even if the other one is correct.
- ◆ Some 'short' essays are unnecessarily long! Centres should encourage candidates to be more succinct, and try to stick to the upper limit of 150 words for their short essay
- ◆ If there are two questions in the Short Essay stimulus, both of these must be addressed. Otherwise a penalty of one pegged mark, two per cent, will be deducted. In the 2011 examination, there were three questions in the stimulus, and candidates were expected to address at least two of these.

### **Writing in general**

- ◆ Candidates should use the dictionary sparingly in both the Directed Writing and Short Essay, and only to check the accuracy of what they have written in terms of spelling and grammar.

### **General Comments**

- ◆ Candidates should, in the course of their studies, be encouraged to go onto the SQA website and look at marking instructions, Writing GRC and External Assessment Reports. This will help them to gauge what is required of them when it comes to sitting the examination. Likewise, teachers and lecturers could carry out this exercise with candidates in class.
- ◆ Candidates should read over all of 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**.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2010	1361
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Number of resulted entries in 2011	1498
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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	50.1%	50.1%	751	68
B	21.5%	71.6%	322	57
C	13.6%	85.2%	204	47
D	5.2%	90.5%	78	42
No award	9.5%	100.0%	143	-

## **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.