Course report 2019

Subject	Spanish
Level	National 5

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any post-results services.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

In the reading question paper, markers noted that there was a good range of questions across the three texts. The question paper covered the contexts of culture (text 1 — holiday destinations for tourists), society (text 2 — young people still living at home) and employability (text 3 — an international shoe company). There were questions of high, low and average demand across the three texts.

Question paper 1: Writing

In the writing question paper, which is always in the context of employability, candidates reply by email to a job advert in Spanish. In the email they should address the six bullet points listed in the job advert. The question paper is worth 20 marks, with four predictable bullet points and two unpredictable bullet points. Markers commented that both the unpredictable bullet points were relevant to the job advert and should have been straightforward for candidates to address.

Question paper 2: Listening

In the listening question paper, markers commented that there was the appropriate amount of challenge and demand in terms of the content and questioning. Markers also said that the topics used were familiar and that there was a wide range of vocabulary used across the two items. The question paper covered the context of learning.

Assignment–writing

Candidates generally performed well in the assignment–writing and in line with last year's performance.

Performance–talking

The performance–talking performed as expected.

In the performance–talking at National 5, candidates carry out a spoken presentation and take part in a conversation directly afterwards.

Centres are familiar with how this coursework task works, and it is the same format year on year. Revised performance–talking marking instructions were published for session 2017–18; however, the aim and format of the task remain unchanged.

As in previous sessions, the general and detailed marking instructions allow teachers and lecturers to mark candidates' performances with confidence. The majority of centres sampled this session marked candidates' performances in line with national standards.

Teachers and lecturers play an important role in guiding candidates prior to the assessment in their choice of contexts and topics. This is outlined in the *National 5 Modern Languages Course Specification*.

In the sample of centres verified this year, teachers and lecturers had encouraged candidates to identify topics that gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities against the four aspects.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Reading

In the reading question paper, it was clear that for most candidates the content of each of the three texts was appropriate and relevant, and many candidates coped well with all three texts. There was a very high level of response in the reading question paper with almost no evidence of candidates being unable to complete the paper in the allocated time. As in previous years, there were few questions with no response.

Markers noted that the questions following each of the three texts were clearly worded and accessible to candidates, making it straightforward for most candidates to locate the answers in the text. There was enough space for almost all candidates to write their answers and those who required extra space could write on the additional pages.

Candidates coped well and most were able to provide detail in their answers, for example adjectives and adverbs. Many candidates correctly translated *un presupuesto ajustado* (a tight budget). Questions 1(a), 2(b) and 2(d)(i) were answered well by the majority of candidates.

In question 2(c), there was good evidence of confident and accurate translation by many candidates of the phrase *la influencia de amigos* to 'peer pressure'. Also, it was encouraging to see that many candidates were able to show understanding of the future tense in question 2(f) *encontraré* and *podré.*

Question paper 1: Writing

In the writing question paper, markers were impressed by the overall quality in many responses, especially in relation to the first four bullet points. There were many examples of detailed language, range of structure and high levels of accuracy. Many candidates were able to show that they had prepared well and were able to confidently use conjunctions and accurate adjectival agreement, as well as a range of tenses and vocabulary structures. Very few candidates did not attempt this paper and most candidates attempted to address the two unpredictable bullet points.

As in previous years, most candidates are writing a well-structured email which is relevant to the job advert and contains language and structures that are appropriate to National 5. We are seeing fewer long lists of nouns and repetition, and more candidates are producing a varied and succinct piece of writing.

It was encouraging to see common use of the idiomatic phrase *se me da bien el español* (I am good at Spanish), as opposed to the mistranslation into Spanish *soy fuerte en…* of the French phrase *je suis fort en...* It is a useful reminder that there is no requirement for a formal start or finish to this job application.

In bullet point 5 (why you would like to work in Spain), many candidates were able to address this successfully and showed the ability to cope with forming a sentence using *me gustaría* + infinitive.

It was also very encouraging to see the range of reasons that candidates gave for wanting to work in Spain. Many candidates were successful in applying familiar vocabulary phrases to the context of working in Spain.

Question paper 2: Listening

In the listening question paper, markers commented that there were few no responses, or supposed guesses, to answers in both items. The majority of candidates coped well with the vocabulary in the context of learning. Most candidates performed well in questions 1(a) and 2(g) and many were able to give the detail required in some of the answers, for example 'helps her a lot' *(me ayuda mucho) and* 'quite new' *(bastante nueva).* It was encouraging to see that candidates were able to recognise familiar vocabulary in a different context, for example 'freedom' *(la libertad)* and 'tried the local food' *(probamos los platos típicos).* Overall, candidates engaged well with both items.

Assignment–writing

As last year, most candidates submitted very good pieces of writing, which were produced in line with SQA guidelines published in 2017. There was a very good range of topics in evidence from each of the three contexts of society, learning and culture, for example family, friendship, healthy living, ICT, school, holidays, town, environment and film. Most candidates used detailed language which was appropriate to National 5, with some outstanding examples using some very sophisticated language and complex structures.

The overall presentation of the candidates' work was very good. The majority of candidates ticked the relevant box in the answer booklet regarding the context chosen and most had written a title. Most candidates had well-structured essays written in paragraphs with a clear beginning and end. The majority of assignments had a good range of vocabulary, including time phrases and tense variety. Most candidates were able to express both positive and negative ideas and opinions, and many were able to give reasons for these opinions.

While the recommended word length for assignment–writing is 120–150 words, some candidates went well beyond this and were able to maintain their high standards of accuracy and range of detailed information and opinion. However, this is not the recommended approach.

Performance–talking

The overall quality of candidates' performances sampled this session was good.

Candidates performed very well in the presentation subsection of the performance. The majority of candidates were awarded pegged marks 10 or 8. This is as expected as this section of the performance can be thoroughly prepared ahead of the assessment.

Candidates coped well in the conversation subsection and, among the centres sampled, around two thirds of candidates were awarded pegged marks 15 or 12.

Most candidates sustained the conversation well, despite any errors, and were awarded 5 or 3 marks for this aspect. Very few candidates in the samples verified were awarded 1 or 0 marks for sustaining the conversation.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

Many candidates found the reading accessible and were able to gain over 20 marks. There was an element of detail required in the answers which some candidates did not provide and therefore were   /not able to access the higher marks.

Some candidates lost marks as a result of not providing either qualifiers or detail in their answers, not looking closely enough at the detail in the text itself or not considering the context of the word. For example:

Text 1
Question 1(b): some candidates failed to translate *periodistas de viajes* (travel journalists) and only wrote 'journalists'.

Question 1(c): some candidates mistranslated *el entorno* to 'the setting', which did not make sense in this context.

Text 2
Question 2(c): there were several poor translations of *la falta de ayudas públicas*, which included 'failure of public help', 'lack of publicity help' and 'lack of help in public', which prevented candidates from gaining this mark.

Question 2(e): although the majority of candidates understood *independizarme,* somefailed to show correct understanding of the phrase *tengo ganas de* and wrote 'he has to become independent', and did not gain the mark.

Text 3
Question 3(d): the mistranslation of *de* led some candidates to write 'dedication to family members', instead of 'dedication of family members'.

Question 3(e)(ii): *siempre hay que reinventarse* (you always have to reinvent yourself). This proved to be a challenging question for the majority of candidates, which included a time phrase and a reflexive verb. Many wrote 'you always have to reinvent' (omitting the reflexive), which could imply the shoes rather than yourself or the company. Some candidates wrote 'you have to reinvent yourself' (omitting the time phrase). Both time phrases and reflexive verbs feature in the productive grammar grid at National 5.

Question paper 1: Writing

All markers commented positively that the standard of candidates' responses for the writing question paper this year was very good.

Most candidates made an effort to include a range of detailed vocabulary and structures appropriate to National 5. In terms of content and language resource, many candidates are comfortable with what is required for the writing question paper as teachers and lecturers had prepared them well. However, accuracy rather than content is still the main challenge for some candidates, both in the predictable and unpredictable bullet points.

Poor dictionary use, mother tongue/other language interference, and literal translations of idiomatic phrases were again the three main factors affecting accuracy. Common errors included not using the infinitive after *puedo, quiero* or *voy a.*

There was, as expected, challenge in the two unpredictable bullet points. Some candidates were unsuccessful in addressing both of these and were awarded 12 marks in line with the detailed marking instructions.

Bullet point six proved to be the most challenging for many candidates. As well as some inaccuracy with the verb phrases and confusion with *ser/estar (*when using *disponible),* there were some candidates who experienced difficulty in expressing simple time phrases, for example *en el verano, el cinco de julio* and *la semana que viene.*

Question paper 2: Listening

In the listening question paper, candidates were unable to access all of the marks for a number of reasons,including sometimes due to lack of accuracy in translation, for example:

Item 1
Question 1(b): there was confusion in English between 'literature' and 'literacy' for *literatura.*

Question 1(c): *comprensiva* was mistranslated as 'understandable', 'easy to understand' or 'nice'.

Question 1(e)(i): some candidates seemed unfamiliar with the word *excursión* and simply wrote 'cycling', which was not enough detail to gain the mark.

Item 2
Question 2(a): some candidates lacked accuracy in translating *diez mil* (10,000).

Question 2(b): some candidates mistranslated the comparative *más interactivas* to 'very interactive' rather than 'more interactive'.

Question 2(c): proved to be challenging for many candidates, with few recognising the phrases *tenemos la misma edad* or *pasamos mucho tiempo juntos.* Although it should be pointed out that many candidates recognised the phrase *un gran sentido del humor* and gained a mark for this.

Question 2(e): a few candidates heard *el mes que viene* and translated this to 'June', as the exam took place in May. Centres should remind candidates to translate what they hear and not take the translation out of context.

Question 2(f): not many candidates were able to understand *salgo a correr*.

Question 2(g): a few candidates translated *profesor de natación* as 'swimming professor', which was unacceptable.

The listening question paper always covers a wide range of vocabulary both within and outwith the main context. Centres should ensure that there is sufficient revision of vocabulary areas built in at appropriate points in the course, including revision of basic areas of vocabulary such as numbers.

Assignment–writing

Most candidates produced a piece of writing which fulfilled the criteria at National 5, scoring 12, 16, and 20 out of 20 marks. Candidates who did not manage to get higher than 12 marks were repetitive in their use of expression or communicated by listing. More range of expression and greater levels of accuracy were needed in some cases. Common errors made were with adjectival agreement, gender, verb endings, lack of consistency in spelling, and some candidates failed to communicate their ideas by missing out key words.

There were a few common errors in Spanish worth noting: *no me gusta* requires *ni* instead of *y* when listing further information, *estoy en cuarto* and *estoy en el cuarto curso* are both acceptable ways of expressing 'I am in fourth year', but some candidates were wrongly combining the two. Some candidates were omitting accents in verb expressions when they are required, for example *me gustó* (I liked it).

In order to achieve 20 marks, candidates are required to write in an organised and structured way, expressing a wide range of ideas and opinions. There needs to be a very good degree of grammatical accuracy, using a wide range of structures, verbs and detailed language throughout.

Some candidates started off well, but then they were unable to maintain the high levels of accuracy and range of detailed information. In some cases, this was due to going beyond the recommended word length of 120–150 words.

Other candidates did not go into enough depth in the topic they had chosen, and then went on to discuss another topic which was not relevant to their chosen title.

Performance–talking

The Spanish verification team noted some candidates found the level of grammatical accuracy and sustaining this throughout the performance difficult.

Among the samples verified, weaker performances by candidates highlighted errors which detracted from the overall impression. Some made more serious errors, for example problems with gender of nouns, incorrect agreement of adjectives, problems with verb conjugation, missing words or incorrect word order.

In some performances, pronunciation and intonation were not always sufficient to be understood by a speaker of the language and detracted from the overall quality of the performance.

In the samples verified, some candidates found the conversation subsection of the performance more demanding as it is less predictable and involves a series of questions. Almost a third of the conversations at this level were awarded a pegged mark of 9 or lower.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

As in previous years, the advice for both reading and listening is that candidates should read questions carefully then respond by giving the correct amount of information, and ensure that enough detail is given. At National 5, there is an amount of detail required, and candidates should ensure that if qualifiers are in the text, they too should appear in the answer.

Detailed marking instructions for the reading, writing, and listening question papers are available in the National 5 Spanish past papers section of SQA's website, and show the level of detail required for answers. The marking instructions for the assignment–writing and the performance–talking are available in the *National 5 Modern Languages Course Specification*. Candidates should be familiar with the approach behind these, for example where detail is required, as they need to provide this detail to access the full range of marks.

Markers commented on the poor handwriting of some candidates, making responses more challenging to read and to mark.

Candidates would benefit from as much practice as possible in answering exam-type questions. Centres should ensure that these have a similar structure and standard to the course assessments:

♦ reading assessment with three texts from different contexts
♦ writing assessment in the format of applying for a job using six bullet points
♦ listening assessment with a monologue and a conversation

Question paper 1: Reading

Candidates should be familiar with the structures, grammar and detailed language appropriate for this level. For example, National 5 candidates should be able to translate these familiar words: *barrio*, *ambiente* and *cómodo* and also the detail in these longer phrases: *es perfecta para pasar unas vacaciones con familia o amigos, el tiempo que pasa hasta que se promocionan en un puesto* and *nos comunicamos bien con los clientes*, albeit with the use of a dictionary. Candidates should develop dictionary skills as part of the course and they should be encouraged to think about the context of the word, in order to decide which meaning is most appropriate.

Question paper 1: Writing

Given the overall performance in this question paper, centres have again prepared candidates well. Candidates should develop ways of addressing the first four predictable bullet points which allow them to use a range of vocabulary and structures, as well as applying knowledge of verbs, persons of verbs and tenses. Candidates should be able to provide at least one accurate sentence for each of the two unpredictable bullet points, and centres are strongly encouraged to allow candidates to practise manipulating the language in a wide range of unfamiliar bullet points, which will enable them to cope with the challenge in this part of the assessment.

Question paper 2: Listening

In the listening question paper, candidates should be familiar with a range of basic vocabulary from the four broad contexts of society, learning, employability, culture.

As well as knowledge of words and phrases, including a good range of adjectives, candidates should know and understand a range of tenses and verb forms. Attention to detail is also key, and centres should ensure that candidates are familiar with qualifiers like *bastante* and comparatives like *más*, so that they include this detail in their answers.

Assignment–writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ aim to have a strong focus on one of the contexts and a topic
♦ have a good structure, include a range of ideas, and opinions with reasons
♦ do not write long lists of nouns and verbs
♦ have a clear introduction and conclusion to the piece of work, which should also contain a range of conjunctions
♦ include a range of verbs, verb forms and some tenses to show markers that they have the ability to use language resource and variety
♦ structure the assignment in paragraphs and that the title clearly relates to the content of the overall piece of work

The *National 5 Modern Languages Course Specification* on SQA's website provides further information on the approach to the assignment–writing.

Performance–talking

Teachers and lecturers should continue to include grammar practice and coverage of the rules of the language as an integral part of learning and teaching. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use a variety of persons and tenses, where appropriate. The assignment–writing could contribute towards developing candidates' understanding of how language works.

Many confident performances demonstrated very good language resource. In some instances, candidates did not use enough detailed language and this detracted from the overall quality. For information on the level of language, teachers and lecturers can refer to the productive grammar grid in the appendix of the *National 5 Modern Languages Course Specification*, and Understanding Standards exemplars of National 5 performances available on SQA's secure website.

In the conversation section, teachers and lecturers are encouraged to ensure candidates have strategies for asking for questions to be repeated, or language structures and phrases to use when they have not understood any aspect of the conversation. Candidates who were able to use interjections and ask relevant questions could sustain the conversation more confidently.

Where candidates struggle to answer certain questions, teachers and lecturers should continue to support the candidate by rephrasing, asking another question or changing the topic. Teachers and lecturers should give candidates appropriate thinking time before doing this.

The length of the performances sampled varied, and teachers and lecturers should refer to the recommended duration of the presentation and the conversation as provided in the *National 5 Modern Languages Course Specification*. This is to ensure candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of the task. Where performances sampled went beyond or were significantly shorter than the recommended duration, neither approach was necessarily to the candidate's benefit.

As noted in previous years' National 5 Spanish course reports, some candidates gave what appeared to be short, 'mini-presentation' answers in the conversation. While candidates may wish to prepare language and phrases for topic-related questions, teachers and lecturers are encouraged to continue to put open-ended questions to candidates, which can elicit detailed language in the answers.

Teachers and lecturers should also put a variety of questions to their candidates, even where candidates from the same centre select the same or similar topics. In turn, this provides for personalisation and choice and provides scope for candidates to produce a more varied conversation.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates have the opportunity to practise talking skills in preparation for the performance–talking. The 'Approaches to learning and teaching: talking' section in Appendix 1 of the *National 5 Modern Languages Course* Specification provides examples of how to develop candidates' talking skills, and suggests talking activities as part of learning and teaching.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	4937

Number of resulted entries in 2019	5122

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	53.0%	53.0%	2713	86
B	20.4%	73.4%	1046	74
C	14.2%	87.6%	727	62
D	8.2%	95.7%	418	50
No award	4.3%	-	218	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
♦ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
♦ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.