



Course Report 2016

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| Subject | Spanish |
| Level | Advanced Higher |

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Summary of the Course assessment

It is pleasing to report that the number of candidates being presented for Spanish at Advanced Higher level continues to increase. There were no significant setting issues for the 2016 paper, and no changes to the experienced setting and checking teams. Question papers were on standard.

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Translation

Candidates responded fairly well to this paper, especially when answering the comprehension questions 1–5. The vast majority engaged with the subject matter of the text, which related to the changing fortunes of Latin Americans who live and work in California.

In general terms, candidates did not respond well to Q6, the Overall Purpose question, and a number of candidates found some of the sense units in the Translation fairly demanding.

This was taken into account when setting the Grade Boundaries.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates performed reasonably well in the Listening component, which focused on the way people learn and the role of teachers. Most candidates achieved better results in Item 1.

In Discursive Writing, there were some very good essays which demonstrated flair, appropriate use of idiomatic language and accurate expression of opinions. However, some candidates were penalised as a result of not addressing the question fully and relying instead on the reproduction of learned material or an essay which sometimes proved irrelevant.

It is pleasing to note that all four essay titles were attempted, the most popular choice being question 4 (learning).

Component 3: Portfolio

For the first time, with the introduction of the Portfolio candidates wrote one essay of 1500 words, which had to include two sources in Spanish. There was a reasonable degree of variety in the way in which this was approached.

Component 4: Performance: Talking

As in previous years, candidates did very well in this skill area. This year's cohort managed to achieve very encouraging marks.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Translation

Candidates generally responded well to the comprehension questions, in particular Q1 (when candidates found the key word 'actualmente') Q3(b), Q4, and Q5(a), where they provided accurate responses.

Sense units 1, 4, 6 and 9 in the Translation section seemed more accessible than the others.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

In Listening, Item 1, candidates did particularly well when answering Q1(a), 1(d)ii and 1(e).

In Item 2, Q2(b), and 2(d) were very well done.

On the whole, Discursive Writing essays were fairly 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.

Candidates achieved best results when they fully addressed the titles and came up with well structured essays containing coherent language and interesting ideas. Of the four choices available to them, question 5, the essay on equality of opportunity for women in the workplace, was the one which was tackled most successfully.

Appropriate linking structures and phrases relating to expressing opinions were characteristics of good practice eg *dicho esto ... sin duda alguna ... cabe agregar ... vale mencionar ... hay que destacar que ... que yo sepa ...*

There was also some excellent use of 'essay' Spanish structures which deserve special mention such as:

vaya por delante que ... es hora que + subjunctive

se puede constatar que ...

se suele afirmar que ...

examinemos ... /abordemos .../ averiguemos

en la actualidad el tema de ... es sumamente popular en las medias

hablar sólo un idioma es el analfabetismo del siglo veintiuno

... es más falso que un billete de seis

estar en el candelero

Component 3: Portfolio

Presentation of Portfolio work was good overall. The most successful essays were those that had a question/title which genuinely led candidates to adopt an analytical approach or allowed for two sides of an argument to be developed. Essays also often worked better when there was an element of comparing and contrasting, eg characters in novels/short stories/plays/films, or some analysis of poetry focusing on specific themes from an anthology.

Essays that stood out were well structured, displayed a good level of English, and provided accurate and justified quotation from the text/screenplay which supported the arguments being presented.

Few candidates incurred a penalty for exceeding the word limit or failing to produce a bibliography.

Component 4 – Performance: Talking

Most candidates were comfortable and confident in the language, with the majority scoring 30 or more out of 50. Fluency and readily taking the initiative were features of good performances.

The vast majority of candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared. Many 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 the Visiting Assessor.

Candidates were very much at ease with the method of assessment.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Translation

Questions 1–5

In question 1 the expressions *mano de obra* (line 9) and *técnicos* (line 10) caused candidates some problems.

In question 3(a) candidates experienced some difficulty with the phrase *sacar adelante* (lines 25–26). Many did not capture the idea of ‘improving prospects’ for families.

In question 5(a) for the first mark, a number of candidates had difficulty with the verb *gustar* (line 56) and did not get the first mark. Otherwise, this question was done well.

In question 5(b)(i) there was occasional misuse of the dictionary/mistranslation of the word *formado* (line 61) as ‘formed’ or ‘fit’.

In question 5(b)(ii) some candidates found difficulty with the expression *de nuevo* (lines 62–63) and incorrectly made reference to a ‘new’ society.

Question 6 Overall Purpose Question

Candidates, on the whole, are still not providing a sufficiently reflective or analytical response to this question. Many wrote far too much (in some cases eight pages) without going beyond a recounting of the facts outlined in the text. In a number of cases, the quality of the English was poor, and answers tended to lack structure and/or come to an abrupt end.

Very few candidates gave a response that incorporated the idea of the writer providing a balanced viewpoint, in that there are signs that many Latin Americans will benefit from the new immigration reform but also some who are less likely to gain any advantage.

Candidates tended to find it challenging to express their ideas through the use of 'inferential' type language or to focus on the writer's techniques or issues such as tenses used, the structure of the text, the use of statistics/direct speech and real life examples.

Question 7 Translation

Sense units 2, 5, 8 and 10 were found to be demanding by candidates.

In unit 2, many translated *salubridad* as 'healthiness' or 'nourishing', which did not fit this context.

In unit 5, a number of candidates failed to get the appropriate rendition of *papeles* and lost one mark.

In unit 8, the word *imitar* was mistranslated as 'follow'.

In unit 10, candidates struggled with the expression *son los que*.

Verb forms/tenses on the whole (eg *explica* in line 41 and *cree* in line 42) also presented candidates with difficulties in this section. There was occasional unidiomatic translation from Spanish into English.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening Item 1

In question 1(c) some candidates missed out the words 'essential' or 'more', both of which were necessary to gain the mark.

In question 1(d)(ii) some omitted the comparative 'greater' in their answer.

Listening Item 2

In question 2(c) there was some confusion around the development of personal and interpersonal skills, the latter being the correct answer.

In question 2(e), surprisingly, some candidates struggled with the verbs *suspender* and *romper con*.

In question 2(f)(ii) not many achieved all 4 marks for this answer and they did not include 'respect' **and** 'appreciation'.

In question 2(g) a fair number of candidates disappointingly failed to pick up on the phrase *al menos*, which was required for the mark.

Discursive Writing

Some candidates ran into difficulties when going beyond prepared material, and this led on occasion to them not fully addressing the question. These candidates were inclined to write pre-learned essays, which clearly compromised relevance and focus.

Many wrote too much, causing them to make unnecessary grammatical errors. There were issues with basic grammar such as incorrect verb endings and tenses (eg *gente* with third person plural), genders, adjectival agreements, 'Ser' and 'Estar' confusion (eg *es claro* instead of *está claro*), and inaccurate or inappropriate use of the subjunctive. Misuse of the dictionary was also evident in the essays which achieved 24 or 20 or less.

Not all candidates have grasped what exactly constitutes a discursive essay. In question 4, a number of candidates limited themselves to their own personal experiences of language learning and travelling.

Essays that were repetitive rarely did better than 24 or 20, and those that did not fully address the question may have only achieved 16 or 12 if it was felt that more than half of the essay was irrelevant.

Component 3: Portfolio

Selecting a title was problematic for a number of candidates. Many candidates still find it difficult to select a title or essay question that generates debate or critical analysis, and too many had poorly worded titles or titles that were too vague, contrived or over-complicated.

Some candidates struggled with having to use two sources and tended to 'marry' texts/characters inappropriately when adopting a compare/contrast approach. Others approached the task by choosing titles that made unnatural links or encompassed two widely differing and often incompatible sources, eg a fairly modern film with a 1930s play.

Portfolios in which candidates attempted a comparison between a literary text and its film adaptation were generally poorly done as the film tended to be treated more superficially and less critically.

Historical essays were inclined to be more informative and less investigative.

Some candidates used the first person in their essays eg 'in my opinion'/'I think that' etc. Essays of this type tended to be lacking in detailed analysis. Where the third person was used, there tended to be better critical evaluation of the subject matter.

In some instances, candidates struggled to sustain a quality of performance and expression of ideas throughout the course of their essay. At times, there was too much information and

not enough evaluation. Instead of selecting and analysing evidence and then drawing conclusions, too many candidates wrote their conclusion at the start of their essay and then tried to justify this for the remainder of their piece.

A significant number of candidates do not proofread their work effectively in English, and especially when quoting in Spanish from a literary text.

Component 4 – Performance: Talking

Despite this being an area where candidates generally do well, some still have difficulty in manipulating and adapting learned material to cope with questions they are asked.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Centres should share with candidates all grade related criteria, performance and pegged mark descriptors etc, as well as incorporating Understanding Standards materials and Professional Development Workshop materials into lessons. It is also important to encourage candidates to make full use of the SQA website, especially by referring to External Assessment/Course reports for Advanced Higher Spanish from the last couple of years as well as the Marking Instructions for specific past question papers.

Candidates should be reminded that handwriting needs to be clearly legible to ensure marks awarded equate to content.

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Translation

Time should be divided appropriately between the comprehension questions, the Overall Purpose question and the passage for translation.

The passive voice needs to be addressed, eg *que se vean valorados* (lines 28-29); *se pierda* (line 42).

Question 6 Overall Purpose Question

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. Good answers to the 2016 question were those which provided a good balance between identifying the writer's standpoint and the techniques he/she used to exemplify this.

Answers to the Overall Purpose question should be well structured and have a rounded conclusion, preferably at the end of the answer. Any quotation from the text should be appropriate and relevant, not just a repetition of what has been argued in English. It is also just as important to note that if candidates are quoting in Spanish from the text, adding a word for word translation in English adds nothing to their argument.

A succinct answer using inferential type language eg 'the writer implies/suggests that ...', 'this leads me to believe that ...' etc would be more likely to achieve a good mark than a long drawn out response which simply provides information from the text (most probably already covered in the answers to questions 1–5).

SQA's previously published exemplification of performance in the inferential question may be used by teachers/lecturers to assist candidates in developing inferencing skills.

Question 7 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 dictionary skills.

All candidates should be encouraged to read and review their translation when they complete it, to ensure it makes sense in English.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening

Candidates should be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible. It may be a good idea to suggest to candidates to access listening materials on the internet, especially short news items on Spanish radio.

Teachers/lecturers could advise candidates on how they should use the time they have when looking at questions before they hear the recording on the day of the examination. Strategies for note-taking while they are listening to the recording could also be discussed.

It goes without saying but obviously the teacher/lecturer using the target language as much as possible in class will help develop Listening skills.

Discursive Writing

Centres should focus candidates on improving grammatical accuracy (see section 'Areas which candidates found demanding' above). For example, to avoid an error such as *es claro que ...*, perhaps an expression like *queda claro que ...* could be used if candidates are unsure about how to use *Ser* and *Estar*.

Centres should ensure that candidates address the question at all times and do not reproduce a well-rehearsed essay that may not be entirely relevant. Candidates should address all aspects of the title. Candidates should also remain within the word limit and have a more focused approach.

Encourage candidates to avoid high-frequency language and to adopt a strategy to incorporate sophisticated language appropriate to Advanced Higher level and to the subject matter of the essay. Encourage pupils to build up word banks of phrases for use in their essays.

Impress upon candidates that they should set aside some time during the examination to use their dictionary to proofread their essay, and ensure that candidates have or are provided with a dictionary of quality, appropriate to the demands of the Discursive Writing task at Advanced Higher.

Try to get candidates to focus on structure and to reveal their conclusion at the end of their essay, not in the first paragraph.

Component 3: Portfolio

The choice of a title continues to be of crucial importance. The title should not be over-ambitious or vague or too general, but should generate a discursive/evaluative approach. It may require having a fairly narrow focus to allow for deeper analysis. Centres should therefore negotiate appropriate essay titles with their students to ensure they adopt a consistently investigative tone throughout their work. To this end, they should discuss the use of critical terminology with their students to enable them to improve the quality of their expression in English.

The choice of suitable and compatible sources needs to be addressed. Centres should avoid allowing candidates to access secondary sources which do not closely relate to the primary source. There should be a critical evaluation of the primary source.

Candidates should be reminded to use an appropriate register in their essays and to avoid abbreviating the names of authors or film directors (eg GDT for Guillermo del Toro).

The quality of many of the Portfolio pieces would benefit from the inclusion of more quotations in Spanish to support the arguments being developed. Translating these quotes into English should be avoided. Quotations from a literary text or film or any other source which is solely in English could detract from the content and may even lead to the candidate being awarded 0 if it is felt he/she has not read eg a literary text in Spanish.

Candidates should develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies.

More care and attention is needed concerning proofreading in relation to the use of English, spelling, typing errors and punctuation, as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts.

Candidates should vary their expression throughout their essay and avoid the repetition of words and phrases. The quality of English in the Portfolio is of paramount importance and an appreciation of how to structure an essay is essential. Teachers/lecturers have an important role to play in monitoring the work of their candidates in this respect.

Component 4: Performance: Talking

Centres should sustain 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, and use of 'Ser' and 'Estar' and the subjunctive.

Centres should also encourage candidates to build up word banks of phrases for use in their Talking assessment, and continue to train them 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.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information

Statistical information: update on Courses

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|------------------------------------|---|
| Number of resulted entries in 2015 | 0 |
|------------------------------------|---|

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|------------------------------------|-----|
| Number of resulted entries in 2016 | 480 |
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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: | | | | |
| A | 35.4% | 35.4% | 170 | 134 |
| B | 22.9% | 58.3% | 110 | 115 |
| C | 22.3% | 80.6% | 107 | 96 |
| D | 6.5% | 87.1% | 31 | 86 |
| No award | 12.9% | - | 62 | 0 |

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.