Course Report 2018

Subject	Spanish
Level	Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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

Summary of the course assessment

The content of the course assessment covered all four contexts of society, learning, employability and culture across the three components. Markers noted that the question papers and marking instructions were very fair and that the papers offered an appropriate level of challenge at Higher.

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

Candidates continue to perform very well across the reading and directed writing question papers. Candidates and centres are to be congratulated on excellent preparation for the examination.

In the reading question paper, the sections were balanced in terms of high, low and average demand questions; the translation and overall purpose question were well done, and showed the range of candidate language ability.

Candidates read one text in Spanish in the context of society, about attitudes of young people in Spain towards cars. Candidates are required to answer questions in English. In addition, candidates had to answer one overall purpose question which required them to demonstrate a good understanding of the arguments presented in the text, interpreting these to demonstrate their inferencing skills.

The reading text also had a small section to be translated into English, which requires a high degree of accuracy in the language. The translation passage measures literacy and higher-order thinking skills. Full marks are only available from the translation with a very good rendering of the text into English. It is positive to see that candidates seem to be dedicating more time to the translation.

In the directed writing question paper, candidates were given a choice of two stimuli, each with four unseen bullet points to address. Candidates had to write 120–150 words, and they had a choice between the contexts of employability or learning.

In scenario 1: employability, candidates were asked to write about their experience of their work in Spain the previous summer. The four bullet points were: where you worked and what you thought of working there; what skills you had to use in your job; what you did in your free time; why would you recommend working abroad to other people. In scenario 2: learning, candidates were asked to write about their experience taking part in a language exchange in Argentina. The four bullet points were: how you travelled and what you thought of the journey; how you got on with the other students; what you did during your stay; if you would do a language exchange again.

Candidates have continued to embrace the element of personalisation and choice in the directed writing question paper. The choice of directed writing tasks in the 2018 paper, allowed candidates who felt more comfortable with the employability context, as a step-up from National 5, to perform well in the task. Although many candidates performed very well, others struggled with the second bullet point, 'what skills you had to use in your job'.

Candidates who chose scenario 2 did well, although markers noted that a significant number of candidates thought that Argentina was in Spain. Candidates were not penalised for this, but centres should continue to emphasise to candidates that there are 360 million Spanish speakers in countries outwith Spain, and that these may be included in future papers.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

Overall, candidates performed very well in the listening and writing paper.

The listening question paper was linked to the context of culture. Candidates listened to item 1, a monologue in which David talked about living in Argentina. In item 2, Ana and Javier discussed a recent holiday studying English in the north of England. Candidates answered questions in English.

After the listening, candidates had to write a 120–150 words essay linked to the listening stimulus. Candidates were asked to write about their holidays.

Most candidates did well in the writing element, although this year there seemed to be more candidates struggling to use language to a sophistication level appropriate for Higher when writing about their plans for the summer or what they usually like doing during their holidays.

Component 3: performance–talking

The performance–talking performed as expected.

In the performance–talking at Higher, candidates are required to carry out a spoken presentation and then take part in a conversation directly afterwards. In both the presentation and conversation sections candidates are required to employ detailed and complex language at Higher. The majority of centres sampled for verification this session marked candidates' performances in line with national standards.

No revisions have been made to the Higher performance–talking marking instructions since session 2016–17. Centres are familiar with how this coursework task works, and feedback from the Spanish verification team confirmed that marking instructions allowed centres to mark candidates' performances with confidence.

In the performance–talking candidates should aim to demonstrate their abilities against the four aspects of the performance: content, accuracy, language resource and interaction.

Assessors play an important role in that prior to the assessment they guide candidates in the choice of subtopics and contexts.

In the sample of centres verified this year, candidates had been encouraged to select topics from two different contexts (a different context is to be covered in the conversation to that used in the presentation). This gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their ability against the four aspects. The topics selected by candidates provided scope for them to use detailed and complex spoken language.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Overall, the performance of candidates in the Higher Spanish course has been very good this year, and the question papers have worked well. Markers noted that a small number of candidates were possibly not quite prepared for Higher and could not write with the level of accuracy and language resource required for the writing elements at this level.

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

Candidates performed particularly well in the reading and directed writing question papers. Markers felt they were accessible and the marking instructions were fair.

In the reading question paper, there was a balance of high, low and average demand questions. The structure of the papers enabled candidates with a lesser command of the language to access the paper through more straightforward questions. Most candidates used their literacy skills to look for the 'signposts' offered in the Spanish text, linking them to the questions in English.

Questions 1, 2(a) and 2(b) were answered well by candidates, as were questions 4(a), 5(a) and 6(b). The translation was also well done, especially sense units 1–3.

In the directed writing question paper, candidates performed better in scenario 2: learning (trip to Argentina), despite any misunderstanding about the location of Argentina.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

In the listening question paper, the topics were accessible and candidates could easily connect with the content. However, on the whole candidates did not give accurate answers in item 1 (monologue). Item 2 was answered better (dialogue).

Overall, candidates did well in the writing section of the question paper, answering the questions about their holidays. It was nice to see that candidates were able to write about their future holiday plans.

Component 3: performance–talking

Based on the performances sampled this session, the overall quality of candidate performance was high.

Presentation (10 marks)
Candidates performed very well in the presentation section of the performance. Based on the centres verified, the vast majority of candidates achieved pegged marks of 8 or 10. This is as expected given that this section of the performance can be thoroughly prepared ahead of the assessment.

Conversation (15 marks) and sustaining the conversation (5 marks)
Candidates coped well in this section and among the centres sampled, the majority of candidates were awarded pegged marks of 12 or 15. The majority of candidates sustained the conversation well, despite any errors, and were awarded 3 or 5 marks for the 'sustaining the conversation' aspect.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

Most candidates coped well with the reading text on attitudes of young people about car use, the overall purpose question, and the translation. Nevertheless, for some candidates, there were some challenges in the reading paper.

In question 3(a), many candidates lost the mark because they did not recognise *tantos jóvenes ('*not as many/not so many/fewer'). Candidates found question 4(b) especially challenging. Candidates were confused with the concept and answered that public transport had adapted to the new lifestyle derived from technology, as opposed to the fact that travelling by public transport is more compatible with the new lifestyle. Many candidates found question 6(a) difficult, and very few candidates obtained the full 3 marks. Many candidates offered 'ecological' as part of their answer and therefore lost a mark here.

In translation, sense units 1–3 were well answered. In sense unit 4, many candidates missed *ya*, and in sense unit 5, many candidates did not manage to understand *no sienten la necesidad de adquirir bienes tradicionales.*

The overall purpose question was answered well. Candidates seem to be getting used to the idea of providing an assertion (1 mark) and a justification (1 mark). When quoting Spanish text to justify their answers, candidates overall provided an explanation in English rather than merely adding a word-for-word English translation. In previous years, a considerable number of candidates have dedicated too much time to this question and written too much (for example three or four justifications) for a 2 mark question, which limited time for the translation in some instances. It is noted that centres have been very successful at communicating this to their candidates.

In the directed writing question paper, some candidates did not manage to tackle the skills bullet point of the employability option.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

In the listening question paper, not providing enough information and lack of detail let down some candidates.

It was unfortunate that many candidates wrote 'experiment a new way of life' instead of 'experience' for question 1(a)(i). Candidates should continue to double-check what they have written makes sense in English. Many candidates found question 1(a)(ii) difficult as they did not manage to give the Spanish for *apreciar* ('appreciate other cultures'), and they wrote 'learn' or 'see'. Question 1(b)(i) was answered poorly by more candidates than expected.

Candidates were asked to recognise language which would have been covered at National 5 as part of the employment context, such as organising online reservations at a restaurant, welcoming customers or taking customers to their table. Question 2(d) was not answered well. *Analizar* caused issues and candidates heard *pelí́culas* and assumed *mirar/ver. Obra de teatro* was also not translated well, and some candidates confused *obra* with 'opera'. Question 2(e) was an 'A' type question, and as such, was more challenging for most candidates.

In the writing element of the listening question paper, those candidates who tackled the writing task without showing progression from National 5, did not demonstrate content, accuracy or language resource at the level required for Higher.

Component 3: performance–talking

Conversation section
Some candidates found the conversation section of the performance–talking more demanding as it is less predictable and involves a series of questions. Among the centres sampled, pegged marks of 9 or 6 were awarded to some candidates.

The level of grammatical accuracy was also an area highlighted by the Spanish verification team. Among other aspects, errors, which detracted from the overall impression, were a feature of weaker performances.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

In both reading and listening, candidates should read questions carefully, and respond giving the correct amount of information, ensuring enough detail is given. Detailed marking instructions for reading and listening are available on SQA's website, and show the level of detail required for answers. Candidates should re-read their answers to be sure that they make sense in English, especially in the translation.

Component 1: question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

In the reading question paper, in the overall purpose question, most candidates have understood that one assertion and one piece of evidence from the text is enough to gain 2 marks. Candidates should provide an explanation in English when citing Spanish from the text; merely adding a word-for-word translation in English adds nothing to their justification. Many candidates wrote considerably more than they needed to, in a way that is more similar to the Advanced Higher overall purpose question, and this could have had a detrimental effect on the translation as candidates did not allow themselves enough time.

Candidates should read the questions carefully and re-read their responses to check English expression. The reading questions offer candidates 'signposts' to answers in the text. Candidates overall had a good grasp of how to tackle the reading text. However, there were some who were not guided by the 'signposts' and as a result provided information which, although not wrong, was irrelevant.

In the translation candidates performed well overall, but it is important to keep in mind that full marks in the translation are only available if there is a very good rendering of the text into English. Candidates should allow enough time to complete the translation where accuracy plays a very important role.

Component 2: question paper 2: Listening and Writing

In the writing question paper, the majority of candidates achieved the 6 marks threshold. Those who achieved 8 and 10 were able to demonstrate a flair for the language and performed well across the three categories of content, accuracy and language resource.

The stronger essays used time phrases and connectives, which added to the sense of structure and flow in the language. Very successful candidates also often structured their writing into paragraphs.

Some recurring inaccuracies in Spanish were present in using gender, adjectival agreement and verb tenses. Some candidates did not know when to use indefinite or definite articles. *Ser* and *estar* usage is another recurring issue, as is the lack of precision when using the preterite and the imperfect. Equally, many candidates found difficulty using the subjunctive after *cuando*. Candidates should be comfortable using phrases such as *cuando sea, cuando vaya, cuando tenga* if they are writing about their future intentions to work abroad or do a language exchange, or recommending working abroad or a language exchange to other people.

Component 3: performance–talking

In some of the performances sampled, there were grammatical errors such as gender errors and problems with agreement of adjectives and verbs.

Centres are encouraged to continue to include grammar practice and coverage of the rules of language as an integral part of learning and teaching. Centres should continue to encourage candidates to use a variety of persons and tenses, where appropriate. It is important that candidates continue to have an understanding of how language works and are able to correct their errors including during any talking practice and tests as part of learning and teaching.

Many confident performances demonstrated very good language resource. In some instances, the language was not detailed and complex and this detracted from the overall quality.

In the conversation section, centres are encouraged to ensure candidates have a variety of strategies, for example to enable them to ask for questions to be repeated, or language structures and phrases to say when they have not understood any aspect of the conversation.

Candidates who were able to use interjections, ask relevant questions, and use idiomatic phrases were able to sustain the conversation well. Centres are encouraged to continue to prepare candidates in this way.

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

The length of the performances sampled varied, and centres are advised to refer to the advice on the recommended duration of the performance–talking. This is to make sure candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of the task at Higher.

A few of the performances went beyond the recommended duration and others were significantly shorter than the recommended duration. Neither approach is necessarily to the candidate's benefit.

As noted in previous years' Higher 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, centres are encouraged to continue to put open-ended questions to candidates in order to elicit detailed and complex language in the answers.

Centres are also encouraged to put a variety of questions to their candidates, even where the same or similar topics have been selected by candidates from within the same centre. In turn, this provides for personalisation and choice and provides scope for candidates to produce a more varied conversation.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	2809

Number of resulted entries in 2018	2795

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	45.0%	45.0%	1257	70
B	22.2%	67.2%	621	59
C	16.5%	83.6%	460	49
D	6.5%	90.1%	181	44
No award	9.9%	-	276	-

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 which 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.

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 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.

Grade boundaries from exam 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 exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.