Course Report 2017

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 very pleasing to report that the number of candidates being presented for Spanish at Advanced Higher level has remained steady and healthy. There were no significant setting issues for the 2017 paper, and no changes to the experienced setting and checking teams.

Component 1 — question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates responded fairly well to this paper, especially, as last year, when answering the comprehension questions (1–6). The vast majority engaged well with the subject matter of the text, which focused on mature students in Spanish universities.

In general terms, candidates, once again did not respond well to Q7, the Overall Purpose question, and a number of them found some of the sense units in the Translation challenging.

Component 2 — question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Candidates performed reasonably well in the Listening component, which related to immigration and the influx of young people from Central America to the USA.

In Discursive Writing, on the whole, essays were well structured and written in paragraphs. There were some very good essays that demonstrated flair, appropriate rendition of subjunctive clauses, and accurate use of discursive language. However, some candidates scored only 16 or less as a result of not addressing the question fully and relying instead on the reproduction of learned material or an essay they had written previously.

It was pleasing to note that all four essay titles were attempted, the most popular choices being Q4 on the relevance of school subjects and Q5 on successful women in the workplace.

Component 3 — portfolio

As last year, candidates wrote one essay of 1500 words, which had to include two sources in Spanish. There was a 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.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1 — question paper: Reading and Translation
Candidates generally responded well to the comprehension questions and in particular Q1(a) and (b), Q2(b), Q3 and Q6, where they provided mostly accurate responses.

Sense units 1, 3, 4 and 10 in the Translation section seemed a bit more accessible than the others to this year's cohort.

Component 2 — question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

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

In Item 2, they seemed to find Q2(b)(i), Q2(c), Q2(d)(i), Q2(e) and 2 (f)(ii) more straightforward than the other questions.

Discursive Writing
Candidates were successful when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their answer and when their essays were relevant to the question.

Candidates achieved their best results when they fully addressed the title and delivered well-structured essays using coherent language and interesting ideas. Of the four choices of titles available, Q5 about successful women in the workplace and Q6 about racism were tackled most effectively.

Appropriate linking structures and phrases relating to expressing opinions were characteristics of good practice eg *dicho esto…, no hay duda de que…, parece justo decir que…, vale mencionar…, en pocas palabras…, que yo sepa…*

There was also some excellent use of 'essay' Spanish structures which deserve special mention such as: *eso no significa necesariamente que sea …, va por descontado …, se debate con frecuencia …, es imposible negar …, sigue siendo…*

Component 3 — portfolio
As always, presentation of Portfolio work was good overall. The best essays were those that had a question/title that genuinely led candidates to adopt an analytical or evaluative 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. Areas where results justify special mention were those Portfolios which focused on literary texts (poetry in particular) and films, where it was encouraging to note there was increased focus on cinematographic techniques. Essays which stood out were those that were well structured, displayed a good level of English and provided accurate and justified quotation from the text/screenplay that supported the arguments being presented.

Reliable bibliographies containing three or more references to sources were a feature of good practice. Few candidates incurred a penalty for exceeding the word limit or failing to produce a bibliography.

Component 4 — performance: Talking

Most candidates are generally comfortable and confident in the language. As last year, 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 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. This continues to be the area of examination in which they do best.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1 — question paper: Reading and Translation

Questions 1–6
In Q2(a) the words *licenciado* (line 10) and *seguros* (line 11) caused candidates some problems. There were misinterpretations like 'licensed in Law'.

In Q2(c) candidates experienced some difficulty with the phrase *por su cuenta* (line 14). Many did not capture the idea of Jesús Rodríguez set up something on his own.

In Q4 the phrase *se me queda corta* (line 30) proved difficult for many candidates, who did not achieve the second point for this question.

In Q5(a) surprisingly, some candidates mistranslated *sesenta por ciento* (line 49) by writing 70%.

In Q5(b) *algún que otro trabajo* (line 54) was mistakenly answered as an 'occasional job' or 'one or two jobs'.

Q7: Overall Purpose Question
Candidates, on the whole, are still not providing a sufficiently reflective or analytical response to this question.

Many responses failed to go 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. It would have been pleasing to have seen more candidates making a connection between the increase in the number of mature students in Spanish universities and the economic crisis.

In general, candidates still find it challenging to express their ideas by using '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. A number of candidates did indeed make reference to the use of statistics and expert opinion in the text but did not develop their ideas or go on to mention the intended impact of these techniques on the reader.

Q8: Translation

Sense units 2, 5, 6 and 8 were found to be demanding by candidates.

In unit 2, *hago suplencias* (line 32) presented candidates with having to come up with the notion of 'supply teaching' or 'replacing absent teachers', which a number of them did not manage to do.

In unit 5, a sizeable number of candidates had difficulty in translating *tampoco* (line 33) and lost at least one mark.

In unit 6, the phrase *inseguridad laboral* (line 34) was sometimes mistranslated as 'working insecurities' or 'workplace instability'.

In unit 8, a number of candidates struggled with the expression *en función de* (line 34) and did not translate it correctly as 'depending on' or 'according to'.

Verb forms/tenses (eg *Pensé* in unit 4 (line 32) also presented candidates with difficulties in this section. There was occasional unidiomatic translation from Spanish into English.

Component 2 — question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening Item 1

In Q1(a)(i) the majority of candidates did not get the number 500,000.

In Q1(a)(ii) very few candidates provided sufficient detail in their answer relating to *encima de* ('*on top of* cargo trains').

In Q1(c)(i) numbers once more proved to be problematic for some candidates. This time 65,000.

In Q1(c)(ii) *casi el doble* presented a challenge for some who failed to provide the detail of 'almost double' or 'nearly double'.

Listening Item 2

In Q2(a) lack of attention to detail with *durante y después* ('during *and* after') or an incorrect answer of 'before and after' meant some candidates lost a mark.

In Q2(b)(ii) *quiere* the idea of 'wanting' was missed by a number of candidates.

In Q2(d)(iii) *doctorado* was misinterpreted by some as José Luis wanting to 'become a doctor'.

Discursive Writing

Some candidates ran into difficulties when going beyond prepared material, and this led them on occasion to not fully addressing the question. These candidates were inclined to 'disguise' their essays (mostly unsuccessfully) to suit the title of the essay, or write pre-learned essays which clearly compromised relevance and focus, eg no focus on men in Q3 or an essay entirely on the importance of languages for Q4.

Many wrote too much, causing them to make unnecessary grammatical errors. There were issues with basic grammar such as incorrect verb endings and tenses, genders, adjectival agreements, *ser* and *estar* confusion, and inaccurate or inappropriate use of the infinitive and the subjunctive. Misuse of the dictionary was also evident in the essays which achieved 20 marks or less.

Not all candidates have grasped what exactly constitutes a discursive essay. In Q4, a number of candidates limited themselves to their own personal experiences of how relevant they found school subjects.

Component 3 — portfolio

The selection of titles continues to be problematic. Many candidates still find it difficult to select a title or essay question that generates debate or critical analysis. Too many had titles that were poorly expressed or were too vague or wordy, contrived, over-complicated or not framed as a question.

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

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

Overall, a narrative approach to the Portfolio piece which provided information but little analysis generally did not lead to a good result.

There was a lack of understanding of the term 'Magical Realism'. Many candidates referred to this as a theme rather than a literary technique. Some essays are based on the wrong premise, eg an incorrect assumption that Lorca's work is connected to Franco and/or the Spanish Civil War.

Some candidates used the first person in their essays eg 'in my opinion'/'I think that'. 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.

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. Some of the English is presented in an inappropriate register eg 'old flame', 'sticks out like a sore thumb'.

Component 4 — performance: Talking
Despite this being the skill 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

♦ Share all criteria/Detailed Marking Instructions/pegged marks/performance descriptors etc and appropriate SQA documentation with candidates.
♦ Incorporate Understanding Standards and Professional Development Workshop materials into lessons.
♦ Encourage candidates to make full use of the SQA website, especially by referring to course reports for AH Spanish from the last couple of years, as well as the Marking Instructions for specific past question papers.
♦ Access to a suitable dictionary for this level of examination is absolutely crucial.
♦ Candidates should be reminded that handwriting needs to be clearly legible to ensure marks awarded equate to content.

Component 1 — question paper: Reading and Translation

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

♦ Candidates should be reminded of the importance of how they express their answers in English for the comprehension questions and the Overall Purpose question.

♦ Centres should continue to develop dictionary skills with their candidates. Throughout Paper 1, but especially when tackling the passage for translation, some are prepared to

choose the first entry they find for the word they are looking up rather than persevering to capture the meaning that best fits the context.

Q7 Overall Purpose Question

Centres should encourage candidates to draw inferences from the text and not just provide factual information or repeat the answers to their comprehension questions when doing this task. Good answers to the 2017 question provided a good balance between identifying the writer's standpoint and the techniques he/she used. Answers to the inferential 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 in English of what has been argued. 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 that'/'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 just provides information from the text, most probably already covered in the answers to questions1–6.

SQA's exemplification of performance in this question should be used by teachers/lecturers to assist candidates in developing inferential skills.

Q8 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.
♦ 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: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening
♦ It may be a good idea throughout the year to suggest to candidates that they should access Listening materials on the internet, especially short news items on Spanish radio.
♦ Appropriate use of a Foreign Language Assistant would be of some benefit by timetabling him/her with the Advanced Higher class and getting him/her involved in recording suitable materials.
♦ Obviously, the teacher/lecturer using the target language as much as possible in class will help develop Listening skills.
♦ Teachers/lecturers should advise candidates on how they can 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.

♦ Candidates should be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible.

Discursive Writing

♦ More grammatical accuracy is required (see 'Areas which candidates found demanding - Discursive Writing').

♦ If candidates are unsure about how to use *ser* and *estar*, it may be worth considering a range of strategies to support them — eg to avoid an error such as *es claro que…* instead of the correct *está claro que…,* get them to focus on using *queda claro que.*

♦ Ensure candidates address the question at all times and do not reproduce a well-rehearsed essay that may not be entirely relevant. Essays should address all aspects of the title. Candidates should 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 candidates to build up 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 they 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 and not in the first paragraph.

♦ Impress upon candidates the notion of Discursive Writing and that they should refrain from stating personal opinions, or at least save these until the very end of their essay.

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 need a fairly narrow focus to allow for deeper analysis. Centres should negotiate appropriate essay titles with their candidates to ensure they adopt a consistently investigative tone throughout their work.

♦ To this end, centres should discuss the use of critical terminology with their candidates 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 that 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 and formal register in their essays.

♦ Centres should check the factual accuracy of their candidates' work eg ensure they have a true understanding of the literary technique of Magical Realism and to disabuse them of approaches which incorrectly compare the women in Lorca's plays to women living in Franco's Spain.

♦ Introductions and conclusions to essays should be looked at very closely. The conclusion of the essay should normally refer back to the title.

♦ Many of the Portfolio pieces would benefit from more quotations in Spanish to support the arguments being developed. Translating these quotes into English should be avoided at all costs. Quotations from a literary text or film or any other source that 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 (for example) a literary text in the foreign language.

♦ Candidates should develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies overall — eg Wikipedia (without mention of a website), a reference to a newspaper (on its own with no article noted), and 'teachers' notes', do not constitute appropriate items for a bibliography.

♦ More care and attention is needed in proofreading in English for 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.

♦ It would be helpful if candidates wrote the title of their essay at the top of the first page to ensure it is more visible. The box/grid on the flyleaf may at times be too small for longer titles.

Component 4 — performance: Talking

♦ 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.

♦ Encourage candidates to build up banks of phrases for use in their Talking assessment.

♦ Continue to train candidates in discussion techniques in the language to enable them to deal with any question that goes beyond their 'comfort zone' of learned material.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	480

Number of resulted entries in 2017	433

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	33.9%	33.9%	147	134
B	24.7%	58.7%	107	114
C	15.9%	74.6%	69	95
D	8.8%	83.4%	38	85
No award	16.6%	-	72	-

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.