External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	Spanish
Level(s)	Advanced Higher

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

The Examining Team is very pleased to see that the number of candidates being presented for Spanish at Advanced Higher level increased significantly this year from 239 in 2014 to 326 in 2015.

There were 23 new centres presenting in 2015 and 13 returning centres.

There were no significant setting issues for the 2015 papers and no changes to the experienced setting and vetting teams.

Speaking

As in previous years, candidates did very well in this skill area. This year's cohort managed to achieve an encouraging average mark of 37.4 out of 50.

Folio

A reasonable range of texts and topics were attempted and candidates performed slightly better in this component compared to last year, averaging a mark of 18.2 out of 30, an increase of 0.3 marks — the highest in the last 4 years.

Paper I Reading and Translation

In general, as in 2014, candidates responded favourably to this paper, especially when answering the comprehension questions. The vast majority engaged well with the subject matter of the text which related to the pressure placed on children by their parents.

Some candidates produced answers which addressed both parts of the inferential question eg analysis of language and how the passage is structured, including the viewpoints of experts and students, in addition to techniques used by the writer.

As in previous years, a number of candidates found the passage for translation fairly demanding.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

Although performance in this paper overall was comparable to 2014, candidates found the Listening section, on the role of women in the workplace/equality between men and women, quite challenging. It was disappointing, however, to see that a notable number of candidates made mistakes in questions that involved numbers.

In Discursive Writing, the standard was broadly similar to that in 2014, although some candidates scored only a maximum mark of 16 as a result of not addressing the question fully and relying instead on the reproduction of learned material.

The Examining Team was satisfied to observe that **all** essay titles were attempted, the most popular choices being question 3 on immigration and the economy, question 2 on internet bullying, and question 4 on the idea of marriage being a lottery.

Areas in which candidates performed well

Speaking
As in previous years, most candidates were again comfortable and confident in the language, with only a minority failing to score 30 or more out of 50. Fluency and taking the initiative readily were features of good performances.

The vast majority of candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared. Many candidates 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 at ease with the method of assessment.

Folio
Presentation of Folio work was good overall. As before, the study of literary texts was tackled more successfully than background topics. The best essays had a question/title that genuinely led candidates to adopt an analytical approach or allowed for two sides of an argument to be developed, eg a focus on a particular scene in a play/novel and its effect on the work overall.

Folio pieces also often worked better when there was an element of comparing and contrasting, eg two characters in a novel/play, two aspects of the same character or some analysis of poetry. Essays that stood out from the others were well structured, displayed a good level of English, and provided accurate/justified quotation from the text.

Reliable bibliographies containing three or more references to sources were also a feature of good practice.

Paper I Reading and Translation
Candidates generally responded well to the comprehension questions, especially questions 2(a) and (b), 4 and 5, where they provided detailed and accurate responses.

Sense units 1, 4, 6 and 7 in the Translation section seemed more accessible than the others to this year's cohort.

Paper II Listening
In Part A, candidates did well when answering questions 1, 3(a) and 5.

Generally speaking, however, candidates tended to perform better in Part B, where questions 1, 3(b), 4 and 5 were answered well.

Paper II Discursive Writing

On the whole, essays were 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.

Some candidates who **fully** addressed the titles in question 2 (internet bullying), question 3 (immigration) and question 4 (marriage), came up with interesting and original ideas. There were good pieces written for question 1 (the consequences of selfish behaviour of young people) and question 5 (the relationship between speaking foreign languages and being a citizen of the EU).

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

Areas which candidates found demanding

Speaking

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.

Folio

Many candidates still find it difficult to select a title or essay question that generates debate or critical analysis appropriate to Advanced Higher level, particularly when addressing a background topic. A small number provided no title at all. Titles are sometimes over-ambitious or too general.

There continues to be a large number of candidates who adopt an obvious approach which tends to generate a one-sided argument with a predictable conclusion.

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

Often, particularly when tackling background topics, the content is (almost exclusively) factual and not analytical. Candidates should avoid merely relaying information or making sweeping generalisations or assertions with evidence to support the argument.

Paper I Reading and Translation

In the Reading passage, candidates experienced some difficulty by not checking the dictionary for the meaning of words and expressions such as *rendirán* (line 26,) *en lugar de* (line 27), *pendiente* (line 29), *ámbito* (line 45), *acabar* and gerund (line 64) when meaning 'to end up doing something' and not 'to stop', *no sirve para nada* (line 66) and *en fin* (line 104).

In question 1, again through dictionary misuse, there were occasional misinterpretations of *recoger el baño, doblar la ropa* and *acudir.*

In question 3, some candidates, although they spotted the 'hook' of Isabel Navarro and eventually answered the question well, tended also to 'translate' from line 36 rather than focus on the phrase *donde más presionan* in lines 44–45. In the same question, many failed to think through their response and provide 'timekeeping' as an answer, choosing to write 'timetable' for the word *horarios.* Some candidates were let down by their poor English, and some answers, like those for questions 1 and 3, did not contain enough detail.

Question 6 Inferential question

As in previous years, candidates who did less well provided information from the text rather than attempting to draw inferences. Some found it difficult to express their ideas through the use of 'inferential' type language or to focus on the writer's techniques which reinforced his/her standpoint eg views/analysis of experts, use of direct speech to add authenticity, use of questions to encourage the reader to think, use of lists or repetition to emphasise amount of pressure, view of Silvia Rodríguez to provide a balance to the argument etc.

Disappointing performances in this question were characterised by poor English.

Translation
♦ Sense units 2, 5, 8 and 10 were found to be demanding by candidates.
♦ Unit 2 — Many translated *exigencia* as 'demand', which did not fit the context.
♦ Unit 5 — This was particularly challenging as few candidates were able to cope with the figurative language of *un buen colchón afectivo.* The literal translation of 'affective mattress' made no sense in the context of the translation.
♦ Unit 8 — *echar una bronca* was often badly translated as 'throwing a fuss' or 'tantrum'.
♦ Unit 10 — the translation of *dejar de quererle* caused problems for some candidates who translated *dejar* as 'to leave'.
♦ Unidiomatic translation from Spanish into English, and verb forms on the whole, presented candidates with difficulties in this section.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening Part A
Question 2 presented candidates with problems as many did not deal with the past tense *más hombres que mujeres estaban sin trabajo* and therefore a number lost at least one mark.

In question 4 it was disappointing to see a sizeable minority of candidates fail to achieve a mark for not recognising the number 32 or mistranslating the phrase *de media* as 'a half'. In the same question, some candidates confused maternity rate with maternity age.

Listening Part B
♦ Questions 2(b), 3(a), 6 and 7 caused difficulties for candidates.
♦ In question 2(b), many had problems with the number 40.
♦ In question 3(a) there were difficulties with the word *envejecimiento.*

- In question 6 the term *malabares* presented a challenge to candidates even though it was supported with the verb *compaginar* and a list of things women have to juggle with or combine.
- For question 7, some candidates failed to provide sufficient information to get full marks. *Una jornada laboral reducida* and *sin horas extras* seemed to be the phrases candidates had most problems with in this section.

Discursive Writing

As in previous years, a fair number of essays exceeded the word limit. Although there is no penalty for doing this, overlong essays tend to be self-penalising with candidates making basic errors, especially towards the end, perhaps as they felt they were running out of time.

Candidates ran into difficulties when going beyond prepared material, and this led on occasion to them not fully addressing the question.

In essays this year, there was some unidiomatic translation from English into Spanish and poor control of tenses/verbs, as well as misuse of parts of the verb *gustar.* Other major errors related to poor control of *ser* and *estar,* confusion as to when to use *para* and *por*, and missed opportunities to include the subjunctive mood when required eg after *no creo que...* or *es importante que...* etc.

Mistakes relating to adjectival agreement, genders of nouns, and the omission of pronouns were also apparent in performances in Discursive Writing this year. Misuse of the dictionary was also evident in the essays which achieved Satisfactory or less. There was occasional other-tongue interference (mostly French).

Essays that were repetitive rarely did better than Satisfactory.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

General
- Share all criteria/GRC/pegged marks/performance descriptors etc and SQA documentation with candidates. Incorporate Exemplification of Standards and Professional Development Workshop materials into lessons.
- Encourage candidates to make full use of the SQA website, especially by referring to External Assessment Reports for AH 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.

Speaking
- 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, use of *ser* and *estar* and the subjunctive.

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

♦ If a candidate speaks about a background topic, it would be more interesting if ideas were presented in a Spanish context (eg immigration situation in Spain as opposed to just in Scotland).

Folio

♦ 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. Try to avoid obvious titles which lead to a one-sided argument and/or predictable conclusion.

♦ Where candidates from the same centre are studying the same text or background topic, it would be advisable to offer candidates a choice of essay titles to ensure more individual responses.

♦ The quality of many of the Folio pieces would benefit from the inclusion of more quotations **in Spanish** to support the arguments being developed. English translations of quotations are not required. Quotations from a literary text which are **solely in English** could detract from the content and may even lead to the candidate being awarded zero if it is felt he/she has not read the text in Spanish.

♦ 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 when proof-checking in relation to the use of English, spelling, typing errors and punctuation as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts.

♦ Candidates should avoid the use of inappropriate register and expressions. They should vary their expression throughout their essay and avoid the repetition of words and phrases.

♦ The quality of English in Folio pieces is very important, as is an appreciation of how to structure an essay, as well as an understanding of what is meant by an 'analytical' approach.

♦ Conclusions to essays should be looked at very closely. A weak or poorly articulated conclusion may mean the difference between a Satisfactory and Unsatisfactory performance.

Paper I Reading and Translation

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

Question 6 Inferential 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. Good answers to the 2015 question provided a good balance between identifying the writer's standpoint and the techniques he/she used to exemplify this. 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 of what has been argued in English. It is worth noting that if candidates quote in Spanish from the text, a translation of the quote in English is not necessary.

♦ 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.

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

Translation

♦ More attention should be given to the development of translation skills and, in particular, to 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. On completion, all candidates should be encouraged to read and review their translation to ensure it makes sense in English.

Paper II Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening

♦ Candidates should be familiar with **recognising numbers** (high or low) in any Listening text at this level. They should also be encouraged to provide full and detailed answers as far as possible.

♦ It may be a good idea to suggest that candidates 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 that the teacher/lecturer using the target language as much as possible in class will help develop Listening skills.

Discursive Writing

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

♦ Ensure candidates address the question at all times and do not reproduce a well-rehearsed essay which may not be entirely relevant. Candidates should address all aspects of the title and remain within the word limit.

♦ 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.

♦ Impress upon candidates that they should set aside some time during the examination to use their dictionary to proof-check their essay.

♦ 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.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	239

Number of resulted entries in 2015	326

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 200				
A	28.5%	28.5%	93	139
B	21.9%	54.6%	85	118
C	23.9%	78.5%	78	98
D	8.6%	87.1%	28	88
No award	12.9%	-	42	-

For this Course the intention was to set an assessment with the Grade Boundaries at the notional values of 50% for a Grade C and 70% for a Grade A. While the Assessment was valid and set at the appropriate level, there was a similar issue as in previous years relating to the demand of the Translation, and Grade Boundaries were set in line with 2014.

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.