



## Course Report 2017

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|---------|---------|
| Subject | Spanish |
| Level   | 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

### Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing

Candidates continue to perform very well across all sections of the question papers: in Reading, Writing and Listening.

Candidates are continuing to embrace the element of personalisation and choice in the Directed Writing paper. The choice of Directed Writing tasks in the 2017 paper, between the contexts of learning and employability, allowed candidates who felt more comfortable with the learning context to perform well in the task, whilst allowing more adventurous candidates the opportunity to undertake the employability task.

Candidates and their teachers/lecturers are to be congratulated on their excellent preparation for the examination.

As indicated in the Course Assessment Specification for Higher Spanish, the content of the course assessment covered all four contexts of society, learning, employability and culture across the three components of the examination. Markers noted that the papers and marking instructions were very fair, and that the papers offered an appropriate level of challenge at Higher level.

In the Reading question paper, candidates read one text in Spanish in the context of culture, about Spanish citizens' perceptions of Fairtrade. They had to answer questions in English. They also had to answer one overall purpose question, which required them to demonstrate a good understanding of the arguments presented in the text, and how they would interpret these, demonstrating their inferencing skills. The text also had a small section to translate into English, which required a great deal of sophistication and accuracy in the language. The translation passage measures literacy and high-order thinking skills. Full marks are only available from the translation with a very good rendering of the text into English.

The Reading questions were balanced in terms of high, low and average demand. The translation and the overall purpose question were well done, and showed the range of language ability of candidates, although some candidates found it more difficult to articulate their thoughts regarding the concept of 'ethical reasons' demanded in the overall purpose question. However, even though the answers were in some cases still too lengthy for what is required for only 2 marks (please see specific advice to centres in section 3), it was pleasing to see a good level of understanding overall in candidates' answers.

In the Directed Writing, 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 learning or employability. In scenario 1: learning, candidates were asked to write about their experience of taking part in a school exchange in Spain. The four bullet points were: how you travelled and what you thought of the journey; what you did during the school/college day; how you got on with the people you met; if you would recommend a school/college exchange to others. In scenario 2: employability, candidates

were asked to write about their work experience in Spain. The four bullet points were: how you found out about the placement and where exactly in Spain it was; what you liked/disliked most about the job; how you got on with your work colleagues; if you would like to work abroad in the future.

## **Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing**

Candidates performed equally well in the Listening paper, including the Writing element of this paper. The three questions in the Writing element rubric helped candidates who find it more difficult to write lengthier answers to structure their essays well. Those candidates who write more comfortably used the three questions offered as a springboard to demonstrate their ability to manipulate language well at Higher level.

The Listening question paper was linked to the context of society. Candidates listened to Item 1, a monologue in which Matilde talked about health issues. In Item 2, candidates listened to Elisa asking Pedro questions about his family. Candidates answered questions in English.

After the Listening, there was the second Writing element. Candidates had to write a 120–150 words essay linked to the Listening stimulus. Candidates were asked to write about their own health: what they do to keep healthy, if they have a good diet, and what they do to relax: *‘Y tú, ¿qué haces para mantenerte en forma? ¿Tienes una buena dieta? ¿Cómo te relajas?’*.

## **Component 3 — performance: Talking**

The talking coursework component performed as expected and is the same task year on year.

Revised marking instructions were published for session 2016–17, but the aim and format of the task remained unchanged. In the talking performance candidates still have to carry out a spoken presentation and then take part in a conversation directly afterwards.

In both the presentation and conversation sections, candidates must use detailed and complex language at Higher level. The four aspects of the Performance were also unchanged.

Centres are familiar with how this coursework task works and feedback from the Spanish verification team confirmed that the revised marking instructions allowed centres to mark candidates' performances with confidence. The majority of centres sampled this session marked candidates' performances in line with national standards.

In the performance, 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 topics and contexts. In the sample of centres verified this year, candidates had been encouraged to select topics/contexts that gave them the opportunity to demonstrate

their ability against the four aspects. The topics/contexts 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**

On the whole, the performance of candidates in the Higher Spanish course this year has been very good. The question papers have worked well. Overall, there seemed to be a fairly low instance of very low scores across all question papers, and it was very rare for candidates to leave questions blank.

#### **Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing**

Candidates performed particularly well in the Reading and Directed Writing, and very well in the Listening. The translation was well done by candidates. The question papers were accessible and the marking instructions were deemed fair by markers.

Candidates engaged with the Reading text and enjoyed the Listening paper. They performed equally well in the monologue section and the conversation section of the Listening paper.

In Writing, candidates performed equally well in the Directed Writing and in the essay following the Listening. The element of choice in the Directed Writing has presumably impacted positively on candidates, and this year nearly three quarters of the candidates preferred to undertake the learning option, and not the employability, presumably as a follow on from National 5.

This year the Listening was deemed inclusive and accessible to all candidates. Those candidates who engaged in the topic with the level of language accuracy and resource expected at Higher level did very well, and those candidates who were less secure with their writing skills did enough to secure marks to pass.

#### **Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing**

In the Listening and Writing paper, the topics were such that candidates could easily connect with them. Some candidates found the monologue on health challenging and did better in the conversation on the topic of family. Most candidates had a very positive attempt at the Writing paper.

In Reading, the majority of candidates found the text accessible. There was a balance of high, low and average demand questions. The structure of the paper 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.

Overall, the translation was well done.

It was pleasing to see again that candidates engaged with the content of the Reading text and the questions in the Listening paper, demonstrated by the relative lack of 'no responses'.

### **Component 3 — performance: Talking**

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

#### **Presentation section (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 8 or 10. This is as expected, given that this section of the performance can be thoroughly prepared ahead of the assessment.

#### **Conversation section (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 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 Fairtrade, the overall purpose question and the translation. Nevertheless, for some candidates, there were some challenges in the Reading paper:

In Reading, in the Translation, candidates at times were not being precise and accurate enough. There were also examples of not using the dictionary correctly, and of not allowing themselves sufficient time for translation and ensuring that what they had written made sense. Some candidates struggled to translate the verbs/tenses/constructions correctly, for example *'se pueden comprar'*; *'aunque el producto estrella sea el café'*; *'la bisutería está alcanzando grandes cuotas de mercado'*.

There were a few mistranslations, such as the understanding of *'el café'* as a physical space — *'café'* rather than the product one drinks — despite the whole text being on Fairtrade. Some candidates performed well providing translations for *'un sinfín'* and *'grandes cuotas de mercado'*.

More time on translation and checking over work would have helped. On the other hand, there were candidates who seemed to be aware they were going to struggle with time and

therefore tackled the translation before doing any comprehension questions at all. Quite often, these candidates did not manage to get the gist of the text and this worked against them when doing the translation. It is important to strike a balance, so candidates are aware that, for example, the overall purpose question is only worth 2 marks and therefore, they can attain 2 marks without writing a page (and running out of time for the translation). All they need is a sharp answer/statement and justification from the text. In comparison with previous years' evidence, candidates are better at getting those 2 marks with 'sharper' answers, and credit needs to be given to teachers/lecturers who are giving good advice to their candidates. However, coming back to the issue of the translation, there were candidates who, once they had tackled three quarters of the paper, moved on to the translation. It has to be noted that, very often, this 'exam timing management technique', chosen by those candidates who may have struggled with time, seems to be a better choice rather than doing the translation before anything else.

The overall purpose question was very well done on the whole. Candidates were asked whether Spanish consumers bought Fairtrade articles for ethical reasons only. When reading candidates' answers, it is evident that some did not understand the concept of 'ethical'. These candidates very often did not manage to gain full marks from other questions in the Reading text either — so performance in the overall purpose question for these candidates was in line with the rest of the paper. However, overall, candidates have been very successful at providing an assertion and a justification; and when using Spanish text to justify their answers, candidates, mostly, have written the meaning in English too, therefore not losing marks.

As in previous years, there are still candidates who have dedicated too much time and written too much in English (three or four justifications) for a two-mark question. Many candidates who did this still managed to do very well in the translation. However, it became evident that some candidates were spending too much time on the overall purpose question, and not enough on the translation.

Questions 1 and 2 were well done, and they served the purpose of engaging candidates with the Reading text on Fairtrade. Questions 3 and 4 were more testing questions: some candidates struggled with understanding and putting into English answers to questions 3a and 3b based on difficulties with comparatives: '*mayor equidad*' or '*mejores condiciones*'. Many candidates struggled with the concept of '*desarrollo sostenible*'.

In question 4b, in which candidates had to provide 'positive impacts of Fairtrade', some candidates struggled to keep the different options separate from each other and often mixed them up. It is important that candidates are able to differentiate the verbs offered in each possible answer, which ruled each possible option, and to distinguish each one (verb + what follows the verb) from the others: '*a luchar contra la injusticia laboral*' — to fight (...); '*a terminar con la discriminación de la mujer*' — to finish (...); '*y a concienciar a la sociedad sobre la explotación infantil*' — to raise awareness (...); '*finalmente ayudan a informar sobre los salarios mínimos*' — help to inform (...).

Question 5 'Why do Spanish people not mind paying a little bit more for their coffee?', was there to act as a less demanding question to engage candidates after the challenge of questions 3 and 4.

In question 6 there were some candidates who did not recognise '*alta calidad*' (high quality) and instead made a bad use of the dictionary: '*alta*' also means 'to be discharged from hospital'.

Question 7a, in which candidates were asked for any two reasons behind María Muñoz organising a Fairtrade market at the school with her class, was done quite well. However, 7b has proven more difficult as candidates did not manage to convey the meaning of '*la cafetería se vió obligada*' nor '*el año que viene*' when asked to provide details about the results of the Fairtrade market.

A considerable number of candidates struggled in the Directed Writing to be fully accurate when using the preterite and the imperfect tenses to answer bullet points.

## **Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing**

Some candidates did not have a clear understanding of conjugations in the present tense, and were unable to conjugate verbs in the first person singular and plural.

In Listening, not providing enough information and lack of detail let some candidates down. In Item 1 question (a): 'Apart from eating healthily, what does Matilde think young people should do to be in good health? State any two things', despite the fact candidates were told not to provide 'healthy eating', some candidates gave this as their answer. It is important that candidates pay attention to what they have been asked to provide.

In the monologue, candidates struggled to understand and convey the points about smoking — question (c) (i) and (ii).

In the Writing element of the Listening paper, those candidates who tackled the Writing task without showing progression from National 5 when writing about their health, good diet or what they do to unwind, did not demonstrate content, language resource or accuracy as expected at Higher.

## **Component 3 — performance: Talking**

### **Conversation section**

Some candidates found the conversation section of the performance more demanding, as it is less predictable and involves a series of questions. However, among the centres sampled, a minority of candidates scored pegged mark 9 or below.

## Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

### Component 1 — question paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing, and Component 2 — question paper 2: Listening and Writing

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 the SQA website and show the level of detail required for answers.

In Listening, for example, in question 2 (f), 'Pedro's mum went to Madrid to study 20 years ago. What made her stay there? State any one thing' some candidates did not manage to give enough detail in their answers: '*Se enamoró tanto de la lengua y la cultura, que decidió terminar su curso en España. Después encontró un empleo en una empresa de exportación y se quedó*': for example, some candidates wrote 'like' not conveying the meaning of '*enamorarse*' or answered that 'she got a job', not offering details of the kind of job.

In Writing, the majority of candidates achieved the six marks threshold. Those who achieved eight and ten marks 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 structured their writing into paragraphs. Both the Directed Writing structured with bullet points or the three questions offered for the Writing task following Listening, give candidates the opportunity of structuring their work in line with what would be expected at Higher level in terms of literacy, clarity of ideas and presentation. Some candidates offered these organisers: '*con respecto a la primera pregunta (...), 'en cuanto a la segunda pregunta, sí que tengo una buena dieta*'. Having ideas in paragraphs, and a variety of language that is not repetitive, does help candidates.

Some recurring inaccuracies in Spanish were usage of indefinite or definite articles, use of 'ser' and 'estar', and the lack of consistency when using the preterite and the imperfect tenses.

Candidates who performed poorly did so mainly because of poor handling of verbs and verb tenses, as well as the agreement of adjectives. Equally, many candidates found difficulty in using the subjunctive after '*cuando*'.

In Reading, regarding the overall purpose question, candidates have in the main understood that one assertion and one piece of evidence from the text is enough to gain two marks. Candidates should provide explanation in English when citing Spanish from the text, eg quoting the Spanish to justify does not suffice. As mentioned, many candidates wrote considerably more than they needed to, in a way that is more akin to the Advanced Higher inferential question, and this could have had a detrimental effect on the translation, as candidates did not allow themselves enough time.



In Reading, candidates should read the questions carefully and re-read their responses to check English expression. The questions in the Reading text offered candidates 'signposts' to answers.

As in previous years, candidates overall had a good grasp of how to tackle the Reading text. However, there were some who did not appreciate the 'signposts' on offer and as a result provided information which, although not wrong, was irrelevant.

In the translation, overall, candidates performed well, 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 3 — performance: Talking**

While the overall quality of candidate performance was high, pronunciation in Spanish remains one of the main difficulties for many candidates. Assessors and verifiers must be able to understand candidates, no matter how good the content and language resource may be in the talking performance.

In some performances, incorrect pronunciation, intonation and word stress detracted from the overall impression. Centres are encouraged to ensure their candidates use listening materials (in the classroom setting or for example via web-based materials during out of school time) as a source for modelling their pronunciation and intonation.

Grammatical accuracy was generally good, but in the conversation section some performances were weaker with gender errors, and problems with agreement of adjectives and verbs. Centres are advised to continue with grammar practice and to encourage candidates to use a variety of persons and tenses, where appropriate.

Many performances demonstrated confident delivery and flow in the presentation, with a variety of opinions and time phrases. Centres should encourage their candidates to avoid rushing the delivery of the presentation.

In the conversation section, centres are encouraged to ensure candidates have a variety of strategies for asking for questions to be repeated, or language structures and phrases to utter 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 presentation and the conversation. This is to make sure candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of the task

at Higher, as provided in the document 'Modern Languages Performance-talking, General assessment information (Higher)'. A few of the conversations were prolonged and this is not necessarily to the candidate's benefit.

As noted in last year's Spanish course report, there was a tendency for some candidates to give 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 which can elicit detailed and complex language in the answers.

Centres are also encouraged to put a variety of questions to candidates to provide scope for shorter and more extended answers for a more varied conversation.

## Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

### Statistical information: update on Courses

|                                    |      |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Number of resulted entries in 2016 | 2600 |
|------------------------------------|------|

|                                    |      |
|------------------------------------|------|
| Number of resulted entries in 2017 | 2809 |
|------------------------------------|------|

### 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                             | 50.1% | 50.1%  | 1408                 | 72          |
| B                             | 24.0% | 74.1%  | 674                  | 61          |
| C                             | 14.7% | 88.8%  | 412                  | 51          |
| D                             | 4.4%  | 93.2%  | 123                  | 46          |
| No award                      | 6.8%  | -      | 192                  | -           |

## 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.