



Course Report 2015

Subject	Spanish
Level	New 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 examinations. 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 and marking instructions for the examination.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component 1: Question paper

In the first year of the New Higher Spanish course it was very pleasing to note that candidates performed very well across all sections of the question papers: in Reading, Writing and Listening. Markers reported that there were very few poor performances. Candidates embraced the element of personalisation and choice in the Directed Writing very well, and changes in the Listening paper were also well received by candidates, who also performed very well here. Candidates and their teachers and lecturers are to be congratulated on their excellent preparation for the examination.

As indicated in the Course Assessment Specification for New 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, and it was of the appropriate level of challenge at SCQF level 6. Markers noted that the papers and marking instructions were very fair and that the papers offered an appropriate level of challenge for Higher Spanish.

In **Reading** and **Listening**, overall, the sections were balanced in terms of high, low and average demand questions.

In the **Reading** question paper, candidates read one text in Spanish in the context of learning, about teenagers and their motivation to study. They had 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 passage. The text had a small section to be translated into English. Full marks are only available from the translation with a very good rendering of the text into English.

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 culture or society. In scenario 1: culture, candidates were asked to write about their experience taking part in a local festival in Spain. The four bullet points were: how you travelled and what the journey was like; what you enjoyed most about the festival; what else you did during your stay in Spain; if you would recommend such an experience to others. In scenario 2: society, candidates were asked to write about a language exchange programme they took part in, in Spain. The four bullet points were: how you travelled and what you thought of the journey; how you helped around the house; what you did to improve your Spanish; if you would recommend an experience like this to other young people. There was an equal spread in terms of candidate choice of scenario.

The **Listening** question paper was linked to the context of employability. Candidates listened to Item 1, a monologue in which Ana talked about her future career. In Item 2 candidates listened to Guillermo who spoke at an interview about his job as a television actor. Candidates answered questions in English and candidates had an overall purpose question at the end of Item 1 where they had to tick the correct statement related to Ana's monologue.

After the **Listening**, there was the second **Writing** element. Candidates had to write a 120-150 words essay linked to the stimulus offered by Ana. Candidates were asked to write about their future plans, their skills and whether they would like to continue studying. These three questions are offered as a springboard for candidates to structure their response.

Component 2: Performance

The Performance takes the form of a talking assessment and provides Higher candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their ability in using detailed and complex spoken language, to use language accurately and to maintain interaction in a conversation.

The Performance generates evidence of added value in the Higher course and requires centres to make an audio recording of a talking assessment which is recorded on various formats (CD, memory stick) for the purposes of external verification by SQA. The recording also serves as a source of professional discussion and judgement among assessors of Higher candidates.

The talking assessment is conducted in centres, face-to-face with an assessor in a single assessment event, and has two sections — a presentation (10 marks) and conversation (20 marks). Candidates are required to give a presentation in Spanish on a Higher Modern Languages context of their choice (Society, Learning, Employability or Culture) of normally 1.5 to 2 minutes in duration.

Directly following this presentation, candidates are required to have a conversation with the assessor on at least one other context than that selected for the presentation. The conversation should normally last between 4.5 to 6 minutes. The candidate may have access to headings as set out in the *Higher Modern Languages Performance: talking General Assessment Information* document, which is available on SQA's website.

The assessment task and marking instructions functioned as expected at Higher for all centres that were verified by SQA.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Summary of Candidate Performance

Component 1: Question Paper

On the whole, the performance of candidates in the first year of the New Higher Spanish course 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.

Candidates performed particularly well in the **Listening** and **Reading**, and very well in the **Directed Writing**. 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 passage and enjoyed the Listening paper. The Overall Purpose question proved to be more challenging.

In **Writing**, candidates performed better in the Directed Writing than in the essay following the Listening. The element of choice in the Directed Writing has presumably impacted positively in candidates.

For some candidates, there were some challenges across each section of the assessment:

- ◆ In **Reading**, not allowing enough time for the translation, not providing an assertion and a justification for the overall purpose question, and not using the 'sign posts' to all questions correctly.
- ◆ In **Listening**, not providing enough information and lack of detail let down some candidates.

These are discussed in more depth in section 4 of this report.

Component 2: Performance

Generally speaking, among the centres verified by SQA, candidates performed well in the talking assessment and were well prepared for the assessment event.

Candidates performed confidently at Higher with a high degree of accuracy and very good language resource.

Section 3: Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Question papers

Candidates performed well across the three skills (reading, listening and writing) and it was evident that centres had prepared their candidates well.

Generally, in **Listening and Reading** the choice of possible answers in most questions (any two from three, any one from two) meant that most candidates could access answers.

Candidates performed very well in the **Directed Writing**. This might be due to the introduction of the element of choice of two stimuli and the reduction from six to four bullet points.

In the **Reading** question paper, the majority of candidates found the reading passage accessible. There was a balance of high, low and average demand questions. The structure and content of the paper enabled less able candidates to access the paper through more straightforward questions.

The translation was well done: some units, such as unit 3, were found more challenging by candidates, but units 4 and 5 were very well done by candidates.

Most candidates were very well prepared and took their time to read the questions in English and look for the 'sign posts' offered in the text.

It is pleasing to note that candidates clearly engaged with the content of the Reading passage and the Listening question paper, demonstrated by the relative lack of 'no response's.

As in the Reading, in the **Listening**, the structure and content of the paper enabled less confident candidates to access the paper through some very straightforward questions in Item 1, notable in questions 1(a), 1(biii) and 1(c). As is to be expected, candidates coped well with these questions, which tested very familiar language of the context of the Higher course, in very brief sections of language.

Equally in **Writing**, in the essay following the Listening, the nature of the question on future plans enabled the vast majority of candidates to comfortably reach and overtake the suggested minimum word limit. There were very few examples of candidates 'giving up' after producing no more than a couple of brief sentences. Similarly, there seemed to be a welcome tendency for candidates not to produce excessively and unnecessarily long pieces of Writing.

Component 2: Performance

For the majority of the performances verified by SQA, candidates' presentations were more confident than the conversations. Generally speaking, the standard of the presentations was high, with many candidates achieving full marks for this section. Presentations were structured with relevant content.

The tasks set by centres were mainly of a nature that encouraged candidates to use detailed and complex language, as expected at Higher. Centres are encouraged to advise candidates on the choice of context or theme which can provide scope for candidates to demonstrate a variety of tenses in their presentations.

Section 4: Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Question paper

Reading

Most candidates coped well with the reading passage, overall purpose question and translation. However there were some questions which some candidates found more challenging.

Question 3: The article discusses the role of parents. What should they encourage their teenagers to do? Give details.

Some candidates struggled to express the answer in English and they gave a long rendition but nevertheless achieved the marks. Equally some candidates did not understand the verb 'alentar' which was in fact part of the question 'encourage'. This is why in answers such as 'to cheer up / brighten their kids to understand...' the renditions 'cheer up/ brighten up' were

ignored and candidates were awarded the marks. Candidates are encouraged to pay careful attention to the wording of the questions.

Question 4(a): Rocio Rodriguez is a mother of two teenage daughters. What happened to her daughters when they became teenagers? State any two things.

Many candidates mistranslated 'tareas' as 'chores' instead of 'homework/school work/tasks'.

Question 4(b): Rocio helped them to manage their time. What does she always advise them to do? Give details.

The lead or signpost to this question was in 'always advise' (*siempre les aconsejo*). Many candidates answered this question with 'helping her daughters to administer their time' and 'getting them to do a study plan', which are correct, but do not answer the question. *Siempre les aconsejo que es preferible empezar por lo que menos nos gusta e ir intercalando las asignaturas que nos resultan más complicadas con las que nos resultan más fáciles.*

Question 6 Paco Bernabeu Martinez implemented some of the strategies of the study. What positive results did he see?

Candidates found the concept of 'improvement in academic performance/results' difficult to grasp, and some wrote incorrect renditions such as 'academic productivity/efficiency or output'.

In the overall purpose question some candidates did not provide an assertion and a justification.

The translation was well done by candidates. Sense Unit 2 was challenging for many candidates. *Dicen que es cada vez más difícil.* The 'cada vez más' was found to be difficult to translate by candidates, and many were translating it as each time/every time/at times, instead of 'it is more and more'.

Question 2 b (i) and (ii) were the questions where candidates performed less well, with average scores of 0.38 and 0.44 respectively: 2b (i) *He found his first job in television. What was surprising about his job?* Candidates found the idea of working 'behind the cameras' difficult. The marking scheme was adapted to take cognisance of this, accepting renditions such as 'camera man'. (ii) *In what way did it help him to become a better actor?* Many candidates answered 'learned about actors' rather than 'learned from actors'.

Component 2: Performance

Candidates found the conversation section of the performance more challenging than the presentation, although the majority of candidates scored between 9 and 15 out of 15 marks in this section.

Assessors should advise candidates to avoid listing in responses in the conversation, and should encourage them to employ a range of verbs and constructions.

Assessors play a crucial role in the conversation and where the assessor used a range of open-ended questions, candidates had more scope to use detailed and complex language in

their answers. Reference in the conversation to another context meant that candidates were able to use different vocabulary and a variety of language structures, which was encouraging. On occasions, where candidates were asked questions about the same topic/context as in their presentation, candidates were often limited to repeating parts of their presentation in their answers. This was not to the candidates' benefit.

Section 5: Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Question paper

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, Item 2 (d) asked candidates to give any two details about Guillermo's normal day; answers were very straightforward for Higher and included any two from three: He spends time with his wife/son/kid/child; he goes (out) for lunch/something to eat/dinner with friend(s) (in the old area of town); he goes for walks along/on down the beach. Many candidates did not provide enough detail, for example 'has lunch' on its own, or 'went out with friends' but not to eat. In question 2 b (i) many candidates wrote he 'had breakfast' but left out 'with team' so they did not achieve this mark either.

In the piece of **Writing** following the **Listening** paper, where candidates did not perform well was mainly because of poor handling of verbs and verbs tenses, as well as the agreement of adjectives. Many candidates could not handle the subjunctive after 'cuando'. Candidates should be comfortable using sentences such as 'cuando sea', 'cuando vaya', 'cuando tenga' if they are writing about their future plans.

In **Reading**, question 8 was the **overall purpose question**. Candidates need to understand 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. Equally, many candidates wrote considerably more than they needed to, more akin to the Advanced Higher inferential question.

In **Reading** candidates should read the questions carefully and re-read their responses to check English expression. The reading passage offered candidates 'signposts' to answers. Candidates overall had a good grasp of how to tackle the reading passage. However, there were some who did not appreciate the signpost 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 and accuracy plays a very important role in this question.

The **Directed Writing** was well done by candidates, and the element of personalisation and choice has had a positive impact on candidates' performance. Candidates are less likely to lose marks because of not addressing all bullet points as there are four. However, many candidates made an inconsistent use of preterite and imperfect tenses. As in the Listening/ Writing, many candidates could not handle well some straightforward uses of the subjunctive 'cuando vaya', 'cuando tenga'.

Adjectival agreement is another issue which causes candidates to perform not so well. It appears that some candidates are not checking their work or using the dictionary to check gender. For example 'experiencia', 'casa', or 'ciudad' are used as masculine nouns by some candidates. Other repeated errors included the use of *por/para*, or *viaje por un avion*.

Component 2: Performance

A number of candidates found it difficult to sustain a conversation that was longer than the recommended length, and other candidates did not perform as well as they might have given that their conversation was shorter than the recommended length. Assessors are encouraged to adjust the number of questions put to candidates depending on the length of candidates' responses and duration of the conversation.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	0
Number of resulted entries in 2015	1487

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark - 100				
A	53.2%	53.2%	791	72
B	18.0%	71.2%	268	61
C	14.9%	86.1%	222	50
D	5.6%	91.8%	84	44
No award	8.2%	-	122	-

For this Course, the intention was to set an assessment with grade boundaries at the notional value of 50% for a Grade C and 70% for a Grade A. While the Course assessment functioned as intended, changes in the format and weighting of the assessment created the conditions for a revised standard. A new assessment approach in the Talking component allowed a slightly higher degree of accessibility at the top end of performance. The grade boundaries - set at C (50), A (72), A+ (87) - reflect this.

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.