Course report 2023

National 5 Spanish

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022:   5,764

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   5,898

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	3,214	Percentage	54.5	Cumulative percentage	54.5	Minimum mark required	76
B	Number of candidates	1,028	Percentage	17.4	Cumulative percentage	71.9	Minimum mark required	63
C	Number of candidates	872	Percentage	14.8	Cumulative percentage	86.7	Minimum mark required	50
D	Number of candidates	493	Percentage	8.4	Cumulative percentage	95.1	Minimum mark required	37
No award	Number of candidates	291	Percentage	4.9	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

♦ 'most' means greater than 70%
♦ 'many' means 50% to 69%
♦ 'some' means 25% to 49%
♦ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics and information page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper 1: Reading

In the reading question paper, markers noted that there was a good range of topics across the three texts. The question paper covered the contexts of employability (text 1, about part-time jobs), society (text 2,discussing an environmental project in Spain) and culture (text 3, about the famous novel *Cien años de soledad*). The topics were relevant, and the vocabulary and grammar assessed were in line with the National 5 course specification. There were questions of high, average and lower demand across the three texts. As in previous years, there were few questions where candidates were unable to supply a response.

Many candidates performed well in this question paper, demonstrating good reading skills at National 5 and achieved high marks.

Question paper 1: Writing

The writing question paper, which is always on the context of employability, required candidates to reply by email to a job advert. In the email, candidates should address the six bullet points listed in the job advert: four predictable bullet points and two unpredictable bullet points.

The unpredictable bullet points were 'why you want to work in Spain' and 'questions you want to ask about the job'. Both unpredictable bullet points were relevant to the job advert and straightforward for candidates to address.

Most candidates performed as expected in this question paper, showing that they had prepared well.

Question paper 2: Listening

In the listening question paper, markers commented that there was a good level of challenge and demand in terms of the content and the questioning. The topics used were familiar and there was a range of vocabulary used across the two items.

The question paper covered the context of learning. After each item, candidates answered questions in English. Many candidates did not perform as well in this question paper as expected and grade boundaries were adjusted accordingly.

Assignment–writing

The requirement to complete the assignment–writing was removed for session 2022–23.

Performance–talking

The performance–talking performed as expected. At National 5, candidates carry out a spoken presentation and take part in a conversation directly afterwards.

In session 2022–23, the aim and format of the task remain unchanged. As in previous sessions, the general and detailed marking instructions allowed teachers and lecturers to mark candidates' performances with confidence.

Teachers and lecturers play a pivotal role in guiding candidates prior to the assessment in their choice of contexts and topics. In the sample of centres verified this year, teachers and lecturers had encouraged candidates to identify topics that gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities against the four aspects.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper 1: Reading

Candidates performed well across all three items, with a good distribution of marks. There was a high level of response in the reading question paper, with little evidence of candidates being unable to complete the paper in the allocated time.

The questions following each of the three texts were clearly worded and accessible to candidates, making it straightforward for most candidates to locate the answers in the text. The supported questions worked well, especially question 1(c)(i), where most candidates gained the full 2 marks.

Candidates coped well and most were able to provide detail in their answers, for example using qualifiers, adjectives and adverbs. Many candidates correctly translated *mucha energía* (lots of energy) and *comunicarse eficazmente* (to communicate effectively) in question 1(d)(i). Many candidates coped well with the detail required in question 2(d)(i) *han producido folletos informativos* (produced information leaflets). Questions 1(d)(ii), 2(c)(i) and 3(c) and (d)(ii) were all answered very well by many candidates.

In question 1(a), there was good evidence of accurate and detailed translation by many candidates of the phrase *no es posible encontrar un trabajo a tiempo completo* (it is not possible to find a full-time job). In question 2(d)(ii), it was good to see more candidates familiar with *medio ambiente* (environment) and translating it correctly, as this has been incorrectly translated in previous years.

It was encouraging to see that many candidates showed confidence and expertise in using the dictionary to help them translate less familiar verbs and phrases. They coped well in understanding familiar language in a less familiar context.

Question paper 1: Writing

In the writing question paper, markers were very impressed by the overall quality in many responses, not only in relation to the first four bullet points, but also in the way candidates attempted to address the last two bullet points. There were many examples of detailed language, range of structure and high levels of accuracy. Many candidates were able to show that they had prepared well and were able to use conjunctions and adjectival agreement accurately, as well as a range of tenses and vocabulary structures. Very few candidates did not attempt this paper and most candidates addressed the two unpredictable bullet points.

As in previous years, most candidates wrote a well-structured email, which was relevant to the job advert, containing language and structures that are appropriate to National 5. There was less evidence of long lists of nouns and repetition, and more candidates continue to produce a varied and succinct piece of writing. It was noted that some candidates used sophisticated language and structure in bullet points 1 and 2, for example *tengo quince años, pero pronto tendré dieciséis años* (I am 15 years old, but I will soon be 16 years old) and *me dicen que se me dan bien los idiomas* (I'm told that I am good at languages). This is

good practice. Some candidates included language and structures that are more appropriate to Higher, but it should be noted that this is not required to achieve full marks at this level.

Many candidates were able to address bullet point 5 successfully (why you want to work in Spain) and markers were impressed by the variety of reasons given by candidates and how creative they were in addressing this bullet point. They showed confidence in using either *me gustaría* (I would like to) or *para* (in order to) followed by an infinitive. Some candidates used *porque* (because) and followed that with a valid reason for wanting to work in Spain. There was a variety of reasons given, for example *la comida es deliciosa* (the food is delicious), *me interesa la cultura* (I'm interested in the culture) and *me gustaría mejorar el español hablado* (I would like to improve my spoken Spanish). It was noted that this bullet point gave candidates the opportunity to expand and give detail, which many did, and they still managed to maintain a high level of accuracy.

In bullet point 6 (questions you want to ask about the job), some candidates addressed this by successfully using a question word in a relevant question and showing accuracy in using the conditional tense, for example *¿Cuánto dinero ganaría?* (How much money would I earn?) or by using the future tense, for example *¿Cuándo empezaré?* (When will I start?). Others asked questions without a question word, for example *¿Tendré un día de descanso?* (Will I have a day off?) and by using the present tense *¿Tengo que llevar uniforme?* (Do I have to wear a uniform?). There were a few examples of more basic questions, for example *¿Dónde está la piscina?* (Where is the pool?), but provided that these questions were relevant to the job (as an assistant at a pool), candidates were given recognition for them. Some candidates asked several questions about the job and others asked only one question.

Question paper 2: Listening

In the listening question paper, markers commented that not only the content, but also the questioning was fair for candidates. Many candidates coped well with the vocabulary in the context of learning. Candidates performed well in the following questions:

♦ question 1(a): being able to understand the adjective *fácil* (easy), as well as the qualifier *muy* (very)

♦ question 1(b): understanding *prefiero escribir* (I prefer writing)

♦ question 1(c): many candidates showed confidence in understanding *divertidos* (fun/funny) and *muchísimos deberes* (lots of homework)

♦ question 1(d): more candidates showed understanding of the 'advantage' *no tenemos que llevar uniforme* (we don't have to wear uniform)

♦ question 2(a): understanding *seis años* (6 years)

♦ question 2(e): many candidates were able to gain 2 marks from 3 for understanding *una buena reputación* (a good reputation), *mis primos viven allí* (my cousins live there) and *la vida nocturna es fantástica* (the nightlife is fantastic)

Performance–talking

The overall quality of candidates' performances sampled this session was good. Candidates performed very well in the presentation subsection of the performance.

Many candidates were awarded pegged marks 10 or 8 for the presentation. This is as expected as this section of the performance can be thoroughly prepared ahead of the assessment.

Candidates coped well in the conversation subsection and, among the centres sampled, most candidates were awarded pegged marks 12 or 9.

Most candidates sustained the conversation well, despite errors, and were awarded 5 or 3 marks for this aspect.

Very few candidates in the samples verified were awarded 1 or 0 marks for sustaining the conversation.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper 1: Reading

For some candidates, there was an element of detail required in some of the answers, which they did not provide, and they were not able to access the higher marks. There were many examples of poor spelling in English, but markers took a sympathetic approach to this.

Some candidates missed marks by not providing qualifiers or detail in their answers, and not looking closely enough at the detail in the text itself or not thinking about the context of the word. Some candidates clearly guessed the answer, without checking the meaning of the word in the dictionary, for example:

Text 1
♦ question 1(c)(i): a few candidates mistranslated *difíciles de hacer* (difficult to do) as 'difficult to make', which is not correct in this context and a few translated it as 'difficult to get', which is incorrect
♦ question 1(c)(ii): *apuntarse a una oficina de empleo* (enrol with an employment agency/office) some candidates translated this as 'get an office job' and for another mark *utilizar un buscador* (use a search engine), a few candidates wrote 'look on the internet', which was not accepted

Text 2
♦ question 2(a): *plazas tranquilas* (quiet squares). Most candidates successfully translated *tranquilas* as 'quiet', but then some mistranslated *plazas* as 'beaches' or 'places', so they did not gain the mark
♦ question 2(c)(i): *ropa de marca y joyas de oro* (designer clothes and gold jewellery). A few candidates omitted the detail for both marks in their answer and wrote 'clothes and jewellery', and did not gain the marks

- question 2(c)(ii): *una cena en un restaurante de mariscos* (dinner in a seafood restaurant). A few candidates did not include 'seafood or shellfish' in their answer, and did not gain the marks
- question 2(d)(iii): *el más bonito* (the prettiest). This superlative was incorrectly translated as a comparative 'prettier' or as an adjective (pretty) and some candidates confused *más* (more) with *muy* (very)

Text 3

- question 3(a) some candidates translated *las relaciones familiares*, as 'familiar relationships', instead of 'family relationships'. The second more challenging point *el poder del lenguaje* was mistranslated as 'the ability of language' instead of 'the power of language'
- question 3(d)(i) some candidates were not specific enough in their translation of *chateando en las redes sociales* (chatting on social media) and wrote 'chatting on the internet', and similarly *mirando la telrealidad* (watching reality TV) was incorrectly translated as 'watching TV'
- question 3(d)(ii): some candidates mistranslated *la lectura* as 'literature' or 'literacy' instead of 'reading', which are both different things

Question paper 1: Writing

The standard of responses for the writing question paper this year was very good overall, showing that candidates had prepared well for this part of the course assessment. Markers commented very positively on the responses by candidates.

In terms of content and language resource, most candidates are comfortable with the requirements for the writing question paper. However, accuracy rather than content is still the main challenge for some candidates, both in the predictable and unpredictable bullet points, and in particular accuracy with verbs.

Poor dictionary use, mother tongue and/or other language interference, and literal translations of idiomatic phrases were again the three main factors affecting accuracy. Some candidates showed lack of accuracy when talking about the weather and there were several inaccurate ways shown of expressing *porque hace sol* (because it is sunny). Candidates should remember that when saying 'it is very sunny', the word *muy* (very) is not used and *mucho* (lots of) should be used: *hace mucho sol* (it's very sunny).

Other areas candidates found demanding included:

- writing the first-person part of the verb after *me gustaría* (I would like to), when candidates should have written the infinitive, for example *me gustaría aprender más sobre la cultura* (I would like to learn more about the culture)
- forgetting to make the phrase *me gusta* (I like) plural, when expressing opinion on more than one item, and they should have written, for example *porque me gustan las playas* (because I like the beaches)
- instances of poor spelling of high frequency words such as *Escocia* (Scotland) and *España* (Spain)

- when addressing bullet point 2 (describing school, college, education experience until now), a few candidates continue to write a long list of subjects, which should be avoided, and a few are describing the school building, for example *mi instituto es grande* (my school is big), rather than details of their education experience
- in bullet point 6, which was more challenging for candidates, many showed poor punctuation in writing a question in Spanish: there should be an inverted question mark at the start of the question and the question word should have an accent, for example *¿Cuándo…?* (When…?)
- in the two unpredictable bullet points, a few candidates were unsuccessful in addressing both of these and were awarded 12 marks, in line with the detailed marking instructions. Some candidates did not address one of the unpredictable bullet points and were therefore awarded 16 marks
- a few candidates who did not manage to produce an acceptable job application. In some cases, they produced a long piece of writing that did not meet the criteria to gain 12 marks due to lack of accuracy or, in a small number of cases, a few lines were written that were accurate, but not enough detail was provided for the level

Question paper 2: Listening

Many candidates found the question paper to be challenging this year, especially item 2. It was evident that many candidates were less confident with some of the more basic vocabulary.

Candidates were unable to access all of the available marks for a number of reasons. There was a lack of accuracy in translation, for example:

- question 1(a): most candidates found the second mark challenging, with few recognising the phrase *útil en el mundo laboral* (useful in the world of work)
- question 1(e): this was challenging for many candidates, with only some candidates gaining the mark for either of the answers: *todos mis amigos van allí* (all my friends go there) and *podemos charlar durante el recreo* (we can chat during interval)
- question 1(f): this was very challenging for many candidates, with only a few candidates gaining the mark for either of the answers: *pasarlo bien* (have a good time) and *desarrollar mis cualidades personales* (develop my personal skills)
- question 2(a): a few candidates mistranslated *me encanta* (I love) and wrote 'I like' and only a few candidates showed understanding of *la moda* (fashion)
- question 2(c): some candidates failed to include the verb in the following answers, and this prevented them from gaining the mark: *ver películas* (watch films), *leer las noticias* (read the news) and *escuchar canciones* (listen to songs)
- question 2(d)(i): many candidates showed lack of understanding of these time phases, *una vez al año* (once a year) and *a principios de junio* (at the beginning of June)
- question 2(d)(ii): some candidates omitted the word 'quite' in the translation of *bastante organizada* (quite organised) and 'well' in the translation of *me los preparo bien* (I prepare well)
- question 2(d)(iii): this was challenging for many candidates, with only some candidates gaining the mark for either of the answers: *busco una habitación tranquila* (I look for a quiet room) and *apago mi móvil* (I turn off my phone)

Some candidates found the more challenging questions and the more basic questions difficult. There was a lack of confidence and competence in listening for some candidates. Listening is a skill that is developed in class with teacher or lecturer support. As in reading, there were examples of poor spelling and expression in English, but again, marks were awarded where communication was achieved.

Performance–talking

Some candidates found it difficult to sustain the required level of grammatical accuracy throughout the performance.

Among the samples verified, weaker performances by candidates highlighted errors which detracted from the overall impression. Some made more serious errors, for example where there were problems with the gender of nouns, incorrect agreement of adjectives, problems with verb conjugation and tenses, missing words, or incorrect word order.

In some performances, pronunciation and intonation were not always sufficient to be understood readily by a speaker of the language and this detracted from the overall quality of the performance.

Some candidates found the conversation subsection of the performance more demanding as it is less predictable and involves a series of questions. Most candidates at this level were awarded a pegged mark of 12 or lower for this section.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ read questions carefully, then respond by giving the correct amount of information, ensuring that enough detail is given, as required at National 5
♦ know that if qualifiers are in the text, they should appear in the answer
♦ refer to the detailed marking instructions for reading, writing and listening (available in the National 5 Spanish past papers on SQA's website) as these show the level of detail required for answers. Candidates should be familiar with the approach behind these, for example where a candidate should provide detail to access the full range of marks
♦ make their handwriting legible
♦ indicate on their script if they are using the additional pages to write answers, for example by writing an asterisk(*)
♦ regularly practise answering exam-type questions with a similar structure and standard to the course assessments

Question paper 1: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ are familiar with, and recognise the structures, grammar, and detailed language appropriate for this level
♦ are able to translate these common verbs, for example *encontrar* (to find), *buscar* (to look for), *hacer* (to do/to make), *conocer* (to get to know), *compartir* (to share) *and chatear* (to chat online) and these common nouns, for example *plazas (squares), sitios* (places) *and playas* (beaches), especially with the use of a dictionary
♦ continue to develop dictionary skills as part of the course and think about the context of a word in order to decide which meaning is most appropriate
♦ know they must translate the whole answer, for example right to the end of the sentence

Question paper 1: Writing

Teachers and lecturers should continue to ensure candidates:

♦ develop ways of addressing the first four predictable bullet points that allow them to use a range of vocabulary and structures, as well as applying knowledge of verbs and tenses
♦ are able to provide at least one accurate sentence for each of the two unpredictable bullet points
♦ practise manipulating the language in a range of unfamiliar bullet points
♦ know that they are not required to provide a long formal introduction and/or end to the job application, as this can prevent candidates from performing well in the required areas of the job application
♦ avoid writing long lists and try to write legibly

♦ be accurate in using the infinitive after certain verb phrases, for example *me gustaría* (I would like to) and *para* (in order to)

♦ take time to check spelling and accents in a bilingual dictionary

♦ know the punctuation required when writing a question in Spanish

Question paper 2: Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ are familiar with a range of basic vocabulary from the four contexts of society, learning, employability, culture

♦ have knowledge of words and phrases, including a good range of adjectives, and know and understand a range of tenses and verb forms

♦ have opportunities to practise listening to Spanish using equipment as in the exam

♦ pay attention to detail, and are familiar with qualifiers, for example *muy* (very), *mucho* (lots of) and *bastante* (quite) and comparatives, for example *más* (more) and *menos* (less) so they can include this detail in their answers

♦ are familiar with time phrases, for example *siempre* (always)*, nunca* (never), *una vez al año* (once a year), *a principios de* (at the start of) and *a finales de* (at the end of)

♦ have knowledge of common verbs, for example *escribir* (to write), *ver* (to see/to watch), *leer* (to read) and *escuchar* (to listen to) and some less common verbs, for example *charlar* (to chat), *apagar* (to switch off) and *desarrollar* (to develop)

Performance–talking

Teachers and lecturers should continue to include grammar practice and coverage of the rules of the language as an integral part of learning and teaching. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use a variety of persons and tenses, where appropriate.

Many confident performances demonstrated very good language resource. In some instances, candidates did not use enough detailed language, and this detracted from the overall quality. For information on the level of language, teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to refer to the productive grammar grid in the appendix of the National 5 Modern Languages Course Specification.

In the conversation section, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates have strategies for asking for clarification or questions to be repeated, or language structures and phrases to use when they have not understood any aspect of the conversation. Candidates who were able to use interjections and ask relevant questions could sustain the conversation more confidently. Where candidates struggle to answer certain questions, teachers and lecturers should continue to support the candidate by pausing, rephrasing, asking another question or changing the topic.

Some candidates gave short, 'mini presentation' answers in the conversation. While candidates may wish to prepare language and phrases for topic-related questions, teachers and lecturers are encouraged to continue to put open-ended questions to candidates, which

can elicit detailed language in the answers. It is important to include a range of questions with candidates, providing opportunities for personalisation and challenge.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates practise talking skills in preparation for the performance–talking. In appendix 1 of the National 5 Modern Languages Course Specification, the 'Approaches to learning and teaching: talking' section provides examples of how to develop candidates' talking skills and suggests talking activities as part of learning and teaching.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

♦ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
♦ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
♦ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report.