



Course report 2024

Higher 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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 2,604

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 3,034

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	1,456	Percentage	48.0	Cumulative percentage	48.0	Minimum mark required	81
B	Number of candidates	570	Percentage	18.8	Cumulative percentage	66.8	Minimum mark required	69
C	Number of candidates	503	Percentage	16.6	Cumulative percentage	83.4	Minimum mark required	57
D	Number of candidates	302	Percentage	10.0	Cumulative percentage	93.3	Minimum mark required	45
No award	Number of candidates	203	Percentage	6.7	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding 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 statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

The course assessments covered all four contexts of society, learning, employability, culture. The papers and marking instructions were fair and offered an appropriate level of challenge at this level.

For the reading and listening question papers, candidates engaged well with all questions. In some instances, the responses did not provide the level of detail required to gain marks. In session 2023–24, the course returned to full assessment requirements, including the reinstatement of the assignment–writing.

Question paper 1: Reading

Candidates read one text in Spanish, in the context of employability, about future jobs. The text was accessible for most candidates. Candidates continue to perform well in the reading paper, especially in the comprehension questions, providing very competent responses and many candidates understood almost all the main points. All questions were accessible. The questions were balanced in terms of high, low and average demand, and there was a balance of questions worth 1, 2 or 3 marks. The overall purpose question was well done.

The text contained a section for candidates to translate into English. This requires a high degree of grammatical accuracy and high order thinking. Full marks are only awarded in the translation with a very strong rendering of the text into English. Candidates seem to be dedicating more time to the translation and most candidates attempted this part of the paper. The translation, as in other years, had a degree of challenge, and candidates found the second and third sense units most challenging.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

In the directed writing question paper, candidates were offered a choice of two scenarios, each of which had six unseen bullet points that they had to address. Scenario 1 was in the context of society and scenario 2 was in the context of culture.

Candidates have an element of personalisation and choice in this paper. In the strongest performances, candidates wrote six distinct paragraphs that addressed each bullet point in a balanced way. Candidates demonstrated a balance in terms of content, grammatical accuracy and language resource appropriate to Higher level. Most candidates chose scenario 1 (society).

Overall, candidates did well in the directed writing paper and were able to adapt prepared material effectively to address the less predictable bullet points. Some candidates found it more challenging to address all six bullet points at the required level.

Question paper 2: Listening

The listening question paper covered the context of learning. Candidates listened to a monologue in which Jaime spoke about going on to further education in a cookery school, and then a conversation about Marison and Aurelio's school experiences. There was a balance of questions worth 1 or 2 marks. There were a range of questioning techniques over the two items in the paper.

Most candidates performed well in this paper, and candidates engaged with all questions, understanding in most cases the gist of the information given, although at times there was a lack of detail. There were a small number of questions that did not perform as expected and grade boundaries were adjusted to take account of this.

Assignment–writing

Candidates produce a piece of writing of 200 to 250 words in Spanish using detailed and complex language. The piece of writing is based on one of the following contexts: society, learning, employability, culture.

The production of the assignment–writing, based on formative, iterative approaches, means that many candidates perform very well. Teachers and lecturers should advise candidates on the selection of appropriate stimuli as these restricted a small number of candidates, and this meant that they were not always able to write as discursively as the assessment requires. A key feature of the assignment–writing is personalisation and choice.

Performance–talking

The performance–talking performed as expected.

The performance at Higher is a discussion (in Spanish) based on at least two of the following contexts: society, learning, employability, culture.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Overall, candidates performed well this year. The question papers for reading and directed writing worked well and allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and skills effectively. The overall quality of writing was very good in those aspects of the course, but some candidates did not manage to perform at a level required.

Question paper 1: Reading

Candidates performed particularly well in the comprehension questions, for example the question ‘What question do we often ask children?’, most candidates gave the correct answer.

There were a few questions that candidates found difficult, for example 3(b) ‘Why will it be necessary for companies to hire cybersecurity experts in the future?’ and 5(a) ‘Why will the role of a personal trainer extend to giving nutritional advice?’. Some candidates may have understood the Spanish text, but they could not give the meaning in English, and did not gain the marks.

Some of the more straightforward questions allowed candidates to access the text successfully. Candidates responded well to the signposting in the questions, and there were few instances where candidates gave an answer in the wrong place.

In the overall purpose question, candidates performed well, and many were able to give clear justification for their assertion. Some candidates quoted in Spanish from the text without explaining why this quote backed up their assertion. Many candidates gave their answers to the comprehension questions as their justification here, and did not gain the mark.

In the translation, many candidates found sense units 2 and 3 challenging. Sense units 1, 4 and 5 were more accessible, and candidates achieved a range of marks.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Candidates performed well in each of the two scenarios. Most candidates chose scenario 1 (society). The level of demand in both scenarios was appropriate to the level and allowed candidates to display their knowledge of the language. Overall, the quality of writing was very good. Most candidates addressed all six bullet points. Essays that gained high marks tended to have well-prepared introductions and conclusions and included other information that was relevant to the scenario. This added to the overall impression. Many candidates made good use of learned material, which they could adapt to help them address the bullet points.

Many candidates chose to write about their experience and knowledge of life in a Spanish-speaking country (other than simply Spain) and were more adventurous in their writing skills. They made wider connections with other linguistic and cultural competencies, such as finding out about different cultural aspects of life in Spanish-speaking countries.

Question paper 2: Listening

The topics linked to further education (a cookery school in Santander) and past school experiences and were accessible to many candidates. There were very few candidates who did not attempt questions.

Assignment–writing

Most candidates performed very well in the assignment–writing and engaged fully with the formative aspects of the assessment.

Some candidates provided a personal response rather than focusing on features of discursive writing. There were instances of over preparation, which did not always flow well.

Performance–talking

Most candidates coped well with the format of the task and were able to sustain the discussion for approximately 8 to 10 minutes. Many candidates gained pegged marks 15 or higher, and most of those gained pegged marks 27 or 30. Very few candidates gained pegged marks 12 or lower.

Candidates covered a range of topics and a wide variety of structures, vocabulary, and tenses appropriate to Higher. Some candidates gave confident performances with little hesitation, very good grammatical accuracy and used interjections and questions.

Many confident performances demonstrated very good language resource. In some instances, candidates did not use detailed and complex language, and this detracted from the overall quality.

Weaker performances included errors that detracted from the overall impression. Some candidates could not always be understood as there were some serious errors, for example using pre-learned answers when they did not understand the question, resulting in weak phrasing and miscommunication. There were other minor errors, for example wrong gender of nouns, incorrect agreement of adjectives, and words omitted from responses.

Some candidates gave extended answers, which resulted in fewer questions than would be expected at this level.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

In both reading and listening, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read the questions carefully and look or listen for the signposts in the Spanish text or recording
- ◆ give as much detail as they can, including adjectives and adverbs
- ◆ make sure they know how many marks are available for each question
- ◆ refer to the detailed marking instructions for reading and listening
- ◆ re-read and proof their answers to make sure they make sense in English, especially in the translation section of reading

Question paper 1: Reading

For comprehension questions, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ know that the comprehension questions offer signposts and keywords to help them identify where to find the answer in the text
- ◆ provide two or three distinct answers where a question is worth 2 or 3 marks
- ◆ are aware that if a question indicates, 'State any one thing', there is more than one possible answer
- ◆ for the overall purpose question, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:
 - know that one assertion and one justification, with evidence from the text, should gain 2 marks
 - know that the evidence from the text must not come from the answers to the comprehension questions
 - are discouraged from quoting in Spanish from the text and from adding a word-for-word translation of the quote into English, as this does not add anything to their justification
 - consider the use of language in the text to help them make their justification
 - don't write excessively in response to this question. This could lead to not having enough time for the translation question
- ◆ for the translation, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:
 - are aware that accuracy plays a very important role in this question and that incorrect verb tenses in the sense unit do not gain marks
 - re-read each sense unit to make sure they have translated every word. Full marks are only awarded when there is an accurate and complete translation of the text into English

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read the scenarios and the bullet points carefully and make sure they address all information required
- ◆ are aware the first bullet point requires them to address two distinct pieces of information
- ◆ provide an equal and balanced response to each bullet point as they have to sustain content, accuracy and language resource appropriate to the level throughout
- ◆ attempt to use different verb forms, going beyond the first person where appropriate
- ◆ incorporate some idiomatic expressions into their writing
- ◆ make sure they can use the conditional tense in the final bullet point
- ◆ refer to the detailed marking instructions so that they are aware of what is required to achieve full marks. They should apply these marking instructions to their own writing, or to that of their peers, to gain an understanding of what they can do to improve their skills in writing
- ◆ the directed writing should be used to engage with different aspects of cultural, societal, learning and employability topics in Spanish-speaking countries

Question paper 2: Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read the questions carefully in the time allocated before the first playing of each item
- ◆ are aware of how many marks each question is worth
- ◆ highlighting the question words and key phrases that signpost the answer in the recording
- ◆ consider the vocabulary they are listening for, based on their review of the questions, before the first playing of each item
- ◆ provide sufficient detail in their answers, including qualifiers

Assignment–writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ explore and discuss aspects of the assessment as outlined in the detailed marking instruction and the coursework assessment task

Performance–talking

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ practise grammar and know the rules of the language
- ◆ use a variety of persons and tenses, as appropriate to the topics
- ◆ have strategies for asking questions to be repeated when they have not understood something or to seek clarification. Candidates who were able to use interjections and ask relevant questions could sustain the discussion more confidently
- ◆ practise talking skills regularly
- ◆ do not answer with ‘mini monologues.’ Some of these extended answers can appear overly rehearsed and any sense of spontaneity in the discussion may be lost. Ideally, they should include a mix of shorter and longer responses

In relation to the level of language, teachers and lecturers can refer to the productive grammar grid in appendix 2 of the [Higher Modern Languages Course Specification](#) and Understanding Standards exemplars of Higher performances on SQA’s secure website.

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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).