Course report 2026

Higher Spanish, SCQF level 6

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question papers and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We carried out limited verification for performance–talking this year, so we won't publish a verification summary. You can find summaries from previous years on our website.

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Copyright © Qualifications Scotland 2026

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 3,168

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 3,113

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	1,518	48.8	48.8	82
B	598	19.2	68.0	70
C	476	15.3	83.3	59
D	338	10.9	94.1	47
No award	183	5.9	100	Not applicable

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find statistical reports on our website.

General commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, we aim 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's very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, we hold a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. We 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy.

How the course assessment performed

The course assessments covered all four contexts of society, learning, employability, culture. The question papers for reading, listening and directed writing performed as intended and allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

Question paper 1: Reading

The reading paper was accessible and offered an appropriate level of challenge. The text on the context of learning, was about lifelong learning, the different ways in which we learn, and how we can overcome issues that affect learning.

There was a balance of accessible and challenging questions, with some offering options for acceptable answers.

Most candidates attempted the translation. In this question, sense units 4 and 5 were more challenging than expected. We adjusted the grade boundary to reflect this.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

The directed writing paper offered an appropriate level of challenge. Scenario 1 (on the context of society) and scenario 2 (on the context of employability) were accessible and of equal demand, allowing candidates to show their knowledge of Spanish. Candidates have an element of personalisation and choice in this paper.

An equal number of candidates chose the scenarios, and most candidates addressed all six bullet points.

Question paper 2: Listening

The listening paper was on the context of culture. Item 1 was a monologue in which a young person spoke about her experiences of a recent trip to Trujillo in Peru, South America. Item 2 was a conversation about cinema.

The paper contained questions of various levels of demand.

The listening paper was accessible, and candidates engaged well with the topic and attempted all questions; there were very few no responses. However, in some answers, candidates did not provide enough detail. We adjusted the grade boundary to reflect this.

Assignment–writing

The assignment–writing performed as expected. Candidates choose a stimulus on a topic of their choice and write discursively using detailed and complex language in response to the stimulus.

Many candidates used a variety of topics from the contexts of society, learning or culture, with fewer pieces of writing on the context of employability. The most popular topics were technology and social media, family versus friends, the value of language learning, healthy living, and the pros and cons of a gap year.

The assignment–writing offers an element of personalisation and choice and gives candidates opportunities to write on topics that interest them.

How candidates performed

Areas where candidates performed well

Question paper 1: Reading

Most candidates responded confidently to the comprehension questions (questions 1 to 6), and many answers had the level of detail required at this level. Most candidates used the signposting in the questions to find the correct answer in the text. Some candidates did the overall purpose question (question 7) well.

- questions 1(a) and (b) offered optionality, and most candidates identified:
    - for question 1(a), either *grupo de alumnos sentados en un aula tradicional* (group of pupils sitting in traditional class), or *tomando apuntes* (taking notes) or *levantando la mano para contestar a una serie de preguntas* (raising hand to answer questions)
    - for question1(b), either *adquirimos conocimientos y habilidades con más facilidad* (we acquire knowledge and skills/abilities more easily) or *el cerebro humano está programado para aprender desde el nacimiento* (the human brain is programmed to learn from birth)
- question 2(a): most candidates identified ‘how quickly his granddaughter learns three languages at the same time’ from *la rapidez con la que su nieta, Amaya, está asimilando tres idiomas al mismo tiempo*
- question 2(b): most candidates identified ‘she knew more words than him’ (*sabía muchas más palabras que yo*) and gained the mark
- question 2(c): most candidates identified both *le encanta corregir mis faltas de gramática* (correcting his grammar mistakes) and *contarme chistes en alemán* (telling jokes in German) and gained both marks
- question 3, offered optionality: most candidates gained 2 marks from *no entiendo nada en matemáticas* (I don’t understand anything in maths), *¿para qué sirven las ciencias?* (what’s the point in maths?) and *nunca seré capaz de tocar un instrumento musical* (I could never, I’ll never be able to play an instrument)
- question 5(b): most candidates answered with ‘he got a job delivering fast food’ (*repartidor de comida rápida*) and ‘he went to classes’ (*iba a clases*) and gained both marks

- question 7 (the overall purpose question): most candidates understood the gist of the text, asserting that understanding how we learn helps us overcome challenges, and that learning is lifelong and many candidates gave many good examples from the text to justify their answers
- question 8: while the translation was challenging in parts, many candidates performed well, particularly in sense unit 4 (*que empezó hace un par de meses*)

Question paper 1: Directed writing

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

Many candidates performed well in each of the two scenarios and the quality of writing was very good.

Where candidates performed well they:

- wrote six distinct paragraphs that addressed each bullet point in a balanced way
- had a balance in terms of content, grammatical accuracy and language resource appropriate to Higher level
- had well-prepared introductions and conclusions
- included other information that was relevant to the scenarios, which added to the overall impression
- made good use of learned material, which they could adapt to help them address the bullet points

Question paper 2: Listening

- most candidates attempted all questions and understood most of the information
- question 1(c), offered optionality: most candidates identified either ‘the quality of its seafood and fish’ (*la calidad de sus mariscos y pescados*) or ‘it does not lack good restaurants’ (*no faltan buenos restaurants*)
- question 1(d), offered optionality: most candidates identified two possibilities from ‘its fresh ingredients’ (*sus ingredientes frescos*), ‘its vegetarian options’ (*sus*

opciones vegetarianas), or ‘there is live music in the evenings’ (*música en vivo por la tarde*)

- question 2(a): most candidates identified the date ‘2013’ from *ví “La jaula de oro” que salió en el año 2013 y ganó varios premios en los festivales de cine*
- question 2(b)(i), offered optionality: most candidates identified two possibilities from either ‘friendship’, ‘discrimination’ or ‘injustice’ (*la amistad, la discriminación y la injusticia*)
- question 2(c): most candidates understood *me gusta aprender sobre la cultura y como viven otras personas* as ‘she likes learning about culture and how other people live’
- question 2(d), offered optionality: most candidates identified two possibilities from *ser una directora famosa* (to become a famous director), *montar mi propio estudio* (to set up her own studio) or *apoyar a jóvenes creativos que tengan un interés en el cine* (to help, support young (creative) people who have an interest in cinema)
- question 2(e), offered optionality: most candidates identified two possibilities from ‘you need to surround yourself with the best professionals’ (*debes rodearte de los mejores profesionales*), ‘you cannot work alone’ (*no puedes trabajar sola*) or ‘you need a very strong team’ (*necesitas un equipo muy fuerte*)
- question 2(f): most candidates identified either ‘scientific and technological knowledge or understanding’ (*conocimientos científicos y tecnológicos*) or ‘sound and special effects’ (*sonido y los efectos especiales*)

Assignment–writing

Most candidates performed very well in the assignment–writing and gained the upper pegged marks of 16 or 20. These candidates included:

- relevant content, with some fully addressing the title in a discursive way
- a clear structure, with different viewpoints on the topic and a clear conclusion
- a very good or good degree of grammatical accuracy, where errors did not always detract from the overall impression
- good language resource with sustained use of detailed and complex language; language structures, verbs and vocabulary

Areas where candidates did not perform well

Question paper 1: Reading

Some candidates understood the Spanish text but could not give the meaning in English and missed out on marks.

- question 4(a): some candidates misunderstood *sentir ridículo frente a otros compañeros de clase* (feeling ridiculous in front of others) as 'being ridiculed by others', and did not gain the mark
- question 4(b): some candidates misunderstood *falta de confianza en ellos mismos* (a lack of confidence) as 'a lack of self-esteem or self-belief' and did not gain the mark
- question 4(c): some candidates misunderstood *aprendizaje* (learning) as 'apprenticeships' and did not gain the mark
- question 5(a): some candidates misunderstood *notas* (grades) as 'notes' and *suficientemente buenas* (good enough) as 'enough, sufficient', and did not gain the marks
- question 5(c): some candidates mistook the noun *orientador* (adviser) for a verb 'orientating', and did not gain the mark
- question 7 (overall purpose question):
    - many candidates quoted the text or did not give precise examples.to back up their assertion
    - some candidates wrote more than what is required at Higher level
- question 8 (translation): some candidates did the translation before the comprehension questions, which meant they did not have the full context of the text. Candidates found sense units 3 and 5 most challenging:
    - sense unit 3: candidates omitted 'managed' from *logró obtener las cualificaciones adecuadas para encontrar un trabajo* (he managed to obtain the right qualifications to find a job)
    - sense unit 5: some candidates mistranslated *y que le resulta muy gratificante* (and which he finds very rewarding) as 'and the result is very rewarding', and did not gain the mark

Question paper 1: Directed writing

- some candidates who chose scenario 2, employability, had difficulty responding to bullet point 2 (how you found out about the job). They addressed the bullet point, but did not provide the level of accuracy and language resource required
- a few candidates did not attempt three of the six bullet points
- some candidates only partially addressed the bullet points, and could not access the upper pegged marks
- some candidates used pre-learned language and phrases that did not address the bullet points in the chosen scenario
- a very small number of candidates had serious inaccuracies where little of the piece of writing made sense and gained no marks
- some candidates had problems with grammatical accuracy in spelling, gender, plurals, accents and adjectival agreement
- a few candidates lacked knowledge of tenses, had little control of language or could not sustain the correct use of past tenses. Some scenarios reverted to the present tense, particularly after the first bullet point
- some candidates used incorrect words and/or phrases

Question paper 2: Listening

- some candidates did not provide the level of accuracy and detail needed, and missed out on marks, for example:
    - question 1(b): candidates wrote ‘culture’ or ‘cultural importance’, instead of ‘cultural and historical importance’ from *histórica y cultural*.; and some wrote ‘festival’ or ‘international festival’ instead of ‘international spring festival’ from *festival internacional de primavera*
- some candidates made errors in comprehension and misunderstood some words and phrases, such as:
    - question 1(a): some candidates misunderstood *mi profesora de español nació allí y quería mostrarnos su ciudad natal* (her Spanish teacher was born/from there) and wrote ‘grew up’ or ‘used to live’, and did not gain the mark
    - question 1(e): some candidates mistook *profesores* (teachers) for ‘professors’, and did not gain the mark

- question 2(b)(ii): some candidates mistook *personajes principals* (main characters) for ‘people’ or ‘teens’; some mistook *paisaje* (landscapes) for ‘views’; and some mistook *la historia* (story) for ‘history’

Assignment–writing

- in the assignment, the writing must be discursive. Some candidates’ pieces of writing had titles and stimuli that should have elicited a discursive response; however, their responses were written from a personal point of view with mostly personal ideas and opinions, and little discussion of different viewpoints
- some pieces of writing lacked an appropriate conclusion. There were some titles or stimuli that required candidates to recount their experience, and this did not provide them with the necessary scope to consider different viewpoints.
- if pieces of writing read as a personal response to a topic and have either few or no discursive elements, candidates cannot access the upper pegged marks.
- where candidates did not perform well:
  - the content had limited coverage of different arguments and/or viewpoints
  - there was an insufficient level of accuracy for the level
  - some pieces of writing had errors that detracted from the overall quality
  - in terms of language resource, some pieces of writing showed unsuccessful use of language and structures, mostly due to issues with accuracy

Preparing candidates for assessment

In both reading and listening, you 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 after completing past papers to gain an understanding of the detail required at Higher level
- re-read and proofread their answers to make sure they make sense in English, especially in the translation section of reading

Question paper 1: Reading

For the comprehension questions, you should ensure candidates:

- know that these questions have key words to help them find the correct answer in the text
- provide two or three answers where a question is worth 2 or 3 marks. Each answer may have a different verb or idea
- know that if a question says, ‘state any one thing’, there is more than one possible correct answer

For the overall purpose question, you should ensure candidates:

- know they should answer the question (assertion), going beyond a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ statement. They should follow this with a justification that shows an accurate reading of the text, using examples or reasons with reference to the text
- do not use their answers to the comprehension questions as evidence to support their assertion
- are aware that quotes in Spanish without an explanation of their relevance, do not gain marks
- consider the use of language in the text to help them make their justification
- when answering this question, leave enough time for the translation

For the translation, you should ensure candidates:

- practise the skill of translation as often as possible
- complete the translation question after the comprehension questions
- are aware that accuracy plays a vital role in this question and that incorrect verb tenses and adjectives do not gain marks
- re-read each sense unit to ensure they have translated every word, and that it makes sense.
- know they can only achieve full marks if they give an accurate and complete translation of the text into English

Question paper 1: Directed writing

You should ensure candidates:

- read the scenarios and the bullet points carefully and make sure they address all information required
- know that for the first bullet point, they must address two pieces of information
- give detail for each bullet point in a balanced way, sustaining content, accuracy and language resource appropriate to the level
- use a variety of tenses and different verb forms, going beyond the first person where appropriate
- include idiomatic expressions in their writing
- use the conditional tense in the final bullet point, where appropriate
- use subjunctive phrases, for example *cuando sea, cuando tenga, cuando vaya* when writing about their intentions in the final bullet point
- refer to the marking instructions and the productive grammar grid in the Higher Modern Languages Course Specification so they are fully prepared for what is required at Higher level
- apply the marking instructions to their own writing, or their peers, to gain an understanding of what they can do to improve their writing
- know they must address each bullet point
- are aware at Higher, especially when easier to understand cognates are used (culture, historical, importance, festival, international) answers require more than one word

Question paper 2: Listening

You should ensure candidates:

- use the time before the recording starts to read the questions
- are aware how many marks each question is worth
- highlight the question words and the key phrases that signpost the answer in the recording
- provide sufficient detail in their answers
- practise grammar and basic vocabulary on a regular basis
- can identify a variety of verb forms and tenses, as appropriate to topics

Assignment–writing

You should ensure candidates:

- explore and discuss aspects of the assessment as outlined coursework assessment task
- have a choice of stimuli at the start of the drafting process to help them write discursively about a topic
- read the general marking principles and detailed marking instructions in the Higher Modern Languages Course Specification to understand that, at this level, they should present different arguments or viewpoints and draw a conclusion
- use the time spent between the first draft and final version to improve accuracy in all aspects of grammar and spelling
- refer to examples of discursive writing on our Understanding Standards web page to better understand the style of writing required in the assignment–writing
- avoid writing in pencil or a gel pen
- if typing responses, use double spaces between lines