



## Course Report 2016

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

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

It was very pleasing to note that candidates performed 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 2016 paper, between the contexts of employability and culture, allowed candidates who felt more comfortable with the employability context to perform well in the task, whilst allowing more adventurous candidates the opportunity to undertake the culture task.

Candidates performed particularly well in the Listening paper. 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 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 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 at Higher level.

In **Reading**, the 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.

In the question paper, candidates read one text in Spanish in the context of society, about reducing food waste in Spain. Candidates had to answer questions in English. Candidates also had to answer one overall purpose question, which required them to demonstrate a good understanding of the arguments presented in the passage, and how they would interpret these, demonstrating their inferencing skills. The text also had a small section to be translated into English, which requires 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.

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 employability. In scenario 2: culture, candidates were asked to write about their experience of taking part in a local festival in Spain they went to with their class. The four bullet points were: where you went and what you thought of the town; what you did during the music festival; how you used your knowledge of Spanish; if you would like to attend a similar event in the future. In scenario 1: employability, candidates were asked to write about their past experience of working in a hotel in Spain. The four bullet points were: what the hotel was like and what you thought of the facilities; what your daily routine was; what skills you had to use in your job; if you would recommend working abroad to your friends.

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

The **Listening** question paper was linked to the context of learning. Candidates listened to Item 1, a monologue in which Javi talked about his school trip to Scotland. In Item 2, candidates listened to Pablo asking Carmen questions about her final year at high school and future plans. Candidates answered questions in English and had an overall purpose question at the end of Item 1 where they had to tick the correct statement related to Javi's monologue.

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 school and what they are currently studying, their opinion about learning modern languages, and their future plans. These three questions are offered as a springboard for candidates to structure their response.

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

This course component performed as expected.

Assessors are familiar with the aim of the performance task and they encouraged candidates to use topics and contexts which allowed candidates to perform well. The task gave candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to use detailed and complex spoken language.

The marking instructions allowed centres to mark candidates' performances with confidence. The majority of centres marked in line with the national assessment standards.

## **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.

### **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 passage and enjoyed the Listening paper. Candidates performed equally well in the monologue section as in the conversation section of the Listening paper.

**In Writing**, candidates performed equally well in the **Directed Writing** as 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 employability option, presumably because they felt more comfortable with this as a transition from National 5. This year the **Listening** was deemed inclusive and accessible to all candidates, given the first question they had to answer was about their studies. 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**

Generally, in the **Listening and Reading** papers, the choice of possible answers in many questions, (any two from three), meant that most candidates could access answers. The topics were such that candidates could easily connect with them.

In **Reading**, the majority of candidates found the passage 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** passage and the questions in the **Listening** paper, demonstrated by the relative lack of 'no responses'.

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

The overall quality of candidate performance was high.

#### **Presentation section (10 marks)**

Candidates performed very well in the presentation section of the performance. In most of the evidence sampled, candidates were awarded the upper 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)**

In the evidence sampled, candidates coped well, with the majority of candidates awarded pegged marks of 12 or 15.

With regards to the 'sustaining the conversation' aspect, most candidates sustained the conversation well, despite any errors, and were awarded 5 marks for this aspect.

### **Areas which candidates found demanding**

#### **Component 1: Question Paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing**

Most candidates coped well with the **Reading** text on food waste, overall purpose question and 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 not allowing themselves sufficient time for translation and checking that what they had written made sense. The passage was mainly written in the present tense, apart from the use of one modal verb (*podría reducir*). Some candidates struggled to translate the verbs/tenses/constructions correctly.

There were a few mistranslations, such as *por desgracia* as 'by disgrace'; *compromisos diarios* as 'compromising diaries'; *rítmo de trabajo* as 'pace of work/work pattern'. Some candidates struggled in unit 5 (*para los demas días*), or did not translate *cenar*. Again, more time to translate and check over work would have helped.

The overall purpose question was very well done. This year candidates have been very successful at providing an assertion and a justification; and when using Spanish text to justify their answers, candidates, overall, have written what it means in English too, therefore not losing marks.

However, it must be noted that a considerable number of candidates have dedicated too much time and written too much in English (three or four justifications) for a two-mark question. 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. It is important that centres convey this to future candidates.

**Questions 1 and 2** were well done, and they served the purpose of engaging candidates with the reading passage. Some candidates recognised the word 'basura' in *la cantidad de alimentos que va a la basura*, and extrapolated their previous learning of *comida basura* to make a link with junk food, as opposed to food that gets thrown away in the bin (*a la basura*).

**Question 4** was a more testing question, and in **question 4b**, many candidates struggled with the understanding of the Spanish phrasal verb *tener en cuenta* — to bear in mind, to take into account.

**Question 5a** was there to act as a less demanding question to engage candidates, although **questions 5 b** and **c** were of a higher demand. In question 5b, some candidates struggled with the idea of creativity/creating the dishes; and despite the question asking specifically for what the 12 people who attended the workshop did in the last cookery class (only one class), many candidates answered 'they were cooking for a week', or 'each day during a week'. The literacy level of candidates might be the issue here, as in **question 5c**, many candidates did not understand the meaning in English of 'culinary traditions'.

**Question 6** was a more sophisticated question where candidates were asked about a food app and what it enables shoppers to do. One of the possible answers was that 'if you enter the fridge ingredients in the app, it suggests a range of possible dishes'. Some candidates misinterpreted the passage as being able to just tell the fridge what they wanted to eat!

In the **Directed Writing**, some candidates did not manage to tackle the skills bullet point of the employability option. 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 about what their daily routine was, and the skills they had to use in their job.

In **Listening**, not providing enough information and lack of detail let down some candidates. 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 school experience or future plans 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 candidates sampled, a minority of candidates scored 9 and very few scored 6, with no candidates scoring below 6 in the conversation.

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

### **Component 1: Question Paper 1: Reading and Directed Writing**

#### **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, **question 2a** asked candidates to give any **two** details about Carmen's choice for studying two subjects; answers were relatively straightforward for Higher: 'she's good/great at maths', 'she wants to know (more) about/learn about/find out about different/other cultures/likes learning about other cultures'. Many candidates simply answered 'she likes maths', or 'because of distinctive cultures'.

In **Writing**, the majority of candidates achieved the six marks threshold. Those who achieved eight and 10 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. Some recurring inaccuracies in Spanish were: gender — *un experiencia, la festival, la pueblo, la hotel, un piscina*. Some candidates were not clear on when to use indefinite or definite articles. 'Ser' and 'estar' usage is another recurring issue, and the lack of precision when using the preterite and the imperfect.

Candidates who did not perform well 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*. 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 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 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 where accuracy plays a very important role.

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

Pronunciation was one of the main issues for many of the candidates who performed less well. Assessors and verifiers must be able to understand candidates, no matter how good the content and language resource may be. In some candidates' performances, incorrect pronunciation, intonation and word stress detracted from the overall impression of the performance. Centres are advised to continue to encourage their candidates to use listening materials, for example, as a source for modelling their pronunciation.

Grammatical accuracy was generally good, if not very good, in the presentation section, but in the conversation section some performances exposed errors with verb endings and agreement of adjectives. Centres are advised to continue with grammar practice and to encourage candidates to use a variety of persons and tenses, where appropriate.

In general, among the candidates sampled, performances were delivered with a good range of detailed and complex language and structures as expected at Higher.

Many performances demonstrated confident delivery, good flow in the presentation and a variety of opinions and time phrases. 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.

Centres are also encouraged to continue to ensure candidates have strategies for asking for questions to be repeated or language structures and phrases to utter when they have not understood an aspect of the conversation. Where candidates struggle to answer certain questions, assessors should try to support the candidate by rephrasing, asking another question or changing the topic.

The length of performances (notably presentations) varied. Centres are advised to refer to the information regarding the recommended length of time the presentation and the conversation should last, so that candidates are able to demonstrate their ability to meet the demands of Higher. These are provided in the document *Modern Languages Performance: talking, General assessment information (Higher)*.

A few of the conversations were prolonged — centres are reminded that this does not necessarily benefit the candidate.

There was a tendency for some candidates to give what appeared to be rehearsed, short 'presentation-like' answers in the conversation. While candidates may wish to prepare language and phrases for topic-related questions, centres are encouraged to continue to ask candidates open-ended questions that can elicit detailed and complex language in the answers. Centres are also encouraged to ask them questions that may provide scope for shorter and more extended answers to produce a more varied conversation.

# Grade Boundary and Statistical information

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	1487
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	2600
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## 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	52.1%	52.1%	1354	73
B	22.3%	74.4%	581	62
C	14.0%	88.4%	363	52
D	4.3%	92.7%	112	47
No award	7.3%	-	190	0

## 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.