Course report 2022

Subject	Spanish
Level	Advanced Higher

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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any appeals.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	470

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	42.1	Cumulative percentage	42.1	Number of candidates	200	Minimum mark required	134
B	Percentage	20.7	Cumulative percentage	62.8	Number of candidates	95	Minimum mark required	114
C	Percentage	18.9	Cumulative percentage	81.7	Number of candidates	90	Minimum mark required	94
D	Percentage	10.4	Cumulative percentage	92.1	Number of candidates	50	Minimum mark required	74
No award	Percentage	7.9	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	35	Minimum mark required	N/A

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in appendix 1 of this report.

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 page of SQA's website.

1

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question papers were in line with national standards.

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates responded well to the reading text, especially when answering the comprehension questions (questions 1–7). Most candidates engaged positively with the subject of the article, which related to the changing face of the workplace and how businesses treat their employees.

Question 8, the overall purpose question, still presents difficulties for most candidates.

Candidates generally responded more successfully than in previous years to the translation (question 9).

It was noted this year, that there was an increase in candidates providing a series of alternative answers to questions, and this is of no benefit to the candidate.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

The listening question paper, which focused on drug use and a drugs prevention programme, proved to be challenging for some candidates; although performance in this skill in particular, was better than in 2019. Candidates achieved slightly better marks for item 2.

In discursive writing, there were some very good essays that demonstrated flair, appropriate use of idiomatic language and accurate expression of opinions. However, a few candidates only gained a mark of 16 as a result of, for example, not addressing the question fully and relying instead on the reproduction of learned material, or using an essay written in a prelim exam.

Candidates attempted all four essay titles. The most popular choices being question 5 (employability) on gender equality in the workplace in relation to women in high-ranking jobs, followed by question 4 (learning) on whether education in primary and secondary school is enough to see you through life.

Portfolio

Candidates approached this in a variety of ways, and there was a wide range of marks.

Performance–talking

The performance–talking performed as expected. In response to the disruption to learning caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the length of time for the assessment was reduced from 20 to 15 minutes, and the requirement to discuss the portfolio was removed. As in previous years, many candidates did very well in the performance–talking.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Overall, candidates responded very well to this paper, especially to the comprehension questions. Questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 6 and 7(a) in particular, were well done.

Candidates who did well in question 8, the overall purpose question, adopted an analytical approach to the text, as well as referring to the writer's stylistic features. They focused on how these substantiated their argument and the impact that these features made on the reader. When quoting from the text, they linked their references appropriately to their answer.

In the translation question, candidates found sense units 2, 3, 4, 7, 8 and 9 most accessible.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening
- item 1: candidates coped well with questions (a), (b) and (d)
- item 2: questions (a), (c), (e), (f), (i), (j) and (k) were successfully attempted

Discursive Writing
The most successful essays were well-structured and written in paragraphs. Candidates achieved good marks when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their response and when their essays were entirely relevant to the question.

Candidates achieved best results when they fully addressed the titles and produced essays containing coherent language and interesting ideas. Of the four choices available to them, question 5, the essay on employability, was the one that was tackled most successfully, followed by question 4 (learning) and question 6 (culture). There were good performances by candidates who chose question 3 (society).

Appropriate linking structures and phrases relating to expressing opinions were characteristics of good practice, for example *consideremos…; cabe apuntar…; vale mencionar…; por lo tanto…; hay que destacar que…; nadie puede negar…; necesitamos analizar…; uno de los temas que más preocupa…; aún existen situaciones…; el problema que se plantea…*

In addition, well-structured essays contained phrases associated with linguistic signposting, for example *Se debate con frecuencia…; En primer lugar/Primeramente…; Hay quienes dicen…; Adicionalmente…; Merece decir…; Algo tiene que cambiar…; Como consecuencia…; En definitiva…; Habiendo considerado todos los aspectos…; Al fin y al cabo…; Con el fin de llegar a una conclusión definitiva…; A modo de conclusión.*

There was some excellent use of structures, for example *se puede constatar que…; no todo es color de rosa…; queda muchísimo camino por recorrer…; es primordial que hagamos más…; es necesario que actuemos…; (la mujer moderna) se caracteriza por…; en lo que se refiere a…*

Portfolio

Presentation of portfolio work was very good overall. The best essays were those that had a short question or title that led candidates to adopt an analytical approach, or allowed for two sides of an argument to be developed. Essays often tended to work better when there was an element of comparing and contrasting, for example characters in novels, short stories, plays or films, or some analysis of poetry from an anthology, focusing on specific themes. The evaluation of themes, symbols and imagery taken in turn in a methodical and structured manner was another feature of good practice.

Candidates performed slightly less well than in 2019, but the more successful candidates were able to highlight and back up their assertions with reference to, or by relevant quotation from, the area of study. Evaluative language was used more often in these essays, as well as consistent use of critical terminology, particularly in the study of short stories or poetry, which tend to facilitate more immediate engagement with the text(s).

There were some mature approaches, which were expressed well with clear and sophisticated expression in English. An appropriate formal language register was also sustained in these pieces of work.

The study of literary texts generally leads to better performances. However, where film was incorporated into the field of study, marks were encouraging, for example when candidates provided details of cinematographic techniques in their essays. In the small number of Language in Work portfolios attempted this year, candidates tended to adopt a narrative approach rather than an evaluative one and, as a result, did not gain high marks.

Reliable bibliographies containing three or more references with at least two sources in Spanish, were a feature of good practice. The best bibliographies contained sources with academic credibility.

Few candidates incurred a penalty for exceeding the word limit or failing to produce a bibliography.

Performance–talking

Most candidates were comfortable and confident in the language with the majority gaining 30 or more marks out of 50. In general terms, their choice of topics afforded them the ability to talk at length. Fluency and readily taking the initiative were features of good performances. In general, candidates were enthusiastic and well prepared.

Many appeared motivated to do well and made good use of learned material. They were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses and incorporated some useful and interesting discussion techniques into their conversation with the visiting assessor. There was use of complex and sophisticated language and some idiomatic turns of phrase. Topics, for example *el feminismo, la inmigración, el racismo, el papel de la mujer, las nuevas familias, la igualdad de género* and *el medio ambiente* lent themselves to the use of more complex language structures more than topics such as *planes para el futuro, un año sabático, estudiando en el extranjero* and *las ventajas de aprender idiomas.*

Candidates were very much at ease with the method of assessment.

4

Areas which candidates found demanding

Question paper: Reading and Translation

♦ question 5: candidates had difficulty interpreting the nouns *las primas* and *el salario complementario*, giving incorrect answers, for example 'shares' or 'complementary salary'

♦ question 7(b): perhaps due to dictionary misuse, some candidates had difficulty understanding *sensibilidad* and *dirección*

♦ question 8, the overall purpose question:

— candidates are still not providing a sufficiently reflective or evaluative response. Those who performed less successfully in this question tended to supply information from the text rather than engaging in analysis. They found it challenging to construct their answers using inferential-type language

— candidates increasingly know what to look out for but fail to develop their ideas or examine the writer's techniques more critically. Many make mention of stylistic features, for example the title of the text, the use of (rhetorical) questions or forceful language, the structure of the text, the possible change in tone within the writer's argument, how the article begins and/or ends, the use of statistics, direct speech and real-life examples. However, the less successful candidates fail to explore the impact of these on the reader

— many candidates wrote responses without going beyond a recounting of the facts outlined in the text. In a number of cases, expression in English was questionable, and less successful answers lacked structure and/or came to an abrupt end

♦ question 9, translation: candidates occasionally had difficulty with the following expressions:

— sense unit 1: *no todo es el salario* was often clumsily expressed in English for example 'not all is the salary'

— sense unit 5: *vale más que* caused problems for some candidates, who mistakenly translated this as 'costs more'

— sense unit 6: some candidates found it difficult to correctly translate *cualquier compañía que lo desee*

— sense unit 10: *política de empresa* was incorrectly translated as 'company politics'

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening: item 1

♦ question (c): understanding *comportamientos,* which candidates should have included in their answer

♦ question (e): understanding *multa* and *cárcel*

Listening: item 2

♦ question (b): less successful candidates missed a mark for failing to understand *desafío*

♦ question (d): some candidates failed to grasp the idea of needing to understand *un número cada vez mayor de campañas*

♦ question (g): some candidates failed to mention *no juzgar el estilo de vida*

♦ question (h): some candidates had problems with providing sufficient detail relating to the expressions *juegos de rol* and *debates en pequeños grupos*

5

Discursive Writing

Some candidates ran into difficulties when going beyond prepared material and, on occasion, this led to them not fully addressing the question. These candidates were inclined to 'disguise' their essays unsuccessfully to suit the title in the question paper or to write pre-prepared essays which compromised relevance and focus. More successful candidates were able to create an original piece of work by using their knowledge and ability to manipulate the language to suit the title.

♦ question 3: *La brecha generacional fomenta la falta de respeto*, some candidates chose to write only about aspects of the generation gap without addressing the issue of respect
♦ question 5: *Hoy en día, las mujeres ya tienen igualdad con los hombres en los puestos de poder* proved tricky for some candidates who focused solely on equality in the workplace without referring to women in high-ranking jobs
♦ question 6: *En España, la fiesta de toros merece ser llamada 'la fiesta nacional'* occasionally generated an essay about other 'fiestas' that were related not to Spain but to other Spanish speaking countries

As in previous years, some candidates have not moved on from the personal response essay approach and struggled to sustain the level of sophistication required for discursive writing.

Other reasons for the lack of quality in discursive writing included:

♦ repeating the title, sometimes on several occasions in the essay
♦ errors in adjectival agreements
♦ random and inappropriate use of infinitives
♦ the inability to conjugate verbs or manipulate tenses
♦ incorrect use of gerund (in wrong place)
♦ unidiomatic translation from English into Spanish, for example:
 — question 3: *si no hacemos acto ahora*, the incorrect use of *ser* and *estar* and the failure to use the subjunctive when necessary
 — question 6: *Cualquier mucha gente*

Essays that were repetitive rarely gained the higher marks. Essays that did not fully address the question gained less marks if it was felt more than half the essay was irrelevant.

Portfolio

The selection of an appropriate title is very important. Many candidates find it difficult to select a title or essay question that generates debate or critical analysis. There were many poorly worded titles or titles that were too vague, contrived, over-complicated or not framed as a question. There continues to be a number of obvious titles with predictable conclusions.

Media essays tended to be more informative and less investigative.

Some candidates used the first person in their essays, for example 'in my opinion', 'I think that'. Essays of this type were usually lacking in detailed analysis. Where a more objective

6

approach was taken and the third person was used, there tended to be better critical evaluation of the subject matter.

Some candidates struggled to sustain a quality of performance, and expression of ideas throughout the course of their essay. Some made general statements which were not substantiated with reference to the area of study. At times, essays lacked structure and coherence.

Occasionally, there was too much information provided and not enough evaluation. Some candidates' use of critical terminology was limited. There was a lack of awareness of figurative speech, imagery, symbolism and of what constitutes the literary technique of magical realism.

Errors in syntax, expression in English and punctuation led to lower marks for candidates. Instead of selecting and analysing evidence before drawing conclusions, many candidates wrote their conclusion in the opening paragraph and then tried to justify this throughout the rest of the essay.

A significant number of candidates do not proofread their work effectively in English and especially when quoting in Spanish from a literary text or screenplay from a film.

Unfortunately, there are still candidates who associate the themes of Lorca's plays, which were written in the early 1930s, with the Franco regime which effectively began in 1939.

Some bibliographies were sparse and unsophisticated, for example Wikipedia, Quizlet, indicating a lack of research, and this generally had a negative impact on candidate performance.

Performance–talking

Despite this being the skill area where candidates do best, some had difficulty in manipulating and adapting learned material in order to cope with questions they were asked.

There is room for improvement in relation to accuracy in verbs, tenses, the gender of nouns and adjectival agreement. Many candidates do not use enough idiomatic language or expressions.

Some candidates were not able to respond to or consistently take the initiative when answering questions on topics they had listed on their STL forms. Others, who had chosen to discuss, for example future plans, a gap year and the importance of learning languages, found it challenging to incorporate the use of complex and sophisticated language into the conversation and to sustain the discussion at the level required for Advanced Higher. These subjects are best discussed in the first few minutes (the 'warm-up' section) of the assessment.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ refer to all criteria, detailed marking instructions, pegged marks and performance descriptors
♦ have opportunities to use Understanding Standards materials in lessons
♦ make full use of SQA's website, especially by referring to course reports for Advanced Higher Spanish from 2018 and 2019 as well as the marking instructions for Advanced Higher Spanish past question papers
♦ are aware their handwriting must be legible to ensure marks awarded equate to content

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Comprehension questions

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ divide their time appropriately between the comprehension questions, the overall purpose question, and the translation
♦ provide a good level of detail in their answers to the comprehension questions
♦ check the number of marks being awarded for each question, to guide them towards the amount of information they are required to provide
♦ pay particular attention to their expression in English. A comprehensive answer to each question is likely to gain more marks
♦ when using a dictionary, explore all meanings of the word they are looking up to ensure they choose the one which best fits the context of their answer, for example question 7(b): *sensibilidad, dirección*
♦ do not provide a series of alternative answers to questions, as this does not benefit them

Question 8, overall purpose question

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ draw inferences from the text and not merely provide factual information or repeat the answers to their comprehension questions. Good answers to the question were those which provided a balance between identifying the writer's standpoint and the techniques they used to exemplify this
♦ provide responses that are well-structured and have a rounded conclusion
♦ are aware any quotation from the text should be appropriate and relevant, not simply a repetition of what has been argued in English
♦ know that when quoting in Spanish from the text, providing a word-for-word translation in English adds nothing to their argument
♦ are aware a succinct answer using inferential-type language, for example 'the writer implies that, suggests that, highlights…', 'this leads me to believe that…', 'through effective word choice such as…', 'adds substance, authenticity to the argument' would

8

be more likely to achieve a good mark than a long response that simply provides information from the text, most probably already covered in the answers to questions 1–7

♦ look at the title of the article, how the text begins and ends, the structure of the text, any reference to statistics, quotations from experts, the use of questions and/or rhetorical questions, lists of words, instances of emotive language and examine the impact of techniques such as these in relation to how the writer develops their argument. For example, is the writer optimistic, positive, in favour of what is being discussed in the article? Or are they pessimistic, negative, against the theme of the text? If the text allows for a balance of arguments, this should be incorporated into the answer

♦ have opportunities to refer to the overall purpose exemplars in the Understanding Standards section on SQA's website to use these as a means of discussing and reviewing the best format, formula, type of language required to answer this question successfully

Question 9, translation

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ give more attention to the development of translation skills and, in particular, ways of converting idiomatic expressions from Spanish into English. Care should be taken with recognising and accurately translating tenses

♦ develop their skills in the use of a dictionary, and are aware they should consider not just the first meaning they find, but all meanings of the word or phrase they are looking up to ensure they choose the one which best fits the context of their translation

♦ read and review their translation when they complete it to ensure it makes sense and reads well in English

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing
Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ provide full and detailed answers as far as possible

♦ continue to revise numbers

♦ access listening materials on the internet, especially short news items and podcasts from Spanish radio

♦ are advised how they should use the time at the start of the recording for looking at questions

♦ have opportunities to discuss and practise strategies for note-taking while they are listening to the recording items and during the interval between the two plays of the recording

♦ use Spanish as much as possible in class to help develop listening skills

Discursive Writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ continue to develop the grammatical accuracy required at this level (see 'Areas which candidates found demanding, Discursive writing' section)

♦ address the essay question and do not reproduce a well-rehearsed essay, which may not be entirely relevant. Essays should address all aspects of the title

♦ remain within the word limit and have a focused approach

♦ avoid high-frequency language

♦ adopt a strategy to incorporate complex and sophisticated and, if possible, idiomatic language appropriate to Advanced Higher level and to the subject matter of the essay

♦ build up banks of phrases for use in their essays or provide them with examples of these

♦ set aside some time during the examination to use their dictionary to proofread their essay

♦ are provided with a dictionary of quality, suitable for use with the demands of the discursive writing task

♦ focus on structure, and to reveal their conclusion at the end of their essay rather than in the first paragraph

Portfolio

The choice of a title is of crucial importance. The title should not be over-ambitious or vague or too general but should generate a discursive and/or evaluative approach. It may require a narrower focus to allow for deeper analysis.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ negotiate appropriate essay titles with them to ensure that they adopt a consistently investigative tone throughout their essay

♦ discuss the use of critical terminology to enable them to improve the quality of their expression in English

♦ address the choice of suitable and compatible sources and avoid accessing secondary sources that do not closely relate to the primary source

♦ are aware there should be a critical evaluation of the primary source

♦ are aware titles that include 'To what extent…?' should not be predictable or unoriginal, but should generate a balanced approach, taking a range of arguments into account

♦ check the factual accuracy of their essay, for example to ensure that they have a true understanding of the literary technique of magical realism and to correct themselves of the idea that this is a theme and to avoid approaches that incorrectly compare women in Lorca's plays to women living in Franco's Spain

♦ carefully consider the introductions and conclusion to their essays

♦ maintain an objective tone throughout and avoid anecdotal expressions such as 'I personally believe…'

♦ are advised that portfolio essays benefit from the inclusion of quotations in Spanish to support the arguments being developed. Quotations from a literary text or film or any other source which are solely in English could detract from the content. It may even lead

10

to the candidate being awarded 0 if it is felt that they have not read, for example, a literary text in Spanish

♦ know they must refer to at least two sources in Spanish in their bibliography

♦ develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies. Any reference to Wikipedia or Quizlet often suggests a lack of breadth of research

♦ take more care and attention regarding proofreading in relation to the use of English, spelling, typing errors and punctuation as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts

♦ avoid the use of inappropriate register and informal language. They should vary their expression throughout their essay and avoid the repetition of words and phrases

♦ are aware that the quality of English in the portfolio is very important and an appreciation of how to structure an essay is essential

Performance–talking

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

♦ practise grammatical accuracy, particularly in relation to the use of verbs (especially the preterite and the perfect), the gender of nouns, adjectival agreements, use of *Ser* and *Estar, Para* and *Por* and the subjunctive

♦ develop banks of phrases in relation to discussion techniques to help them in dealing with any question they may be asked that goes beyond their 'comfort zone' of learned material

Appendix 1: 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 including assessment modifications and revision support, was introduced to support candidates as they returned to formal national exams and other forms of external assessment. This was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams have done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019.

12

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 2022. 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 revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2022 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 2022 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).