



Course report 2024

Advanced 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: 399

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 414

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

| | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|-----|------------|------|-----------------------|------|-----------------------|-----|
| A | Number of candidates | 151 | Percentage | 36.5 | Cumulative percentage | 36.5 | Minimum mark required | 134 |
| B | Number of candidates | 94 | Percentage | 22.7 | Cumulative percentage | 59.2 | Minimum mark required | 114 |
| C | Number of candidates | 76 | Percentage | 18.4 | Cumulative percentage | 77.5 | Minimum mark required | 94 |
| D | Number of candidates | 61 | Percentage | 14.7 | Cumulative percentage | 92.3 | Minimum mark required | 74 |
| No award | Number of candidates | 32 | Percentage | 7.7 | 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

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Most candidates engaged well with the topic ‘preparing for the transition to university’ in the context of learning, and they performed well in the comprehension questions.

The overall purpose question proved challenging, and many candidates gave answers that recounted the facts in the text rather than using appropriate inferencing skills. The translation was challenging for most candidates.

Most candidates attempted most or all questions in the paper.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

The listening paper was focused on plastic waste and candidates found the topic challenging.

In discursive writing, there were some very good essays that focused on the essay titles with a wide range of language appropriate to the level. Candidates were able to adapt material they had learned to address the essay titles. All four essay titles were attempted.

Portfolio

Candidate performance varied depending on the texts selected and the chosen focus of analysis.

There were no language in work portfolios submitted this year.

Performance-talking

Candidates were very well-prepared for the performance-talking and engaged positively with visiting assessors.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Most candidates performed well in this paper, especially in the comprehension questions 1 to 6, where they gave enough detail to gain the marks.

Most candidates successfully attempted questions 1 to 4 and 6.

For question 7, the overall purpose question, candidates who gained higher marks had a deeper understanding of the text as a whole and approached the question in an analytical and critical way. The stronger answers referred to the stylistic techniques and could outline the ways in which these substantiate their argument and the impact they made on the reader. References to the text were linked to their answer and not simply translated from the Spanish.

In the translation section, the stronger responses were when candidates accurately translated verb tenses and took into account that sense units are interlinked, making sure that the translation flowed from start to end.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening paper:

- ◆ item 1: many candidates coped well with questions 1(a), (b) (c) and (f)
- ◆ item 2: most candidates successfully attempted questions 2(a), (c), (d), (e), (f) and (k)

In the writing paper, the most successful essays were well-structured, had an introduction and a conclusion and were written in paragraphs. Candidates achieved good marks when they incorporated appropriate learned material into their answer, their essays were relevant to the question, and they presented comprehensive arguments using accurate language that was appropriate to the level.

Candidates achieved the highest marks when they fully addressed the titles in an objective way using interesting ideas. Candidates who can use appropriate idiomatic expressions and mature opinion phrases perform very well.

Of the four essay titles, candidates gained the highest marks in questions 3, 5 and 6.

Portfolio

Portfolio submissions were good overall. The best essays had a concise question that allowed candidates to adopt an analytical approach or had a title that allowed candidates to develop two sides of an argument.

Essays that worked well:

- ◆ had a title that led to comparisons or contrasts within one text
- ◆ focused on specific themes or linguistic features, for example imagery or symbolism that examine cinematographic techniques in a film
- ◆ had a clear sense of structure, with one idea being discussed in each paragraph as opposed to three or four ideas being addressed in one long paragraph
- ◆ when candidates chose essay titles where the answer was not immediately obvious as this allowed their arguments and analysis to lead towards the conclusion, which linked back to the essay title
- ◆ where the introduction is succinct and does not give the conclusion away at the beginning
- ◆ were written in an appropriate formal register avoiding personal opinions and refer to their chosen text and appropriate, additional sources, with relevant evidence and quotations
- ◆ had reliable bibliographies containing three or more references, with at least two sources in Spanish. This is good practice. The best bibliographies contained sources with academic credibility

No candidates exceeded the word limit.

Performance—talking

Most candidates performed very well, were well prepared, confident and spoke about engaging topics on which they could speak at length. Most candidates responded very well to the questions about their portfolio.

Most candidates were able to go beyond minimal responses and had interesting and considered opinions on their chosen topics. Candidates performed well when they incorporated learned material and responded well to unexpected questions.

Performances that were awarded the higher pegged marks demonstrated high level of accuracy with candidates being able to sustain the discussion, take the initiative and use a wide range of language resources accurately.

Successful candidates were enthusiastic and very well prepared, with good pronunciation and intonation.

Most candidates used mature discussion techniques, complex and sophisticated language including idiomatic expressions. Candidates were at ease with the method of assessment.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper: Reading and Translation

In the comprehension questions (1 to 7), dictionary misuse, poor expression in English and insufficient detail caused candidates to miss out on marks.

In the overall purpose question (8), while most candidates could identify the overall purpose of the text, they did not manage to write a reflective response and could not use analytical or inferential language to develop their answer fully. Most candidates repeated comprehension answers or quoted from the text, rather than analysing the language used or the writer's techniques. Most candidates can identify the techniques used and the stylistic features contained in the text but do not go on to explore these techniques or examine the impact they have on the overall purpose. Answers that lacked structure were awarded the lower pegged marks.

In the translation question (9), candidates who performed less well missed out words, did not use the correct verb tenses and did not proofread their response to ensure that the whole translation made sense.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

While many candidates made use of prepared material that they could adapt to suit the essay questions, some ran out of ideas and did not fully address the topic. Candidates who relied on prepared material tend to produce less accurate language when they must develop their ideas beyond what they have memorised.

Candidates who wrote a personalised response to the essay titles did not gain the higher pegged marks.

Some candidates continue to make errors with basic language and grammar: adjectival agreements, inappropriate use of infinitives, the inability to conjugate verbs or manipulate tenses, unidiomatic translation from English into Spanish, the incorrect use of *ser* and *estar*, *para* and *por*, and missed opportunities in using the subjunctive when appropriate.

Essays that are repetitive or that do not fully address the question, and over half of the essay is irrelevant, rarely achieve high marks.

Portfolio

Many candidates did not select a title or essay question that generates critical analysis. Essay titles that are overly complex or are too vague do not elicit an effective response from candidates.

Some media essays tended to be informative rather than analytical.

Essays that take a personalised approach do not allow for deep analysis of the texts. Inappropriate register had a negative effect on some essays, and candidates should avoid the use of exaggeration. Many candidates repeated one or two ideas throughout their essays and struggled to provide a deep analysis of the text. Many candidates wrote essays that did not have a structure and lacked coherence. Some candidates provided lengthy elaborations from one small point or short quotation, leading to superficial analysis.

Poor expression in English and a lack of proofreading was a feature of some essays. This leads to errors in syntax, poor punctuation and spelling errors which does not give an overall good impression.

Essays often lack critical terminology with candidates retelling the story and not addressing their title through evaluation of themes or literary techniques.

A few essays linked texts that had no thematic link, for example from different authors or set in different time periods. In some essays, candidates made unsubstantiated assertions with no reference to the area of study. The analysis in these essays was contrived and often inaccurate.

There was a lack of awareness of figurative speech, imagery, symbolism and of what constitutes the literary technique of magical realism.

Many candidates wrote their conclusion in the opening paragraph and then tried to justify this throughout the rest of the essay.

A few candidates did not refer to at least two sources in Spanish in their bibliography and were penalised for this.

Performance-talking

Despite the performance-talking being an area where candidates generally do very well, some have difficulty in manipulating and adapting learned material to cope with questions they are asked.

A few candidates had difficulty with accuracy in verbs and verb endings, tenses, the gender of nouns, appropriate use of the infinitive and adjectival agreement.

Candidates who had chosen to discuss, for example future plans, a gap year or the importance of learning languages found it challenging to incorporate the use of complex and sophisticated language into the conversation, to offer mature and sophisticated opinions or to sustain the discussion at the level required.

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
- ◆ make full use of [SQA's website](#), course reports for Advanced Higher Spanish as well as the marking instructions for Advanced Higher Spanish and past papers
- ◆ are aware their handwriting must be legible

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ have opportunities to practise working within the time constraints for the paper
- ◆ allocate an appropriate amount of time to the comprehension questions, the overall purpose question, and the translation
- ◆ provide detailed answers to the comprehension questions and look out for qualifiers, comparatives and superlatives
- ◆ check the number of marks being awarded for each question, to guide them towards the amount of information they have to provide
- ◆ pay particular attention to their expression in English
- ◆ explore all meanings of the word they are looking up when using a dictionary, to ensure they choose the one which best fits the context of their answer

Question 7: 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. Candidates should know that they must examine the impact of the writer's techniques and not simply state what they are
- ◆ provide responses that are well-structured and have a conclusion
- ◆ are aware any quotation from the text should be appropriate, relevant and explained, not simply translated from the Spanish
- ◆ are aware a succinct answer using inferential-type language is more likely to achieve a higher mark than a long response that only provides information from the text
- ◆ 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 study the overall purpose examples on the [Understanding Standards website](#) as a means of discussing and reviewing the best format, formula, type of language required to answer this question successfully

Question 8: translation

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ spend time developing translation skills, and in particular, ways of converting idiomatic expressions from Spanish into English
- ◆ can recognise and accurately translate tenses
- ◆ develop their dictionary skills, and are aware they should consider not just the first meaning they find, but all meanings of the word or phrase to ensure they choose the one which best fits the context of their translation
- ◆ read and review their translation 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
- ◆ continue to revise basic language and vocabulary
- ◆ access listening materials on the internet, especially short news items and podcasts from Spanish-language radio
- ◆ read the questions carefully before the recording begins to anticipate the type of language they can expect to hear
- ◆ have opportunities to practise strategies for note-taking while listening
- ◆ 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
- ◆ refer to the productive grammar grid in the appendix of the course specification to ensure that they have covered all relevant areas of grammar
- ◆ use complex and sophisticated and, if possible, idiomatic language appropriately
- ◆ address all aspects of the essay question in a relevant and balanced way
- ◆ have a focused approach, including an introduction and a conclusion, and refer to the essay stimulus
- ◆ build up banks of phrases for use in their essays, including phrases associated with linguistic signposting, linking structures and opinion phrases
- ◆ set aside some time during the exam to proofread their essay, checking spelling, verb endings and accents
- ◆ are familiar with the dictionary they will be using in the exam

Portfolio

The choice of a title is very important and should generate a discursive or evaluative approach. It may require a narrower focus to allow for deeper analysis.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ can use critical terminology
- ◆ vary their expression and critical terminology so that their essay does not become repetitive
- ◆ use appropriate register and an objective tone rather than writing in a personalised way or using exaggeration
- ◆ choose suitable secondary sources that relate to the primary source
- ◆ include a critical evaluation of the primary source
- ◆ analyse one poem at a time as opposed to moving from one poem to another
- ◆ check the factual accuracy of their work
- ◆ practise writing effective introductions that do not reveal the conclusion before they have presented their analysis
- ◆ include a wide number of quotations in Spanish to support their analysis. Candidates should analyse these quotes and not translate them into English
- ◆ develop the quality of their bibliography to show a depth of research
- ◆ refer to at least two sources in Spanish in their bibliography
- ◆ proofread their use of English spelling and punctuation as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts

Performance-talking

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ choose topics which allow for mature, sophisticated and in-depth discussion
- ◆ read the detailed marking instructions so they are familiar with what is expected for the higher pegged marks
- ◆ focus on grammatical accuracy, particularly on the use of verbs (especially the preterite and the perfect), the gender of nouns, adjectival agreements, and the use of *ser* and *estar*, *para* and *por*, and the subjunctive
- ◆ develop a bank of phrases for use in their performance-talking in relation to discussion techniques in the language, which would help them deal with unexpected questions
- ◆ prepared thoroughly for the performance-talking by regularly practising discussing their chosen topics

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](#).