



Course report 2023

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 in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 470

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 399

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	154	Percentage	38.6	Cumulative percentage	38.6	Minimum mark required	136
B	Number of candidates	87	Percentage	21.8	Cumulative percentage	60.4	Minimum mark required	116
C	Number of candidates	84	Percentage	21.1	Cumulative percentage	81.5	Minimum mark required	96
D	Number of candidates	40	Percentage	10	Cumulative percentage	91.5	Minimum mark required	76
No award	Number of candidates	34	Percentage	8.5	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied 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 more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of SQA’s website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Candidates responded reasonably well to the reading text, especially when answering the comprehension questions. Most engaged positively with the subject of the article, which related to the fight against climate change.

In general terms, there was a mixed performance in the translation section. However, as in previous years, the overall purpose question presented difficulties for most candidates.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Section 1 (Listening) focused on the benefits of going to university and getting a degree and proved to be challenging for some candidates. Candidates achieved higher marks for item 2.

In section 2 (Discursive Writing), there were some very good essays which demonstrated flair, appropriate use of idiomatic language and accurate expression of opinions.

Occasionally, candidates gained only a maximum mark of 16 as a result of not addressing the question fully and relying instead on the reproduction of learned material.

All four essay titles were attempted. The most popular choices were question 6 (culture) on immigration, followed by question 5 (employability) on whether technology in the workplace had improved working conditions for everyone.

Portfolio

Candidates achieved a range of marks in the portfolio, and adopted a range of approaches, some of which were more successful than others.

There were no language in work portfolios this year.

Performance-talking

As in previous years, 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 engaged well with this paper, especially in the comprehension questions 1 to 6.

Most candidates successfully attempted questions 2(a), 3, 4(b) and (c).

For question 7, the overall purpose question, candidates who did well adopted an analytical and/or critical approach to the text as well as referring to the writer's stylistic features, focusing on how these substantiated their argument and the impact they made on the reader. When quoting from the text, they linked their references appropriately to their answer.

In the translation section, many candidates found sense units 6, 7 and 10 most accessible.

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Section 1 (Listening)

In item 1, many candidates coped well with questions (b) and (c)(ii).

In item 2, questions (a), (c), (d), (e), (f)(ii) and (h), were successfully attempted by most candidates.

Section 2 (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 answer and when their essays were fully relevant to the question. Other features of essays that achieved good marks were those that avoided the use of the first person singular or plural and did not contain personal or anecdotal references.

Candidates achieved the highest marks when they fully addressed the titles and produced essays containing coherent language and interesting ideas. Of the four choices available to them, question 6, the essay on culture (immigration) was the one where candidates performed most successfully, followed by question 4 on learning (the future of education). There were some good performances by candidates who chose question 5, on employability (technology in the workplace).

There was some excellent use of structures this year, for example:

- ◆ *la otra cara de la moneda*
- ◆ *hacer la vista gorda*
- ◆ *ya lleva varios años en los medios*
- ◆ *sin que cueste un ojo de la cara*
- ◆ *todavía queda mucho camino por recorrer*

- ◆ *la pregunta que anda en boca de todos*
- ◆ *está en auge*
- ◆ *en gran medida*
- ◆ *es pan comido*

Portfolio

Portfolio submissions were very good overall. The best essays were those that had a relatively short or concise question or title that genuinely 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, films, or some analysis of poetry from an anthology, focusing on specific themes. Another feature of good practice was the evaluation of themes, symbols and imagery, addressed in a methodical and structured manner.

Most candidates attempted to analyse their text(s) and relate their arguments and conclusions to the focus of their study.

Candidates who gained higher marks in the portfolio:

- ◆ made a clear effort to link their argument back to the title
- ◆ clearly structured and organised their essays, for example one idea discussed per paragraph, as opposed to three or four ideas all dealt with in one overlong paragraph
- ◆ chose titles where the answer was not immediately obvious, as this allowed their arguments and analysis to develop more naturally towards their conclusion
- ◆ were able to highlight and back up their assertions with reference to or by relevant quotation from the area of study
- ◆ used evaluative language more often in their 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)
- ◆ used some mature approaches, which were well expressed with clear and sophisticated expression in English. An appropriate formal language register was sustained in these essays
- ◆ avoided personalised language or opinion in their essays, showing a more sophisticated level of English and analysis
- ◆ referenced their statements and assertions with evidence from sources
- ◆ where film was included, they provided details of cinematographic techniques in their essays and used terms referring to camera angles and diegetic sound correctly

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, confident, and performed well. Most candidates' choice of topics allowed them to talk at length.

Fluency, readily taking the initiative and sustaining the discussion were features of good performances. Successful candidates were enthusiastic and very well-prepared with good pronunciation and intonation. Answers were well-structured and comprehensive and learned material used appropriately. Opinions were expressed effectively, and candidates were enterprising in their attempts to go beyond minimal responses. They incorporated some interesting discussion techniques into their conversation with the visiting assessor, using complex and sophisticated language and occasionally bringing in some idiomatic turns of phrase. Contexts such as immigration, racism, technology, education, gender equality and the environment, helped candidates to produce complex and sophisticated language structures much more than topics such as future plans, choice of university, travelling, music, lifestyles and language learning. Candidates were at ease with the method of assessment.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper: Reading and Translation

Questions 1 to 6

In the comprehension questions, dictionary misuse and insufficient detail caused candidates to miss out on marks, for example:

- ◆ question 1(a): some candidates failed to address the superlative *el problema más grave* or refer to Spain *en el caso de España*
- ◆ question 1(b): the verb *abordar* was occasionally misinterpreted in this context as 'approach'
- ◆ question 2(b): presented challenges in relation to the lack of detail in candidates' answers. They did not always provide the superlative *la mayor amenaza*
- ◆ question 5: *políticos* was incorrectly rendered as 'politics' instead of 'politicians' and *negociadores* as 'businessmen' instead of 'negotiators'

Question 7: overall purpose question

- ◆ some candidates did not provide a sufficiently reflective or evaluative response
- ◆ those who performed less well tended to supply information from the text rather than engaging in analysis, and 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 change in tone within the writer's argument, how the article begins and ends, the use of statistics and direct speech and real-life examples. However, less successful candidates fail to explore the impact of these on the reader

- ◆ a few candidates wrote their responses without going beyond a recounting of the facts outlined in the text. In some cases, expression in English was weak and less successful answers tended to lack structure and/or ended abruptly

Question 8: translation

In the translation section, some candidates had difficulty with the following words and expressions:

- ◆ sense unit 1: mistranslating *conscientes* as ‘conscious’ as opposed to ‘aware’ and did not gain the mark
- ◆ sense unit 2: *son los que* caused problems for some who omitted ‘are those’, ‘are the ones who...’
- ◆ sense unit 4: *compromiso* was often mistranslated as ‘compromise’ instead of ‘commitment’ and some candidates could not translate the meaning and the appropriate tense of the verb *convertirse*
- ◆ sense unit 9: many candidates did not achieve full marks as they mistranslated *en ese sentido* as ‘in this sense’ instead of ‘in that sense’

Question paper: Listening and Discursive Writing

Listening: item 1

Some candidates found difficulty with the following questions:

- ◆ question (a): understanding the number 57 as well as the phrase *el salario medio*
- ◆ question (c)(i): misinterpreting *estudios superiores* as ‘university’ and *inferior* as ‘inferior’
- ◆ question (d): failing to gain the second mark relating to people and societies facing up to economic and environmental transformation

Listening: item 2

- ◆ question (b): failing to grasp the comparative *a mayor nivel de estudios*
- ◆ question (f)(i): not providing the detail of *muchas destrezas y habilidades* by leaving out ‘many’ and few captured *es un proceso de aprendizaje significativo*
- ◆ question (g): being unable to fully understand *una carrera que combina dos campos distintos*

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 tended to rely on pre-prepared essays, which clearly compromised relevance and focus. Where candidates relied on memorising material, they made more errors in grammar as they tended to omit several words rather than creating an original detail using their knowledge and ability to manipulate the language. Candidates, on occasion, did not refer to the title at all and chose to develop a new title early in their essay.

- ◆ question 3: *en tiempos de crisis, los conflictos aumentan entre familias y amigos*, often generated a personal response essay from candidates rather than a discursive focus, for example on how they coped during lockdown
- ◆ question 4: *el futuro de la educación reside en el modelo a distancia ya que el modelo presencial está pasado de moda*, some candidates focused on the advantages and disadvantages of the current education system without addressing *el modelo a distancia*
- ◆ question 5: *las nuevas tecnologías en el campo laboral han mejorado las condiciones de trabajo para todos*, some candidates chose to write only about technology without addressing the issue of its role in the workplace

Other issues in discursive writing included repeating the title, sometimes on several occasions in the essay; errors in 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 deploying the subjunctive when appropriate.

In some essays, there was too much personalisation, for example *como ya he dicho; estoy de acuerdo; creo/pienso que; quiero examinar*.

At times, when candidates went beyond pre-learned phrases, the language broke down and there was often repetition. Essays that are repetitive, or essays that do not fully address the question and more than half of the essay is irrelevant, rarely achieve the higher marks.

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 a few of inappropriately worded titles or titles that were too vague, contrived, over-complicated, or not framed as a question. Media essays were inclined 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 approach was taken and the third person was used, there tended to be better critical evaluation of the subject matter.

On occasion, candidates struggled to sustain an appropriate level of expression of ideas throughout their essay, with some making general statements that were not substantiated with reference to the area of study.

Character study from a novel, a play or selection of short stories tended to be superficial.

Other areas that some candidates found demanding:

- ◆ essays lacked structure and coherence
- ◆ they provided too much information and not enough evaluation
- ◆ 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 contributed to lower marks
- ◆ inappropriate register had a negative effect overall, and candidates should avoid phrases like ‘this amazing novel’, ‘the marvellous writer’, ‘this fascinating play’
- ◆ instead of selecting and analysing evidence before drawing conclusions, too many candidates wrote their conclusion in the opening paragraph and then tried to justify this throughout the rest of the essay
- ◆ they did not proofread their work effectively in English and when quoting in Spanish from a literary text or screenplay from a film

It is important that candidates refer to at least two sources in Spanish in their bibliography.

Performance-talking

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

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ practise accuracy in verbs and verb endings, tenses, the gender of nouns, appropriate use of the infinitive and adjectival agreement
- ◆ are encouraged to 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.

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, especially by referring to course reports for Advanced Higher Spanish from 2018, 2019, 2022 and 2023 as well as the marking instructions for Advanced Higher Spanish past papers
- ◆ are aware their handwriting must be legible

Question paper: Reading and Translation

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 detailed answer is likely to gain higher 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 1(b) *abordar*. Translation sense unit 1 *conscientes*
- ◆ do not provide a series of alternative answers to questions, as this does not benefit them

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. 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 is more likely to achieve a higher mark than a long response that only provides information from the text (usually covered in the answers to questions 1 to 6), 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'

- ◆ 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 8: 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. Special care should be taken with recognising and accurately translating 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 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 that candidates found demanding](#)' section for the Discursive Writing)
- ◆ 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 exam to use their dictionary to proofread their essay
- ◆ are provided with a dictionary that is suitable for 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
- ◆ use phrases associated with linguistic signposting, for example:
 - *primero de todo...*
 - *a manera de introducción...*
 - *comencemos por...*
 - *se debate con frecuencia...*
 - *hay quienes dicen...*
 - *merece decir...*
 - *se debería considerar...*
 - *pongamos por caso...*
 - *aún más...*
 - *como consecuencia...*
 - *habiendo considerado todos los aspectos...*
 - *a fin de cuentas...*
 - *al fin y al cabo...*
 - *a modo de conclusión...*
- ◆ use appropriate linking structures and phrases relating to expressing opinions, which are characteristics of good practice, for example:
 - *cabe apuntar...*
 - *vale mencionar...*
 - *cabe destacar igualmente que...*
 - *uno de los temas que más preocupa...*
 - *visto que...*
 - *un tema candente...*
 - *no hace falta decir...*
 - *el problema que se plantea...*

- *el dato más contundente...*
- *merece la pena señalar...*
- *hay que subrayar...*
- *por lo tanto...*
- *no cabe duda ninguna de que...*

Portfolio

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

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ discuss the use of critical terminology with them to help them to improve the quality of their expression in English
- ◆ choose suitable and compatible sources and avoid secondary sources that do not closely 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, for example ensure they have a true understanding of the literary technique of magical realism (not a theme)
- ◆ are aware of the importance of an effective introduction and conclusion to their essay
- ◆ maintain an objective tone throughout and avoid anecdotal expressions such as ‘I personally believe...’
- ◆ include more 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 and may lead to the candidate gaining no marks if it is felt that they have not read, for example, a literary text in the modern language
- ◆ know they should not translate any quotes from Spanish into English
- ◆ develop the quality and breadth of their bibliographies overall. Any reference to Wikipedia or Quizlet suggests a lack of breadth of research on the part of the candidate
- ◆ proofread their use of English, spelling and punctuation as well as accuracy in quotation from literary texts
- ◆ avoid the use of an inappropriate register and informal language
- ◆ vary their expression throughout their essay and avoid the repetition of words and phrases. 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:

- ◆ focus on grammatical accuracy, particularly in relation to 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 any question they may be asked that goes beyond their 'comfort zone' of learned material

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.

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 was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

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 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. 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 the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 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 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).