



Course report 2023

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: 2,463

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 2,604

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	1,316	Percentage	50.5	Cumulative percentage	50.5	Minimum mark required	75
B	Number of candidates	473	Percentage	18.2	Cumulative percentage	68.7	Minimum mark required	63
C	Number of candidates	386	Percentage	14.8	Cumulative percentage	83.5	Minimum mark required	51
D	Number of candidates	243	Percentage	9.3	Cumulative percentage	92.9	Minimum mark required	39
No award	Number of candidates	186	Percentage	7.1	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](https://sqa.my/) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

The course assessments covered all four contexts of society, learning, employability, culture.

Markers noted that the reading and directed writing question papers worked well and offered an appropriate level of challenge.

Candidates found the listening question paper challenging, and there were some perceived issues with the recording. These factors were taken into account when setting grade boundaries.

Question paper 1: Reading

Candidates continue to perform very well in the reading question paper, especially in the comprehension questions. Markers felt that all questions were accessible. The questions were balanced in terms of high, low and average demand, and there was a balance of questions worth 1, 2 or 3 marks. The overall purpose question was well done. The translation also worked well.

Candidates read one text in Spanish, in the context of society, about young people's attitudes towards the environment. In general, there was a very competent response to the comprehension questions and many candidates understood almost all of the main points.

The text contained a section for candidates to translate into English. This requires a high degree of grammatical accuracy and evidence of high-order skills. Full marks are only awarded in the translation with an accurate rendering of the text into English. Candidates seem to be dedicating more time to the translation and most candidates attempted this part of the paper.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Candidates were offered a choice of two scenarios, each of which had six unseen bullet points to address. Scenario 1 was in the context of learning and scenario 2 was in the context of culture.

Candidates have an element of personalisation and choice in this paper. In the best performances, candidates wrote six distinct paragraphs that addressed each bullet point in a balanced way. Similarly, in the strongest performances, candidates had a balance in terms of content, grammatical accuracy and language resource appropriate to Higher level. Most candidates chose scenario 1 (learning).

Overall, candidates did well in the directed writing paper and could adapt prepared material effectively to address less predictable bullet points. Some candidates found it more challenging to address all six bullet points at the level required.

Question paper 2: Listening

Many candidates found the question paper to be challenging this year. Some candidate noted issues with recording playback performance, particularly in item 1. Most candidates did however attempt all questions in both listening items.

The question paper sampled the context of employability. Candidates listened to a monologue and a conversation about work experience. There was a balance of questions worth 1 or 2 marks. There were a range of questioning techniques over the two items in the paper.

Assignment–writing

The requirement to complete the assignment–writing was removed for session 2022–23.

Performance–talking

The performance–talking performed as expected. At Higher, candidates have a discussion (in Spanish) with the teacher or lecturer. Candidates are assessed on at least two of the following contexts: society, learning, employability, culture.

The revised general and detailed marking instructions allow teachers and lecturers to mark candidates' performances with confidence.

Centres sampled this session marked candidates' performances in line with national standards. Teachers and lecturers play a pivotal role in guiding candidates prior to the assessment in their choice of contexts and topics. In the sample of centres verified this year, teachers and lecturers had encouraged candidates to identify topics that gave them the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities against the four aspects.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Overall, the performance of candidates in Higher Spanish was good. The question papers for reading and directed writing worked well and allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Markers noted that the overall quality of writing was very good, but some candidates did not manage to write at a level required for Higher.

Question paper 1: Reading

Candidates performed particularly well in the comprehension questions in the reading question paper, especially in questions worth 1 or 2 marks. Most candidates did well in the questions linked to the slogans and the different ways Rosa and her friends considered protecting the environment. Some candidates found some elements of the text more difficult, for example:

- ◆ question 1: the use of the superlative in question 1: ‘some of the most important’
- ◆ question 2(a): there was some dictionary misuse when candidates looked up *lanzado*
- ◆ question 5(b): some candidates could not make sense of *hechos de papel reciclado*

Some questions, which were more straightforward, allowed candidates to access the text and associated marks. Candidates responded well to the signposting in the questions to find the answer in the text, and there were few instances where candidates gave an answer in the wrong place. There were few questions with no responses, and candidates were using strategies to attempt to answer all questions.

Candidates performed well in the overall purpose question, and many were able to give clear justification for their assertion. However, there were some candidates who only managed to offer an assertion, or provided a few assertions, perhaps thinking they were justifications. Some candidates quoted in Spanish from the text without explaining why this quote backed up their assertion and this prevented them from gaining the related mark.

Although the translation is one of the most challenging aspects of the reading paper, most candidates did well and managed to gain marks in this question. Some candidates struggled with *todo el mundo* in sense unit 4, or *si no actuamos ahora mismo* in sense unit 5. In sense unit 1, *nos hemos unido aqui hoy* some candidates found the tense difficult.

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Most candidates chose scenario 1 (learning) and performed well in both scenarios. The level of demand was appropriate and allowed candidates to display their knowledge of the language. Most candidates addressed all six bullet points. Essays that achieved high marks had well-prepared introductions and conclusions and included other information that was relevant to the scenarios. This added positively to the overall impression. Many candidates made good use of learned material, which they could adapt to help them address the bullet points effectively.

Some candidates found it difficult to produce appropriate content and high levels of accuracy throughout. Common errors included confusion between preterite and imperfect tenses, gender of nouns, agreements, prepositions, incorrect verb forms, use of tenses, use of

definite and indefinite articles. The use of *ser* and *estar* is not always secure. There were some examples where candidates gave a very brief response to one or more bullet points.

Question paper 2: Listening

In the listening question paper, there were some elements candidates found challenging. Some of these elements related to accessible transactional language, for example daily routine, food or greetings.

Other areas that candidates found demanding included:

- ◆ question 1(a): some candidates did not manage to make sense of getting their clothes ready for the following day
- ◆ question 1(b): some candidates did not manage to understand the concept of getting up or waking up earlier
- ◆ question 1(d): some candidates were not able to identify the concept of saying *buenos días a todo el mundo* in your workplace
- ◆ question 1(e): most candidate responses were not sufficiently detailed with *pasteles de chocolate*, giving only 'chocolates'
- ◆ question 2(a): candidates did not manage to render *alquiler* and they only provided *bicicletas*
- ◆ question 2(e): most candidates did not manage to understand *boda*
- ◆ question 2(f): some candidates were not accurate with the numbers

Candidate performance was better in item 2. Candidates did well with questions such as helping refugees or aspiring to do jobs that help their communities.

Performance—talking

Most candidates coped well with the format of the task and were able to sustain the discussion for the suggested duration. The discussion should last approximately 10 minutes. Based on the centres verified, many candidates gained pegged marks 15 or higher, and the majority of those gained pegged marks 27 or 30. Few candidates gained pegged marks 12 or lower.

Where teachers or lecturers used open-ended questions, this was more effective in eliciting detailed and complex language from candidates. Candidates covered a variety of topics and a wide range of structures, vocabulary, and tenses appropriate to Higher. Some performances displayed confident delivery with little undue hesitation, very good grammatical accuracy and use of interjections and questions by the candidate.

Among the samples verified, weaker performances often included errors which detracted from the overall impression. Some candidates could not always be understood, for example a misuse of learned materials, where the candidate appeared not to be at ease with the content resulting in poor phrasing and miscommunication. There were other minor errors, mainly with wrong gender of nouns, incorrect agreement of adjectives, and words omitted from responses. In some performances, candidates could not sustain the use of detailed and complex language required at Higher.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read the questions carefully and look or listen for the signposts in the Spanish text or recording
- ◆ give as much detail as they can, including adjectives and adverbs
- ◆ make sure they know how many marks are available for each question
- ◆ refer to the detailed marking instructions for reading and listening after completing past papers to gain an understanding of the detail required at Higher level
- ◆ re-read their answers to make sure they make sense in English, especially in the translation section of the reading paper

Question paper 1: Reading

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ know the comprehension questions offer signposts and keywords to help them identify where to find the answer in the text
- ◆ provide two or three distinct answers where a question is worth 2 or 3 marks
- ◆ are aware that where a question says, 'State any one thing', there is more than one possible answer
- ◆ in the overall purpose question:
 - know that one assertion and one justification, with evidence from the text, can gain 2 marks
 - know that the evidence from the text must not come from the answers to the comprehension questions
 - are discouraged from quoting in Spanish from the text and from adding a word-for-word translation of the quote into English, as this does not add anything to their justification
 - consider the use of language in the text to help them make their justification
 - do not write excessively in response to this question. This could lead to not having enough time for the translation question
- ◆ in the translation:
 - are aware that accuracy plays a very important role in this question and that incorrect verb tenses will mean that they won't gain any of the marks for the sense unit
 - re-read each sense unit to make sure they have translated every word. Full marks are only awarded when there is a good and complete translation of the text into English

Question paper 1: Directed writing

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read the scenarios and the bullet points carefully and make sure they address all information required
- ◆ are aware that the first bullet point requires them to address two distinct pieces of information
- ◆ provide an equal and balanced response to each bullet point as they are required to sustain content, accuracy and language resource appropriate to Higher throughout the directed writing piece
- ◆ are aware the paragraphs should address the six bullet points fully using appropriate content while sustaining accuracy and language resource appropriate to the level throughout the whole essay
- ◆ attempt to use different verb forms, going beyond the first person: bullet points often require them to write about what they did with other people
- ◆ incorporate some idiomatic expressions into their writing
- ◆ make sure they can use the conditional tense in the final bullet point
- ◆ refer to the detailed marking instructions so that they are aware of what is required to achieve full marks in this question paper. They should apply these marking instructions to their own writing, or to that of their peers, to gain an understanding of what they can do to improve as they are developing their skills in writing

Question paper 2: Listening

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates:

- ◆ read the questions carefully in advance of listening to the recording
- ◆ are aware of how many marks are required for the answer and should highlight the question words and the key phrases that signpost the answer in the recording
- ◆ reflect on the vocabulary they are listening for, based on the questions, before the recording begins
- ◆ provide sufficiently detailed information
- ◆ refer to the detailed marking instructions, published with past papers, to become more aware of what is required in this paper
- ◆ access grammar practice, and coverage of the rules of the language as an integral part of learning and teaching
- ◆ use a variety of persons and tenses, as appropriate to topics

Performance–talking

Teachers and lecturers should continue to include grammar practice and coverage of the rules of the language as a fundamental part of learning and teaching.

They should encourage candidates to use a variety of persons and tenses, as appropriate to the topics chosen.

Many confident performances demonstrated very good language resource. In some instances, candidates did not use detailed and complex language, and this detracted from the overall quality. In relation to the level of language, teachers and lecturers can refer to the productive grammar grid in appendix 2 of the Higher Modern Languages Course Specification and Understanding Standards examples of Higher performances on SQA's secure website.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates have strategies for asking questions to be repeated when they have not understood a part of the discussion. Candidates who were able to use interjections and ask relevant questions could sustain the discussion more confidently. Where candidates struggle to answer certain questions, teachers and lecturers should continue to support the candidate by reshaping the question, asking a different question on a linked idea, or finally changing the topic. Teachers and lecturers should give candidates the appropriate thinking time before doing this.

Teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates practise talking skills in preparation for the performance–talking. The 'Approaches to learning and teaching: talking' section in the appendix of the Higher Modern Languages Course Specification provides examples of how to develop candidates' talking skills and suggests that talking activities form part of learning and teaching.

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](#).