

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/01

Speaking

General comments

Most tests were carried out in full accordance with the requirements, and the majority of Centres examined their candidates in an appropriate manner and depth for this level. Teacher/Examiners are thanked for their professionalism and cooperation.

Previous reports have outlined problems involving aspects of administration that have caused difficulties for moderation or delayed the process disproportionately. Similar comments are, regrettably, applicable this session. There is still a small, but persistent clutch of Centres who do not adhere to the regulations for the conduct of the tests, including sending incomplete documentation or awarding marks that are inconsistent with the mark scheme. Working Mark Sheets are required to allow moderation to take place and these **must** show a mark for each of the thirteen criteria that are assessed in the examination. Without this detailed information, Centres' marks cannot be confirmed. It is not acceptable to provide only a section total, or the overall total. Please also note the maximum mark available for each criterion – usually this is ten, but in some cases it is five.

Recording quality was generally good, but please check that candidates are clearly audible. Candidate names and numbers must be clearly stated at the beginning of each recording and these details should also be written on the recording box or sleeve. Please rewind tapes to the start of side 1.

A few Centres did not make it clear either to the candidate or the Moderators when each part of the test was completed. The initial presentation should last up to three minutes, without interruptions or questions, and there should be a clear distinction between the Topic Conversation and the General Conversation. Please remember (and also remind candidates as necessary) that candidates should request information and opinions from the Examiner in both conversation sections (five marks for each section is at stake): high marks should not be awarded for rhetorical, all-purpose or one-word questions and teacher/Examiners should take care when replying to be brief.

Topic Presentation and Topic Conversation

An interesting range of topics was discussed with very few inappropriate subjects. Topics must reflect a knowledge of a Spanish-speaking country. As in previous years, candidates would sometimes deal with this by implication rather than making it very clear how the topic related to the Spanish-speaking context. Candidates who do this risk having their mark for Content/Presentation halved. In their preparation, candidates should remember to include precise detail, concrete reference, statistics, opinions and analysis, etc., that will place the subject in the appropriate cultural context. This is an exercise in formal communication, not a chat with friends: clear diction, accurate pronunciation and intonation with an appropriate level of language will be rewarded. Candidates treating the topic at a very general or superficial level and without evidence of preparation and organisation cannot be awarded a high mark for Content/Presentation.

The role of Teacher/examiners is vital to facilitate an effective, advanced-level discussion. Candidates should be given an opportunity to counter an argument or substantiate a point of view in the discussion. In a few cases the Topic Conversation had perhaps been over-rehearsed, with trigger questions prompting prepared answers or mini presentations, preventing the candidate from access to the highest marks for fluency and spontaneity. Similarly, to gain access to the highest marks for linguistic range and maturity, candidates must be encouraged – and given the opportunity – to respond to higher-level language in terms of syntax and register.

General Conversation

The mark scheme for the General Conversation uses the same marking criteria as those for the Topic Conversation: the General Conversation should be at an advanced-level standard, both linguistically and contextually, encouraging candidates to deal with topics in an informed but non-specialist way. There was still a tendency for some Centres to treat 'general' as meaning 'everyday' and concentrating on topics at a level more appropriate to IGCSE or O Level. As candidates are assessed on their ability to use an appropriate range of linguistic skills, questioning should allow and encourage them to widen the range of structures and show accuracy in grammar, vocabulary and register, in both factual or hypothetical contexts.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/02
Reading and Writing

General comments

The paper was handled well by the majority of candidates. Candidates were able to take fairly challenging subject matter, and the inclusion of a new test type, in their stride, and very few appeared to have insufficient time to complete the tasks. There was clear evidence that many had been well coached in the techniques required by this examination.

Comments on specific questions

SECCIÓN PRIMERA

Question 1

This was a well-established test type with target phrases which proved to be readily identifiable in the original text. Full marks were often achieved and only a minority of candidates failed to score fewer than three out of five marks.

As in previous sessions, marks were carelessly dropped either by omitting words from the target phrase or by unnecessarily extending it. The target phrase given by the candidate in their answer must match identically with the substitute phrase, and many candidates followed the good practice of writing the former alongside the latter as a means of checking. **Questions (a), (c) and (e)** attracted most correct answers. **Question (d)** proved to be more challenging, and even when correctly identified was often invalidated by the addition of extra words.

Question 2

The relative familiarity of the opening question was counterbalanced here by the introduction of a test type new to this paper. The conversion of direct speech to indirect or reported speech posed problems for many candidates, and construction of the imperfect subjunctive did not appear to be widely known.

Question 3

Candidates appeared to have little difficulty in locating the particular section of the passage targeted by the questions and good scores were commonly recorded.

- (a) (i)** This was answered correctly by almost every candidate, with many taking advantage of the paraphrase offered in **Question 1(a)**.
- (ii)** The point about negative connotations was very easily identified. A minority of candidates considered that this would be sufficient for the award of two marks and failed to mention the supposed connections with other social problems. It should be remembered that in the comprehension exercises marks are always awarded according to the number of points candidates are required to make. No single point of comprehension will ever be considered to be of sufficient importance to be worthy of two marks.
- (b)** Candidates quickly focused on the relevant section of the text and usually picked up two marks with comparative ease. A stumbling block, however, frequently arose with the reproduction verbatim of five or more words from the phrase *ciertas deficiencias en el sistema de protección social*. Some marks were also lost through careless misreading of *deficiencias* as *diferencias*.

- (c) Four basic rights were clearly flagged up in the text and candidates had little difficulty in stating three of them. The only pitfall once again was the occasional tendency for candidates to reproduce five or more words of the original text rather than answering in their own words.
- (d) The relevant sentence from the text was easily identified and understood. However, paraphrasing was again the major problem here, with candidates encountering particular difficulty in re-wording *anular las ordenanzas represivas en cuanto a la regulación del espacio público*.
- (e) This was a more challenging question. Many scored with the mention of *informes honestos* and *opinión positiva* but few followed this up with the point about society questioning its own values or the reasons behind homelessness.

SECCIÓN SEGUNDA

Question 4

Many candidates appeared to find the vocabulary in this second passage more challenging than in the first, and some had difficulty identifying the phenomenon of 'squatting'.

- (a) (i) Examiners thought that *desalojar* would be recognisable from the more widely used words *alojar* or *alojamiento*. Surprisingly, this was not the case for many candidates who failed to convey the notion of eviction.
- (ii) Even more surprising was the failure among many candidates to recognise *dejar de* and *suceso* which meant that they failed to score what should have been a fairly accessible mark.
- (b) With four marks available most candidates managed to pick up something on this question. Those who clearly understood what was going on and who remembered that four marks always means that four different points are being sought scored full marks. There were others who also clearly understood the passage but thought that one or two points would suffice and who therefore scored only one or two marks.
- (c) Even those candidates who failed to understand the notion of *condimentos* had little difficulty in identifying the sentence in the text which was being targeted. The only problems were encountered by those who were unable to paraphrase.
- (d) (i) Apart from a minority who failed to recognise *alquilar* when preceded by a prefix, most candidates who could paraphrase what was stated in the passage scored here.
- (ii) This was an inference question for which more than one answer was possible. Candidates needed to demonstrate their understanding of the situation by coming up with an answer which, although not stated in the text, would be perfectly feasible under the circumstances. The most popular ideas were that Carlos 'had already made enough money out of the scam', or 'he knew that the police would catch up with him if he carried on much longer'.
- (e) Many candidates found this question challenging. The speaker is summing up his previous remarks and it is a paraphrase of these, plus some explanation of *clandestinidad*, that is required. Generalised responses on the workings of the free market economy did not score.

Question 5

Although there has been a marked improvement over the years, a few candidates still seem to be unaware that anything they write in excess of a total of 140 words for parts (a) and (b) will be ignored. Those who transgressed commonly received few or no marks for part (b).

- (a) The summary question proved fairly accessible to most candidates. Candidates who had struggled to comprehend the second text were able to identify many causes and consequences of homelessness in the first text. In an exercise where words are at a premium candidates should be reminded that wasteful introductory sentences such as *Los dos textos hablan de la falta de vivienda, que es un gran problema en muchos países del mundo* are not necessary. Marks are allocated for facts which answer the question and not for literary style.

- (b)** In the two or three sentences which were usually available for this exercise those candidates who came up with ideas other than those suggested by the texts scored the highest marks.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/03

Essay

General Comments

Once again, Examiners are delighted to report that the majority of candidates performed well on this paper. It is very much the case that the Essay paper can give well-prepared candidates the opportunity to show off their linguistic capabilities to the full. Candidates are reminded that they must respond to the title set and keep their thoughts relevant to the topic being debated. Indeed, the very best essays got to the heart of the matter, reached a pertinent conclusion and were crafted with grammatical precision and clear understanding of the points being made.

There were, however, a number of essays that very obviously failed to respond to the title set and ended up being a general discussion of the broader topic. Candidates who resort to such a technique can expect to lose marks for Content.

An increased number of candidates this session also lost marks for producing an essay that fell short of the minimum word count of 250 words stated very clearly in the rubric.

The overall quality of Spanish used by many candidates was, once again, very high indeed. A good number of essays showed a confident manipulation of sentence structure together with a well-researched range of vocabulary appropriate to the topic being analysed. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the problems that did arise were very much predictable and were often the result of candidates not managing to check what they had written. As was the case last year, the use of accents in Spanish would appear to be a mystery to many candidates who simply leave accents out altogether. Fewer candidates this session resorted to the use of English to make up for not knowing certain lexical items in Spanish. When this does occur marks will be lost for Language. There was also evidence this session that a number of candidates had not understood the difference between the imperfect and the preterite tenses in Spanish. This confusion led to utterances such as "...y hace muchos años, cuando tuve cinco años y fui a una escuela primaria, no aprendí mucho..." which, at best, cause some degree of ambiguity and at worst are simply inaccurate. The subjunctive was handled more competently by more candidates than in the last session. Nevertheless, there appears to be a belief amongst a number of candidates that if a sentence begins with *Si* then the subjunctive must follow regardless of the nature of the 'if' clause in question. Centres would do well to disabuse their candidates of this incorrect assumption. On a more positive note, the use of the passive mood was far more convincingly dealt with by more candidates this session.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

As anticipated, this was a very popular title indeed. Most essays argued strongly that parental criticism of young people does not always help the situation, and that adults should indeed listen more attentively to the problems experienced and expressed by their offspring. Hardly any essays argued the opposite case.

Question 2

This was a reasonably popular title. There seemed to be a consensus view that glossy magazines are indeed responsible for feeding the public appetite for celebrity gossip. Many also argued that the ordinary individual should be more assertive and not allow him/herself to be 'seduced' by such coverage of pop stars, footballers, fashion models and the like.

Question 3

This question was by far the most popular title on the paper. The majority view was that secondary education should be compulsory and not optional. Giving the option, it was suggested, would lead to many youngsters simply not attending school and, as a consequence, getting involved in petty crime and the like. A small number of essays argued the opposite but did acknowledge the importance of a school-based education for every young person in society.

Question 4

This title was the least popular by a considerable margin. The small numbers of essays that were produced tended to be well written and very aware of the contemporary political scene. Almost all argued that rich countries are entirely responsible for the exploitation of smaller countries in what used to be referred to as the 'third world'.

Question 5

This title also proved to be somewhat unpopular. It is, without doubt, a comparatively complex issue. However, those candidates who responded to the title were clearly passionate about the importance of cultural activity in everyday life and made it very clear that humans simply cannot live without some element of culture in their lives, whatever form that 'culture' might take.