

Report on the Units

January 2008

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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AS GCE/Advanced GCE SPANISH – 3863/7863

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2671: Spanish: Speaking

General comments

Centres are generally now well used to the format of the examination and we thank the teachers and all those concerned in carrying out the tests for their contribution to the process. There were very few problems this session with the administration or documentation received from Centres, who had ensured that headed mark sheets and candidate topic forms were enclosed with the recordings.

There are relatively few candidates in the winter session of the speaking test and the range is possibly narrower than in the June series. There was no particular change discernible in the performance overall this time.

Previous reports, and indeed INSET sessions, have referred to the importance of the role of teacher / examiners in the speaking test; the candidate depends on the examiner to allow him or her to carry out the role play effectively. There were still a very few occasions when teacher / examiners treated the role play as a comprehension exercise rather than an inter-active conversation. In isolated cases the candidate was left to treat the material as a reporting task or summary exercise of factual transfer of information, with little or no opportunity to respond to queries or persuade the teacher / examiner in client role, with implications for marks eventually awarded in grid 1B of the mark scheme. However, the vast majority of tests allowed the candidate good scope both to transmit the information and respond to more specific requests or worries.

Similarly, in the topic section, judicious questioning can draw out the candidate and make it more likely that a real discussion takes place. The principal weakness in the conduct of this section was a tendency in some cases for the teacher / examiner to ask pre-set questions (from the candidate's topic form) but then allow an uninterrupted series of mini presentations, but with little real opportunity for the candidate to display spontaneity, ability to discuss, justification of ideas (grid 1E). This said, the topic presentation and discussion generally met the requirements of the Specification. There were no reported cases of topics offered that did not fall within the necessary scope for Spanish. As always, the quality of the discussion varied: some candidates limited themselves to re-stating points made in their presentation, whereas well prepared or better performances showed good understanding of the information, followed up points in discussion and displayed the linguistic confidence to do so effectively.

Linguistic performance varied greatly. There is always some compromise between range, adventurousness or playing safe and accuracy. Main weaknesses continued to be in basic accuracy and essential syntax. In contrast, very many candidates made a real effort to widen the range of vocabulary and structure, though again, inaccuracies of basic grammar were common.

Pronunciation of most candidates was at least acceptable, with very few examples of really poor pronunciation overall. Many candidates had very good pronunciation of individual sounds, though intonation and authentic phrasing deserved further attention.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1) (a) Role play A, set in a tourist information office, was a variant on the established pattern of organising a visit to a place of interest, this time a town with a castle. The examiner's replies to the candidate's opening questions gave the important information that any visit would take place in the summer (implications for the opening times as given in the stimulus material) and that the visit would be made by a family (special family ticket available). Candidates generally managed to ask these initial questions, with various degrees of spontaneity and naturalness; weaker attempts tended to repeat the wording on the candidate's sheet, adding *¿Qué son?*

Candidates who had not really listened to the answers to their initial questions tended to summarise in full the opening times and the prices of admission as if unrelated to the client's requirements. Other, perhaps better trained, candidates added comments such as, for you it would be better / cheaper...; you can spend longer there in summer, etc., and gave a more persuasive tone to the conversation – as well as gaining credit for mark scheme grid 1B.

The majority of candidates were able to make some reference to the size of the castle and its ranking with others mentioned in the material. Most attempted some reference to the castle as a "Sleeping Giant", though with various degrees of linguistic success. The stimulus material made reference to other features in the locality, such as shops, offices and houses; a number of candidates gave the impression that these were somehow within the castle, rather than being in the shadow of the castle and in the town.

More challenging was conveying information of the structure and layout of the castle itself, though to their credit most candidates tried to make some reference to the lakes and islands mentioned; some candidates attempted to refer to the leaning tower (in a few cases, the leaning bull). Expressing how to get further information seemed to offer few fears to most candidates, apart from slips in basic numbers.

Candidates coped quite well overall with the more open questions at the end and appeared to have spent some time in the preparation period on dealing with these. Most candidates made some reference to historic buildings at least as *interesante* and some came up with views such as learning about the past, different styles, pleasant to visit, etc. Most candidates were able to come up with some ideas for organising the day, though they were sometimes hindered in expressing these fluently because of gaps in basic language.

Essential vocabulary items such as *castillo*, *fortaleza*, *edificio*, *Gales* were given in the candidate's paper. "Walls", was sometimes a challenge (*paredes* was the most commonly used word); some candidates coped with *torre*, though sometimes with the wrong gender; a couple of candidates used *toro* throughout, even when the teacher / examiner gently insisted otherwise.

More consistently, even otherwise good performances had problems over times of the day: *a las (nueve) por la mañana* was rife and confusion with *noche / tarde* quite common. "Winter" was frequently not known. Better performances used *dormido* or *durmiente* for "sleeping", though, understandably, *durmiendo* (or even *dormiendo*) was quite commonly (mis)used as an adjective.

- 1) (b) Role play B, the Central London Congestion Charge, was tackled well by candidates overall. Those who had used the preparation time effectively to study the points outlined in the *Tarea* had few difficulties in conveying the essential information, though, inevitably, some points needed additional prompting from the teacher / examiner. Virtually all candidates managed to mention hours of operation (though with some linguistic flaws), and most, if not all, ways of paying.

The teacher / examiner's replies to the candidate's opening questions informed that visits would be made to London on various days of the week, and sometimes in the evenings. This information enabled some candidates to emphasise the different rules applying – a number of candidates failed to draw the distinction clearly. The tariff was somewhat harder to explain and the extra charge for paying late was sometimes missed or blurred.

Most candidates were able to address at least adequately the more open questions on cars in cities or give views on the strengths and weaknesses of public transport.

Essential vocabulary, including *peaje, parte central, Londres, regla, sistema*, was in the candidate's information. Some candidates struggled with "map" if asked about the area concerned; "pounds" continues to be a stumbling block for many, though now endemic in topics set; confusion over *por / de la (mañana)* etc. was common and a few candidates were challenged by basic numbers (*nueve / novecientos; cuatro / cuarto*).

- 1) (c) Role play C dealt with concessionary train fares for senior citizens. As most centres had relatively small entries, the randomisation requirements limited this option to comparatively few candidates. Nevertheless, this role play, while being accessible, similarly differentiated well between candidates.

Key points included were the minimum age at which you can use the rail card and the savings possible on standard fares. More challenging points of detail included the possibility of making even greater savings by booking in advance (frequently missed) and the fact that the cost of the card is for one year only.

Most candidates tried to convey some of the restrictions during peak times, though sometimes failed to point out that this applied only during the week. Some direct prompting was needed at times to mention there were other restrictions.

The open questions provided scope for candidates to give views on travelling by train or on the role or value of older people in society. This section again differentiated well.

Linguistic hurdles were mostly of a basic nature. *Tarjeta* was given in the material, along with *descuento, beneficio, limitaciones, gente mayor*. There were hesitations over *sesenta / setenta; veinte* was sometimes *viente / vienta* and "pounds" was often not expressed correctly. Although "rush-hour" was linguistically challenging, most candidates were able to supply a valid glossing; "save a third" was more demanding and defeated many.

2672: Spanish: Listening, Reading & Writing 1

Overall performance of candidates

The paper compared favourably with the standards of previous years and provided a wide spread of marks ranging from 20 to the high 70s (and in one case 80). Few candidates were unable to cope with the demands of the paper overall and there was a good grouping of marks in the middle ranges which has not always been the case in the past.

Poor handwriting was occasionally a problem to the extent that deciphering some of the answers proved almost impossible. Spelling appeared to be of a noticeably higher standard than in some previous years, although, again, there were candidates who had little idea of form (the initial 'h', for example, being used randomly).

In general, candidates seemed to have used their time wisely in a paper that requires a lot to be done in a short time. A number did leave questions unfinished, particularly Tarea 5, but it was not clear whether this was due to lack of time or an inability to cope with the linguistic demands of the task.

Individual questions

TAREA 1

Very few candidates achieved full marks on this question and 3 out of the possible 5 was probably the norm. Difficulties were encountered primarily with questions 1b) and 1c).

Question 1c) – *Hay puntos de recogida en todas las ciudades de España* – highlights the difficulties experienced by candidates in distinguishing between 'F' and '?'. Whilst the spoken text tells us that there are *7 sitios de reciclaje ...en la comarca*, we are given no information about the situation in the rest of Spain, which leaves us unable to judge ('?').

Distinguishing between 'F' and '?' would appear to be a very grey area for many candidates and continual practice in this type of exercise would undoubtedly prove beneficial.

TAREA 2

As with the first task, surprisingly few candidates achieved full marks on this exercise. Most were able to spot (a) and (c) as correct answers but (f), (g) and (h) were incorrectly identified in a large number of papers. Again the answer may lie in practice and technique, so that instead of answering positively when a key word comes up in the spoken text (*alergía* for (f), *calle* for (g) and *playa* for (h), for example), candidates should aim to get an overall understanding of the passage before answering individual questions as though disconnected.

TAREA 3

Although occasional questions posed problems, such as (d), where it was vital to see the link of the textual *la noche anterior a la boda* with alternative A, *la víspera de la boda*, rather than just the simple *la noche de la boda* as given in alternative C, this task was much more accessible and most candidates were able to achieve high marks. Those who struggled to get half marks on this exercise were often those who scored low marks on the paper as a whole.

TAREA 4

This task proved to be quite challenging and an excellent discriminator at the higher end. Answers that were deliberately included as distractors proved to be very popular, particularly with questions 1, 2, 6 and 9. The most difficult questions were undoubtedly 1 and 2, and candidates who answered these two correctly were often those who scored high marks on the paper as a whole.

Unfortunately, an error in the wording of question 7, with the inclusion of the extra words *es que*, lost the immediate link to the intended answer E. It was therefore decided that, because of the possible confusion that this could have caused, no candidate would be penalised for an incorrect answer and all scripts would be given a mark for this question.

TAREA 5

A task which managed to discriminate at all levels.

Questions (a) and (b) – the alphabetical and numerical problems posed were identified and solved correctly by most candidates.

Question (c) – most managed the 2 marks here although many had problems identifying the preposition *dentro de*, while *quince días* sometimes became *cinco días*, which is much too close to *cinco días* to be acceptable.

Question (d) – the rather difficult *por razones ajenas a su voluntad* was correctly identified by many candidates (although with some variations in spelling). Some, however, seized upon the equally difficult *una demora inesperada* but had problems recognising the phrase, often mishearing and giving a noun with *esperada*, which reversed the meaning. A popular phrase in this context was the appearance of *una morena esperada*.

Question (e) – proved easier and almost all candidates were able to explain the “fax”.

Question (f) – another challenging question with the combination of *existencias*, *escasas* and *agotadas*, which only a few candidates were able to identify, although there were some very pleasing paraphrased answers.

Questions (g), (h), (i), and (j) were generally well done.

A number of candidates identified accurately the appropriate Spanish phrases but some candidates attached the phrases to the wrong questions.

Confusion sometimes occurred with direct transcription when it became difficult to decide with any consistency which firm was being referred to, the English or the Spanish one, because first and third person verbs were mingled indiscriminately.

TAREA 6

This task produced a wide range of answers. In the first paragraph, a number of crucial elements of vocabulary were often not known (*camion, fábrica, huelga, retenciones, distintas*), which created significant problems for the full understanding of the text. Candidates who began “The lorry left the fabric” or “The captain allowed the factory to go to England” were unlikely to make much sense of what followed. By the second paragraph, however, despite continuing lexical difficulties (*suministros, centenares, perjudicial*), many candidates had grasped the general idea and were making more sense; these candidates should then have gone back to check and improve upon what they had written at the beginning. The final paragraph also presented a good number of problems so that many candidates found it difficult to generate a fluent translation. Having said that, it was pleasing to see the significant number of acceptable final versions, and most answers scored more than half marks.

The quality of English expression was quite impressive and mistakes of spelling, syntax and punctuation were kept to a minimum. “Pyrenees”, however, defeated all but a very few and there were significant problems with “deterioration”, “immobilised” and “paralysing”.

TAREA 7

As usual, this task gave rise to a complete range of marks even though the overall average appeared higher than in some previous papers.

There are a number of general problems that need to be addressed by candidates for future papers. For example, there is still a tendency for some to translate the instructions literally and start their letter with a phrase like *Por favor, diga al señor Martínez que...* ignoring the fact that the letter is introduced *Estimado Sr. Martínez*. Another common error that attracts a significant penalty is the use of *tú* and *vosotros* in a context which plainly requires the use of the third person *usted* form. This mistake is appearing less than it used to and more candidates are attempting to use *usted* forms – *gracias por su fax* – but in many cases this was followed a line or two later by the verb in the *tú* form or *vuestro* as an adjective.

Disappointingly large numbers were unable to handle the opening sentence – *Gracias para el llamo*, for example, was a disturbingly common approach – in a context where the same type of introduction has been seen with regularity in previous papers. Again, there is a hint that more practice in this type of exercise would be extremely beneficial.

Verb tenses are an essential element of this task and it is disappointing to see candidates unable to handle even the simple present (*tienen, queremos*). The perfect tense was often formed using *tener* while the correct handling of the future “we shall have to” was restricted to a very few. Likewise, “unless” was only rarely given correctly, although the more enterprising candidates were able to circumvent this problem with the use of “if” and a negative verb. Their initiative was often spoilt, however, by the use of the present subjunctive with the “if” clause. Finally, the ability to express regret, as demanded by the last sentence, was poorly handled by most.

Vocabulary difficulties can often be solved by reference to the previous two tasks, where candidates would have found help on this occasion with such terms as “order”, “lorry”, “goods” and “delivery”.

Other common mistakes arose with genders (*la problema, ningún alternativo*) and agreement of adjectives (*este manera*).

Report on the Units taken in January 2008

Specific problems arose with the handling of “ago”, where there was much confusion between *hace, hasta, pasado* and *desde hace*, and with “not yet” where *ya no* was frequently used.

This year candidates from a number of centres attempted to turn *ojalá* into a verb (*ojalamos que su camion no esté demasiado tiempo en Francia*).

Several candidates did not seem to be familiar with the term ‘fortnight’ and translated it as *una noche* or in one case *una fort noche*.

2673: Spanish: Reading and Writing

General Comments

This January's scripts showed fairly typical characteristics of examinations taken at this stage in the academic year. There were several excellent answers, coming perhaps from candidates in their fourth term of A level study, and, at the other extreme, some poor answers from candidates probably in their first term and clearly not yet ready. As always, the majority of candidates filled the middle ground between these two poles.

Candidates did not appear to find difficulty in completing the examination within the time allocated, although once again a significant few neglected to offer an answer to individual questions in Tasks 1, 2 and 4. This is surprising, especially when there is no penalty for wrong guesses and the grade boundaries are often tightly bunched on this 60 mark paper.

Individual questions

Tarea 1

Although deceptively straightforward in appearance, this question proved to be more of a challenge than had been anticipated. Not many candidates achieved full marks, and an average score of 4/7 was a far more likely outcome. Correct answers were commonly given to (a) and (g), whereas questions (c) and (d) caused most problems.

Tarea 2

Generally speaking, candidates fared a little better on this question than on the previous one, although only the very best answers scored the full 8 marks. Questions (d), (e) and (g) attracted the most incorrect answers.

Tarea 3

This was done quite well.

Candidates identified easily with the topic, adapted from a magazine's problem page, and appeared to enjoy writing about it. The stimulus text was generally well understood, notwithstanding the somewhat more pompous register of language used by the psychologist in her response. Scores of 10/10 for Comprehension of Text were not uncommon, with many of the weaker scripts able to demonstrate sufficient understanding to achieve 5 or more marks.

In their response to the text many candidates made interesting comments on the situation of the solitary adolescent and his parents and frequently came up with interesting advice about what might be done to make the boy more sociable, and why it is important for him to learn to interact with others. A number of candidates admitted having had similar experiences themselves and stressed the transient nature of the problem.

A common viewpoint was that modern technology tends to encourage isolation, especially if computers, televisions and mobile phones are permitted in bedrooms. Suggestions to promote socialisation included joining a sports club, going to after-school activities, learning a musical instrument, getting a pet dog to take for walks, going to the cyber café to play computer games and not staying in the bedroom. Some candidates considered erroneously that if the parents were 'socialistas' then their children would be too. And the psychologist's suggestion that the parents should offer to accompany their teenage son to the cinema or a gig was met with widespread howls of derision...

Report on the Units taken in January 2008

Disregarding several noteworthy exceptions, the general quality of written Spanish was not very impressive. In many cases there appeared to have been little progression beyond GCSE. Weaker answers often did not successfully form third person verb endings to say what the mother or parents should do. Candidates commonly ended sentences with prepositions in the English manner, and adjectival agreements were often faulty, with 'sus hijo' being particularly prevalent. 'Aunque,...' and 'En vez,...' were often used to start sentences, and the conditional was widely considered to be the way to express 'should' or 'ought to' with a sense of obligation.

Other widespread language errors included:

'el / un madre';

use of the gerund ('viendo la tele') instead of the infinitive;

overuse of 'se' with third person verbs;

confusion with demonstrative pronouns 'esto', 'este', 'esta';

'fomentar' wrongly used in the sense of 'to encourage a person';

'ello' for 'él', 'es necesito que', 'del mismo edad'.

Tarea 4

Not many candidates really excelled in this session's cloze test and there were not many scores of 15/15. Interestingly, there was frequently no correlation between the mark for this exercise and the language mark awarded for Tarea 3.

Common errors included (1) 'una', (3) 'están', (5) 'viste', (8) 'es necesario', (10) 'salió', (14) 'nos encantamos', and (15) 'dejarán'.

2675: Spanish: Listening, Reading & Writing 2

General comments

There was a wide range of responses to all the questions. There were some very good scripts which scored very highly, with precise and accurate answers expressed in concise and correct Spanish. However, there were some candidates who did not seem that familiar with the demands of the specification. For example, in the listening test – which was on environmental issues – some candidates answered with their own ideas rather than answering according to the recording.

Individual questions

Tarea 1

Candidates found the questions progressively more demanding, as they advanced through the elements. Candidates who were relying on transcribing what they heard, frequently lost marks because they were simply transcribing whatever came next on the recording, rather than answering the question with the relevant information.

a) The number was frequently misheard as 75 or 76.

b) Some candidates listed the 4 topics, instead of giving the two concepts prompted by the question.

l) This question was answered successfully only in the best scripts.

The issue of poor transcription was often a significant one. In (f) many renditions of *conciencia* were incomprehensible. Many common words were incorrectly identified. For example, *crear* (was rendered as *quedar* or *criar*), *nos* (*no*), *se* (*si*), *ya más* (*llamas*), *aire* (*idea*), *cambien* (*también*), *destacar* (*atacar*).

Tarea 2

Some candidates had problems expressing themselves clearly in English. There were misspellings of "aerials". Candidates did not always give precise and accurate detail in their answers. The number required in question (a) appeared as 21 thousand and even 25 million. Question (d) was a challenge for many candidates, as were (h) and (i). Some fairly common words were not known by some candidates: *campaña* was taken as a "camp" or a "company"; *la Red* was seen as "infrared" or the colour red; *entregar* was rendered as "to intrigue".

Tarea 3

Some candidates were not aware of what was required here and apparently did not use the example as a model to follow. Apart from candidates who wrote notes about the topic mentioned in the phrase, a fair number attempted to define the meaning of the phrases with unaltered words from the phrases. This task proved a fair challenge which allowed candidates to show their skills appropriately.

Tarea 4

This task also differentiated candidates well.

Tarea 5

Many candidates succeeded in the manipulation required in this task. Accuracy was variable. In question (c) many candidates had the salesmen or the cities given new names, or computers given to areas, rather than the areas' names given to the computers. In (g), few candidates saw that a change of subject was required in the extension. Question (h) was a challenge, with only the strongest answers using *a/* plus the infinitive and also the subjunctive after *consiguieron*. In (i) it was not always clear who was ignorant.

Tarea 6

The subject matter was clearly accessible. Some answered section (a) with bullet points, which was acceptable. Some wrote far too much for section (a). A fair number did not attempt section (b); it was not clear why this was so. The presentation of some answers was very poor.

The English article was misunderstood by some, who thought that Air Madrid was the name of the airport. Many candidates were missing fairly basic Spanish vocabulary, such as ways of referring to a travel agency, passengers, customers, saving money, flights and planes. The Ministry of Transport was apparently outside the linguistic or general experience of some candidates. There was confusion of *latinoamericano* and *Latinoamérica*. The phrases *en orden a* and *porque de* were common. Many candidates were unable to cope with the variants of *hay*. It is a concern that some candidates entered at this level were using English possessives such as *Madrids aeropuerto* (sic).

In section (b) many, quite reasonably, relied on personal experiences and produced interesting comments. Obviously, most dismissed staying at home as the option for the old. The more thoughtful considered environmental reasons for not travelling or expressed sympathy with migrants and their desire to go home at certain times. Some considered the effects on the economy if too many decided not to travel. On the whole, section (b) was answered more confidently than section (a).

Grade Thresholds

AS GCE/Advanced GCE Spanish (3863/7863)
January 2008 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
2671	Raw	60	47	41	36	31	26	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2672	Raw	80	66	59	52	45	38	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2673	Raw	60	47	42	37	33	29	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2675	Raw	80	62	57	52	47	43	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3863	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7863	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3863	33.3	58.2	70.2	83.0	92.2	100.0	146
7863	22.2	44.4	77.8	100.0	100.0	100.0	9

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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