



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2012**

**Spanish**

**SPAN3**

**(Specification 2695)**

**Unit 3: Listening, Reading and Writing**

***Report on the Examination***

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## General

Examiners reported a further improvement this year in the quality of preparation of the students, particularly in the Cultural Topic essay. However, in the essay and the translations, as ever, there was also evidence of weakness in the usual areas of language. As before the paper covered all of the language sub-topics, and provided a range of task-types. It offered all students opportunities to score marks, and the overwhelming majority gained marks fairly evenly throughout the paper. Very few left blank spaces, and a number scored very high marks. The mean mark for this paper was 77.3.

## Section A

In general, the short answer questions – both listening and reading items - were done well, with just a few students not fully obeying rubrics by squeezing more than one letter into response boxes, or by underlining more than one lexical item in Question 2, thus in both cases negating a correct answer if given. All of the task-types have been used before, so, students should be well-practised in them; indeed the majority of them seemed very familiar with them.

### Question 1

Most students performed quite well except for 1(a) and 1(e), both of which were less straightforward than they seemed in the context.

### Question 2

With eight marks available for this item, students needed to ensure that they understood the meaning of the original sentences clearly before attempting to identify the erroneous element. Generally speaking, most were successful in most of the sentences, at least gaining the mark for identifying the error, if not always gaining the second mark for writing in the correct word(s) accurately. A general problem was failure correctly to spell the word added, with a wide variety of wrong spellings such as *protteccion*, *protesion*, *alamente*, *elamenta*, and *yame*. The item which caused most problems was 2(d), where *se ruega* was underlined as often as *vayan*; of those who correctly identified the latter as the incorrect element, some failed to spot that the answer needed a subjunctive; students should be sensitive to these nuances at this level.

### Question 3

Most scored very well in this ítem, showing a sufficiently high degree of comprehension to identify the correct sentences and rule out the erroneous statements; H was the incorrect sentence most commonly selected, revealing a lack of familiarity with the use of *volver* as 'to repeat an action', and with the meaning of *dejar* in this context.

### Question 4

Most of the elements provided no problems, whilst 4(c) and 4 (e) proved more demanding, and fewer than half of the candidature managed a correct response to 4(f), which proved a good discriminator as intended.

### Question 5

This question was well done, with a quite uniform level of performance across the six ítems.

### Question 6

As hoped, this task proved to be a good discriminator, with an average score of about 2/3 of the marks. The first, fourth, sixth and seventh elements caused most problems, being the items with most grammatical complexity.

### Question 7

This was answered successfully by the majority, apart from 7(a)(iv) where some students gave information which was too specific (*centrales termosolares*), and 7(a)(v) where in many cases *en* was omitted, thus proving to be a good discriminator. 7(b)(ii), (iii) and (vi) proved the most problematical items in the second task based on this text, but generally students performed well.

### Question 8

The text for translation into English was based on a sub-topic, so students should have been familiar with the vocabulary and the issues covered. In general performances were better than in previous years; marks spanned the range from 1-10, with a mean mark of between 6 and 7 out of ten; encouragingly there were some perfect or near-perfect translations. The best marks were gained by students who evidently had a clear overview of the text which enabled them to get to grips with the more syntactically complex phrases and difficult lexical items. Equally, there were, as ever, some items of 'general knowledge' in English which many students lacked, such as the concept of 'security forces', 'territorial waters' and 'coastguards'. Whilst most performed well, some revealed a much lower standard of comprehension, awareness of syntax and even poor English spelling, considering the level one ought to be able to expect from students at A2. Despite this piece of vocabulary being key for the immigration topic, less able students frequently translated *irregulares* inappropriately as *irregular*, though many gave *illegal*, the word which was expected. *Se ha vuelto a intensificar* was unknown by the majority, as was the correct rendering of *después de que...acusara*; *por varios...* invariably produced *for various...*, which clearly alters the meaning completely. Few were able to render *ocurridos* correctly in the past; 'occurring' was not accepted. Among other words which were not well known were: *embajada*, *suceso* and *manifestación*; in the case of the latter, 'manifestation' was not accepted. The preposition *enfrente* was not widely known despite this being a word often used in both Key Stages 3 and 4. As this is a test of the more complex grammar itemised on the syllabus for A2, students should be given frequent practice in expressing such phrases appropriately in meaningful, fluent English.

### Question 9

The translation into Spanish produced a wide spread of marks as usual, but a better overall level of performance than before. A few students gained maximum or almost maximum marks. Even more than Question 8, this translation is designed to test students' acquisition and application of the more advanced elements of grammar. The sentences were designed to present a range of grammatical challenges balanced by more accessible elements, for example *una vida mejor* for which almost all gained the mark, thereby finishing Section A on a positive note. Often, though, students gave good renderings of some of the more difficult elements, but lost marks – often for that same section – by making errors with simpler language. For example, many rose to the challenge in 9(d) of the use of *si* clauses and the pluperfect subjunctive, but then missed the comparative of *más pobres* and making the possessive adjective agree with *economía(s)*. Indeed there was a plethora – even from otherwise very able students - of incorrect genders and basic spelling errors, despite students seeming to understand the grammatical point being tested. Equally disappointing

was the apparent general carelessness shown by some in not making correct subject/verb and noun/adjective agreements, something one really ought not to see from A2 students. Among other noteworthy problem areas were:

- *se sabe que*
- use of the perfect tense
- use of the passive
- use of the subjunctive after *para que*

Among vocabulary items which often appeared not to be known were the following: *desigualdad, bienestar, mayores, salud, sociedad, subdesarrollado*. Nevertheless, it was pleasing to see a general, if relatively small, improvement in performance compared to previous years, with a mean mark over 5/10.

## Section B

### Writing: Cultural Topic Essays

In general there was evidence that teachers have passed on the message that essays should focus entirely on the question, though some students appeared not to have read the question properly. A few answered using the ‘wrong’ question, such as answering Q12a on the subject of Almodóvar, or *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*. Certainly, though, the quality of responses on the cultural topic has improved this year, and most essays were well planned and structured. Predictably, the most popular literary and artistic topics were Lorca, Gabriel García Márquez, Laura Esquivel and Sender, the films of Almodóvar, Guillermo del Toro and Amenábar, the architect Gaudí and the painters Picasso and Dalí. The region topic was least popular, and there were relatively few essays on the history topic, but the quality of essays on these topics seems to have improved over the years. Clearly in order to score well in questions 10 and 11 it is essential to have evidence, (which may be in the form of facts and figures or quotations or reference to incidents in a work of literature), at one’s fingertips in order to justify the points made in response to the question. In general, there were some very interesting and competent responses, though some gave the impression of being pre-learnt.

Basic language errors were still evident, and there were many pre-learnt stereotyped phrases such as *Si fuera...* The most able students used more complex language effectively to express their thoughts in a spontaneous way. Nevertheless, for almost all, to have written an essay in Spanish on such topics is a considerable and praiseworthy achievement.

### Question 10

There were relatively few responses to these two questions; as ever, the least competent wrote about their chosen region in a very superficial, often ‘anecdotal’ way, offering few facts and figures. However, there were also some very good answers. The most popular regions were Andalucía, Cataluña, Aragón and Galicia.

### Question 11

Relatively few students wrote about a historical period, and some found it difficult to ‘adapt’ their topic of study to the questions. Most popular periods of study were: *La Transición*, with descriptions of Adolfo Suárez and King Juan Carlos, and these were usually of good quality. The few essays dealing with Perón and *La Revolución Mexicana* were less convincing. For Q11(a): a few covered *La Guerra Civil*, - far too broad a topic to be considered *un acontecimiento de la época*, though a handful of students did select a major event during this period. Indeed, it was the intention that students select a key event in a defined historical period (eg Pinochet’s coup, the assassination of Carrero Blanco or *el 23-F* – all of which were chosen by some).

### Question 12

The most popular novels were *Crónica de una muerte anunciada*, *Como agua para chocolate*, *Réquiem para un campesino español*, *El otro árbol de Guernica*, *La Casa de los Espíritus* and *Nada*. Question 12(b) was a more popular choice than (a), although the latter lent itself to a logically structured answer if two contrasting characters were chosen (typically Tita & Mama Elena in *Como agua para chocolate*). In (b) students were free to elaborate on what they considered to be the principal ideas of their chosen text (e.g. in *Crónica de una muerte anunciada* frequent reference was made to fate, honour, religion, *machismo*, irony) and well structured and evidenced responses scored well. In some cases justification for the second part of the question was rather simplistic, e.g. *hoy mucha gente no expresa sus emociones a través de la comida*. However, the second part of the question was intended to hint at a more mature and critical consideration of whether the themes and ideas were of universal relevance. These two quite straightforward questions were often rewarded with marks in the upper half of the mark range.

### Question 13

By far the most popular play was *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*, followed by *Bodas de Sangre*. Few students wrote about poetry; a handful wrote about the poetic work of Lorca and Neruda, and one or two had studied Machado. Question 13(a) was the choice of most, whilst 13(b), an analysis of two scenes or poems, was chosen by very few. There were many good, if often unoriginal, answers on themes. The approach of some students was somewhat simplistic, but this question at least afforded an easy structure to plan compared to (b). Of the essays answering the latter, most compared the first and last scenes of *La Casa de Bernarda Alba*.

### Question 14

This was a very popular option, with the overwhelming majority of students who chose it writing about film-makers; the most popular of these was Almodóvar, followed by del Toro, Amenábar, Cuarón and Saura. A handful of students wrote very well on the subject of Picasso, Dalí or Gaudí. Of Almodóvar's films, the most popular were *Volver* and *Todo sobre mi madre*. In answer to 14(a) some students managed to include consideration of the director's other films in justifying their selection and why it was representative of his work. As for 14(b), among the reasons cited for Almodóvar's success were themes, plot, connections to his background, choice of actors, cinematographic artistry and cinematic intertextuality. For 14(b) many of the best answers featured *Volver* and *el Laberinto del Fauno*.

There was a very wide range of marks for section B; the questions offered appropriate opportunities to students who knew their material well and could organise their answers in a way which focussed on the question. The quality of language was quite variable; most students demonstrated knowledge of vocabulary appropriate to the topic, many of them to an excellent degree. The most able students displayed an excellent command of complex structures. The highest marks were gained by essays which had a clearly-focused and short introduction, followed by a series of clearly identifiable and structured paragraphs, each addressing one aspect of the question with an in-depth analysis supported by good textual justification.

## **Conclusion**

Overall this examination discriminated appropriately, and the slightly improved results demonstrate the effect of improved preparation of students in response to previous Principal Examiner reports and other training and materials provided by AQA.

## **Web Pages**

Schools are reminded that a wealth of support documents can be found on our web pages ([http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/languages/spanish\\_materials.php?id=09&prev=09](http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/languages/spanish_materials.php?id=09&prev=09)).

These include the latest version of the specification, past papers, Reports on the Examination and the Teacher Resource Bank (TRB). For SPAN3 the TRB includes for the Writing Section additional specimen questions (to supplement past papers from previous series) and student exemplar work; this is an invaluable resource for preparing students for future examinations.

## **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

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