

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCE

GCE Spanish(9881)

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9881 AEA Spanish Examiner's report

Candidates are required to complete a single three-hour written examination. This year's paper had the central theme of education in Spain. All the texts and listening material contained in the paper related to that theme and the options for the extended writing tasks were based around it. There were several texts, of different styles, with a variety of register.

Assessment Principles

Candidates' performance is assessed positively, with the following weighting: 15% Reading comprehension, 10% Transfer of meaning into English, 15% Linguistic tests, including 5% for a cloze test, 10% Listening comprehension and 50% Extended Writing.

Candidates' Responses

In general, the candidates' performance reflected a positive response to this Advanced Extension Award examination. There were some excellent answers, centres had clearly prepared candidates well and most scripts reflected an appropriate level of competence and knowledge. The majority of the candidates were able to finish the paper within the allotted time and there were few examples of unfinished scripts. Only a small number of candidates were inappropriately entered for this examination.

Primera Sección

Texto A was a historical archive document - a contract for a young woman teaching in Castilla La Mancha in 1923, showing the strict regulations that she had to comply with, both as regards her working conditions and her personal behaviour. One linguistic exercise was set on the text, requiring an explanation in Spanish of words or phrases taken from the passage. Several candidates gave excellent, full definitions, with others scoring partial marks because they did not give the full meaning or wrote in inaccurate Spanish. The phrases *atender en función escolar* and *teñirse el pelo* caused the most difficulty.

Texto B featured an extract written in a journalistic register from a newspaper article about the thousands of university students in Madrid who have to re-sit examinations in September. The linguistic exercise involved finding synonyms. Most candidates scored well on this exercise and found all or most of the words/phrases successfully, with *conforme* and *de mal agüero* causing most problems.

Texto C featured a further extract from the newspaper article. With a sense of humour, the author describes two students, Verónica and Luz, and their experiences of re-sitting examinations. This required a transfer of meaning exercise. Whilst the Examiners were not seeking a highly-polished piece of English prose, they were seeking a high standard of transfer of meaning. Most candidates clearly understood the material and wrote a sound version in English. However, weaker candidates thought that *Empresariales* was a University rather than "Business Studies"; many candidates thought that *Risueña* was a girl's name; others thought that Verónica was studying "media studies", when she was studying *una media de cuatro horas diarias*; *ante* was widely confused with *antes de*; *se me estropeó el verano* proved difficult for many to translate into English and many translated *no logro conciliar el sueño* as "I can't catch the dream". Whilst the weakest candidates found it difficult to

translate common expressions, such as *eso sí*, *a pesar de* and *no obstante*, some candidates produced polished translations that read really well.

Texto D featured a magazine article about the new *Ley Orgánica de Educación*. The comprehension questions in Spanish required inference, analysis and evaluation, not merely identification of information within the text. The instructions stated that responses in full sentences were required and candidates should use their own words, rather than copy whole sentences or parts of sentences from the text. Most candidates had an understanding of the text and many gave full answers. This comprehension exercise required candidates to explain the meaning, but a few were too reliant on “lifting” from the text without explaining: words and expressions such as *desigualdades*, *equipo docente*, *el primero de los cometidos del alumnado*, *la educación es patrimonio de los padres*, etc. were often not explained. Generally, however, there was an impression of an improved performance in the reading comprehension, with fewer candidates leaving blanks and most understanding the material.

Once the answers were assessed for comprehension, an overall mark for the quality of the language was applied, in accordance with the published grid. Although there was some weak language, the quality was generally good, with examples of excellent language used by some. Several of the questions gave candidates the opportunity to use complicated verb forms.

Texto E involved a second extract from the magazine article, discussing the position of Religious Education teaching in the new Law, with a cloze text set on it. Most candidates understood the material and were able to choose the correct items. The words that caused the most confusion were *es*, *está*, *sea* and *será*, and there was some confusion between *quieran* and *quisieron*. The passage seemed to be well understood and candidates generally scored well. Candidates need to show comprehension as well as grammatical skills here and many were successful in doing so.

Segunda sección

In the Listening comprehension text candidates are required to listen to the interview and to retrieve and convey information in their own words. Candidates have individual control of the recording: they may stop, rewind and replay the recording at will, and they may make notes and write their answers at any point. It is not necessary to write in full sentences and there are no extra marks awarded for quality of language in this task. Marks are awarded for answers that show comprehension and which contain facts and information.

Texto E featured an interview with a psychologist who works for *una escuela de padres*, a centre where parents can learn parenting skills. Most candidates gave a pleasing performance and exhibited a high level of comprehension skills. Few lexical items caused problems. Most candidates understood the gist of the material and few failed to score on any of the questions, but it was necessary to give full information to gain the full marks each time. It was pleasing to see that fewer candidates relied on transcribing the whole interview this year and that there was a better attempt to use their own words. Even so, an explanation was required and no marks could be awarded for simply repeating such phrases as *nuestros progenitores*, *no tenemos referentes*, *desmoralizados*, *prolongar las despedidas*, *como si fuese un fardo*, etc. Overall, however, the standard of Listening comprehension skills displayed was very

high, with candidates understanding both the gist and the detail of this passage with its quite demanding lexis and register.

Tercera sección

The Extended Writing question carries half the total marks for the examination and draws on the other parts of the paper. Candidates are expected to devote half of the time to this task, about 90 minutes, and ensure that they plan it carefully. Candidates are required to write about 450-500 words, although they may write more if they wish. There was a choice of two tasks. This year, although the discursive essay was the more popular of the two, there was an increase in the number of candidates who opted for the creative essay. There were some highly successful essays written for both.

Question (a) is a creative essay. Candidates are expected to imagine the life in 1923 of the teacher featured in Texto A. It is expected that candidates should study the contract in Texto A and to consider what it must have been like living under those conditions. The story will probably be in the first person narrative, but the candidate is free to choose the tone and register. There should be references to the village life in Castilla La Mancha in 1923. There are many references that could be picked up and developed, particularly the restricted social life, dress code and the hard physical work involved. Candidates have free rein to use their imagination to continue this story in an appropriate way. It is important to immerse oneself in that period and avoid anachronisms. Weaker candidates did not succeed in using the first-person narrative successfully and several relied too heavily on the details of the contract and repeated all the restrictions without much imagination or creativity. There were also some historical inaccuracies, as a few candidates believed that Franco ruled Spain in 1923. The best candidates, however, showed creative flair, with one essay having the teacher burn the school down when she was lighting the fire, another giving the teacher a secret lover and breaking all the rules and another delightfully poetic essay having a little girl coming to the school at six in the morning to read Lazarillo and other literature, thus escaping from her illiterate peasant family.

The language was often sophisticated and imaginative, with excellent lexis and structures. Without doubt, this year the Examiners saw some of the best creative essays so far at this level.

Question (b) was a discursive essay discussing the challenges that face Spanish education in the 21st century. Candidates are expected to make reference to the material contained in the different texts in the paper and to use the vocabulary and ideas expressed therein. Although some mention of global education problems might well be made, it is expected that the bulk of the essay should refer specifically to Spain and include names, places, events, etc. The previous texts contain references to the Spanish school curriculum content, religion, the pressure and importance of examinations, discipline, immigrants' language problems, motivation and failure, the role of parents, the stress and anxiety experienced, etc. Although some mention of global youth and education issues may be included and references to the UK system and the candidate's own experiences, it is expected that the bulk of the essay will refer specifically to Spain and include names, places, events, etc. A thorough discussion of the issues is expected and the essay should be written in the appropriate register of a discursive essay, with the language of argument and debate. The essay should be structured in a logical way, hopefully with a balanced discussion of education problems, leading to a conclusion summing up the situation and giving a personal opinion. Generally there was a high level of performance in this essay. Whilst most candidates succeeded in writing organised essays which fulfilled the

tasks with an appropriate level of accuracy and range of lexis and structures, unfortunately, some candidates produced essays that concentrated more on general educational issues in England or the Western world, rather than focusing their writing on the actual question set. There was, however, a clear indication that the majority of candidates had followed advice and made pertinent references to the other texts. There were some excellent essays, full of knowledge, well-argued and using accurate, skilful language and a wide range of lexis and structures.

Advice and Guidance for Candidates

In the seventh year of the Advanced Extension Award in Spanish, there were some very good performances across the range of questions. Nevertheless, some points of guidance could be made to enable centres to improve candidates' performance.

- Time management. This is a long paper (3 hours). Candidates are recommended to spread their time carefully and to follow the recommendations as regards the time to be spent on each section.
- Where to start? It is recommended that candidates should look at the last question first. As they work through the earlier sections, they should consider points of information that they might later be able to incorporate in the Extended Writing essay.
- Vocabulary knowledge. Dictionaries are not allowed in this examination. Although the most difficult lexical items will always be glossed, it is essential that candidates should build up their vocabulary knowledge over a wide range of topics.
- Knowledge of Spain and Spanish-speaking countries. The examination requires a widespread knowledge of Hispanic life and culture. Candidates are recommended to study the Guidance for Students document and read widely across a variety of registers when preparing for this examination.

Grade Boundaries

Grade	Max mark	Distinction	Merit
Boundary Mark	200	147	122

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