

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

June 2011

International GCSE Spanish
(4SP0) Paper 3

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General Comments

This year saw a significant increase in the entries for the International GCSE speaking examination, particularly from UK based centres. The majority of the candidates had been well prepared for the examination and coped well with the demands of the test. All five Topic Areas were well represented and the most popular choice for the initial prepared conversation was Home and Abroad. Some of the more able candidates chose The Modern World and the Environment and it was a pleasure to listen to mature conversations on environmental issues and current affairs. Candidates often brought original responses and creativity into their opening conversations and the better students were able to maintain the complexity of language and richness of vocabulary into the remaining two dialogues. The weaker students showed a marked decline in ability once the opening presentation had been completed.

Conduct of the Speaking Examinations

At times there was a lack of variety in tenses, even with the good candidates, in all three conversations. Informative conversations that centred on a photograph or a picture often focused on questions and answers in the present tense, although a good tactic employed by some Teacher Examiners was to ask the candidate to speculate what had happened before the picture was taken and what they thought would happen afterwards. The Teacher Examiner's role in using an appropriate questioning technique is critical if candidates are to be given the opportunity to demonstrate their ability. The better candidates can be stretched by asking challenging and probing questions whereas some centres failed to bring out the best in their weaker candidates by asking inappropriately complex questions and by insisting on an answer from a candidate who is struggling to understand the implications of the question, let alone frame a reply. Some initial presentations were too long, in one case allowing candidates to spend up to two minutes to deliver a monologue.

Some very high ability candidates were very successful in demonstrating regular competence in using the subjunctive. With others it was obvious that set expressions had been pre-learnt and the subjunctive had been instilled so that it was repeated in exactly the same expressions. There were few poor scores in the examination and by far the majority of candidates were able to speak confidently and spontaneously using accurate language in a range of time frames.

The exams were generally conducted in a friendly and encouraging manner and the candidates were stretched to their linguistic ceilings with unprepared questions interspersed with a more standardised set of questions around familiar topics. It is important not to interrupt the candidates in mid-flow, particularly in order to correct them, and Teacher Examiners should refrain from casting overly subjective judgments not in keeping with a normal conversation. Similarly closed questions should be avoided for all but the very weakest of the candidates. It is also important to listen to what the candidate is saying rather than rely exclusively on a prepared set of questions which tends to turn the dialogue into a question

and answer session rather than a natural conversation. Teacher Examiners should also take care to ensure that their own use of language is accurate since candidates often repeat the mistakes in their responses. This is especially critical for dual language teachers, who need to ensure that no undue influence from their other language affects their own performance in Spanish; this is especially important when the vocabulary of the other language is similar to the Spanish. The examination should be completed within the prescribed time limit of ten minutes; a fair number of centres strayed well over the allotted time. Teacher Examiners should remember that examinations that are too long or too short are self-penalising.

Administration of the Examination

Administration was carried out efficiently and effectively by most centres and it is good to see an increase in the use of digital recordings on CD or memory stick. These are generally far clearer and sharper and more user-friendly than tape cassettes. It is important, however, to ensure that the CDs are correctly labelled so that it is clear which candidate's recording is on which track. A few centres failed to photocopy both sides of the mark sheet – pages 41 and 42 of the Specification and this resulted in unnecessary and time-consuming extra work for the examiners who had to draw the grids on the front of the single mark sheet submitted. It is important to protect the CDs adequately in transit; while bubble wrap is useful, it is no guarantee of protection whereas some stout card will prevent the CD from distortion.

The examiners were impressed by the standard of the candidates and the quality of the examinations and centres are to be congratulated on the levels of linguistic competence demonstrated by the great majority of their students and by the professionalism with which the exams were conducted.

Grade Boundaries

The modern foreign languages specifications share a common design, but the assessments in different languages are not identical. Grade boundaries at unit level reflect these differences in assessments, ensuring that candidate outcomes across these specifications are comparable at specification level.

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