

SPANISH

Paper 8685/01

Speaking

General comments

The majority of Centres undertook the tests in full compliance with the wording and spirit of the regulations. The moderators are conscious of the time and effort expended by those conducting the speaking tests and wish to convey their thanks to all concerned in helping the moderation exercise run as smoothly as possible.

There remain a very few Centres which, nevertheless, cause disproportionate problems for moderators and administrators. Issues for concern have been identified in previous reports but these are primarily the following:

- failure to send the correct documentation with the tapes – moderators need the Centre's working mark sheet as well as a copy of the computer mark sheet.
- working mark sheets must show a mark for each of the constituent criteria for each section of the test, i.e. there should be a mark in each of the thirteen columns, 3 for part one, 5 each for parts two and three, not just a section total, or the overall total. Simply writing an overall mark of 95, for example, is not acceptable. Moderators need to see and justify a Centre's assessment.
- award of a mark (maximum 5) for a candidate supposedly having obtained information from the Examiner (topic conversation and general conversation) when no such questions were asked.
- lack of clear identification on the tape and on the tape box of the name and index number of each candidate.

Additionally, an increase was noted this session in the number of Centres needing to turn over tapes in mid-test and frequent interruptions from telephones (mobile and office). It is patently in the interests of all candidates to be able to take their test in as calm and organised a manner as possible.

Quality of recordings was generally good. A few Centres did not use an external microphone or placed the microphone too far away from the candidate. Please remember that the recording must not be stopped between sections, once the test has started.

Part 1: Topic presentation

A somewhat larger number of candidates this session appeared to offer topics that were arguably only marginally relevant to syllabus requirements. Moderators noted in addition more topics that did not really meet the depth appropriate to Advanced Level: topics along the lines of "my daily routine" and "how I spend my free time" – even in a Spanish-speaking environment – are better suited to IGCSE or ordinary level. Paradoxically, this was more prevalent with some candidates of higher linguistic ability – it may be they felt less conscious of the need actually to prepare their presentation.

Perhaps predictably this session, football was a popular topic. Merely listing the names of miscellaneous players and teams did not gain many marks, especially if the relevance to the Hispanic context was not made clear. Whatever the topic, moderators are listening for key words or expressions, such as *en España*, *Argentina* (...) etc., relevant statistics, cultural references. Mainly, and pleasingly, there were many examples of detailed, well-organised and suitably focused presentations and candidates offering these gained appropriate credit for content. We repeat our earlier reminder that the topic presentation is a formal exercise in communication, so preparation, pace, relevance, clarity of structure and voice, appropriateness of language and delivery all contribute to the mark for this section.

Parts 2 and 3: Topic Discussion and General Conversation

In the topic conversation many Teacher/Examiners made great efforts to remind and encourage their candidates to relate the topic discussion as far as possible to the Spanish-speaking context as well as dealing with wider issues. Some real discussions took place with some candidates, though in some cases – and less advantageously for assessment – candidates were allowed to make what amounted to a series of mini-statements, unchallenged, as a substitute for discussion.

The general conversation was more variable in terms both of examining and candidate response. The majority of teachers led the candidate to cover a wide and appropriate range of issues at Advanced Level. This allowed the candidate to gain appropriate credit for variety of language and register. On the other hand, those Centres that limited the general conversation to a couple of pre-prepared predictable themes such as future plans or leisure interests frequently did not provide sufficient scope for a candidate to show appropriate competence at an Advanced Level.

In spite of comments above, the majority of candidates remembered the need to ask the Examiner questions and obtain information – or were reminded to do so. There were a few examples of the all-purpose prepared question, but for the most part such questions were relevant to the discussion actually taking place. Nevertheless, questions should be linguistically appropriate to this level; a candidate whose sole proficiency in seeking information throughout this test is a repeated *¿y tú?* should not expect to gain (or be awarded) a high mark for this aspect of the test.

SPANISH

Paper 8685/02
Reading and Writing

General comments

The paper offered an appropriate challenge. It covered a topic area which most candidates were clearly able to relate to, differentiated well and produced a wide spread of achievement.

Candidates appeared to be familiar with the format of the examination and the demands that this would make upon them. Time management did not seem to be a problem, although there were occasional omissions of some parts of questions, either through lapses of concentration, by better candidates, or intentionally, by less able candidates.

It would be of great assistance to Examiners if Centres could ensure that their candidates are encouraged to write as legibly as possible, use lined paper, not use pencil(!) and secure the pages of their script to one another.

Comments on specific questions

Sección Primera

Question 1

This question was generally tackled well with many candidates scoring 4 or 5 marks. The major difficulty encountered in this sort of exercise lies not so much in identifying the sentence containing the targeted phrase but in selecting the **exact** equivalent needed. Good and less able candidates alike were often guilty of writing more, or less, than was required and frequently invalidating their answers.

- (a) This was answered well although *concentrémonos* was not an uncommon careless error.
- (b) Also answered well. Inclusion of *hace tiempo que* did not invalidate.
- (c) The mark was not awarded if all or part of *a la hora de* was omitted.
- (d) Many failed to score by omitting *de ahí que*.
- (e) Probably the most successfully answered of the five.

Question 2

This was quite a testing set of transformation exercises and only the very best candidates managed to score full marks. Candidates should be reminded that **all** elements of the phrase must be contained in their answer. Nevertheless many ingenious and perfectly valid permutations were devised, especially for **Questions (a) to (c)**.

- (d) Quite a few candidates didn't score when they failed to convey the concept of *veranea* and instead used something relating to *verano*.
- (e) This proved very accessible, with the vast majority of candidates successfully using *a/* plus the infinitive.

Question 3

The text and the questions asked about it gave opportunities for candidates of all levels of ability to score appropriately. Many high scores were recorded.

On the negative side, there was a slight tendency for some candidates, despite being directed to a particular paragraph to find their answers, to introduce extraneous material from other paragraphs which could not be credited.

- (a) Candidates who confined their attention to the first paragraph generally scored well.
- (b) Another fairly accessible question which was generally answered well. Failings included the 'lifting' of *las disfruta de una sola vez*, confusion between *duración* and *destino* and misreading the decimal notation to give *dos a seis semanas*.
- (c) This question generated many interesting answers. Whereas virtually every candidate understood the concept of *Pepe Español* not so many were capable of explaining it in their own words. A fairly common omission was that *Pepe* usually visits *un sitio donde ha estado antes*.
- (d) This question provided the opportunity for really good candidates to display their understanding of the text and show off their linguistic skills. The word *retribuidas* was a difficult discriminator, with only the very best interpreting it successfully. Nearly every candidate was able to come with a valid explanation of *la mejora del transporte*.
- (e) Many candidates focused on either the destination or the duration of holidays and frequently were unable to offer an explanation without 'lifting' too many words from the text.

Sección Segunda

Question 4

At first glance the text for this exercise appeared fairly straightforward, containing mostly everyday speech and a topic which all candidates could relate to. There were, however, a few pitfalls.

- (a) Candidates who recognised the three key words had no difficulty in offering suitable explanations. Even if only *ruido* was familiar, candidates were still able to score marks by deducing that a surge in touristic development was being described.
- (b) This was answered well, with the only weakness being a tendency for some candidates to 'lift' *con actividades variadas para los críos*.
- (c) Again there were many good answers, and again there was some 'lifting'. The phrases *hacer amistades nuevas* and *todo se comparte* should not have presented too much of a challenge to re-word.
- (d) This proved to be quite a demanding question and only the better candidates picked up on both elements: 'the kids love it so much there' and 'they force the parents to stay longer/return'.
- (e) With a range of 'differences' to choose from, this question gave plenty of scope to candidates of all abilities. Surprisingly, not so very many scored full marks and, equally surprisingly, despite instructions to disregard this aspect, many offered the type of accommodation as one of the 'differences'.

Question 5

- (a) Apart from a small minority who failed to mention *Pepe* in their comparison the summary was generally done well. The task had possibilities for candidates of all ability levels. Some marks were lost when candidates merely listed characteristics of the families without saying how they were similar or differed.
- (b) The personal response generated many interesting opinions about the significance of holidays, and the reasons for this, in the candidates' countries.

The majority of candidates seemed to be fully aware that they would be penalised if they exceeded 140 words for these two questions, and kept within the limit.

SPANISH

Paper 8685/03

Essay

General Comments

Once again this session, Examiners are delighted to be able to report that the general standard of performance in the essay paper was very good indeed. Most candidates successfully managed to write coherently argued, clearly relevant and well illustrated essays that showed intellectual maturity and an impressive degree of understanding of the topics under discussion.

Disappointingly, however, some candidates lost marks heavily for content by writing essays that bore little, if any, relevance, to the actual title selected. Essays that adopt an unusual approach to the title set or that call extensively upon personal experience of the issues being analysed are not the problem. High content marks simply cannot be awarded to those candidates who feel it appropriate to produce a pre-learnt piece of writing related to the topic but not to the specific title on the question paper. It is clearly in the candidates' interest to refer to the title as often as necessary throughout the essay in order to maintain relevance and draw logical conclusions. It is, however, the case that most candidates do indeed appreciate the need to stick to the actual title that they select from the paper and to present their ideas and points of view in a structured manner. Such efforts will always score good marks for content.

Despite problems in recent years, word count (250-400 words) was not a huge issue this session. The evidence suggests that Centres are making it abundantly clear to their candidates that exceeding the word count fails to impress Examiners. It is a point worth making in general terms about all examination papers, and it most certainly applies for the essay paper, that rubric infringement will lead to a loss of marks. The whole point of the essay paper is for candidates to be able to show that they can produce a piece of writing that is a genuine response to the title set, written with grammatical accuracy and concision. Candidates who write more than 400 words (or fewer than 250) are failing to demonstrate this skill and will lose marks as a consequence.

Again this session, it is pleasing to report that, in terms of the quality of Spanish used by candidates, there were very few major recurrent errors on which Examiners feel the need to pass comment. Those that merit some attention are, not surprisingly perhaps, similar to previous years. The bewildering lack of understanding of the use of Spanish accents continues to plague even the most able candidates. Omitting accents where the meaning of a word or phrase can be altered considerably (e.g. ...*el profesor me ayudo...* (sic.) instead of ...*el profesor me ayudó...*) causes Examiners to sigh with frustration. Candidates must accept the fact that accents are an important part of the Spanish language. Failing to use them appropriately is destined to result in a loss of marks for grammatical accuracy. The incorrect use of prepositions after verbs also caused problems for candidates this session (...*empecé estudiar...* and ...*decidió de buscar trabajo...* being common errors). The differences between *por* and *para* were, as always, a source of confusion. Also noticeable this session was the use of lower case letters to start sentences and the inaccurate use of *quien* instead of the relative pronoun *que*.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

As has been the case for many a year now, this title was by far the least popular with candidates. Those few candidates who wrote an essay in response to this topic were generally able to produce well written pieces that reached clear conclusions, mainly that Spain should indeed align itself more robustly with Latin America, both politically and economically.

Question 2

An extremely popular title on this paper. Many candidates felt it appropriate to draw upon personal experience in order to argue their case that being young is indeed more difficult than being an adult. Some candidates, however, argued the exact opposite and expressed considerable sympathy for the plight of parents throughout the land! The intention with this title was to produce some very strong responses. In this respect, it functioned very well indeed.

Question 3

Another attractive title for many candidates. Candidates were more than prepared to use the situation in their own countries in order to argue, with some considerable degree of passion, one way or the other with regard to arming the police. Some candidates, however, allowed their essay to drift aimlessly into a general discussion on the need to combat drug-related crime and to introduce capital punishment and consequently marks were lost for content.

Question 4

Quite a popular title. Opinions were clearly divided on the issue of urban or rural dwelling. Many candidates expressed a desire to live in the city in order to be nearer to friends and family (and an active social life!) whilst others were more concerned with quality of environment with regard to raising a family. Either way, this title produced many coherently structured and elegantly written pieces.

Question 5

This title was, surprisingly perhaps, avoided by the majority of candidates. The more abstract nature of the title may well have put many candidates off. However, those essays that were submitted did indeed argue that taking part is more important than winning, but that the pressure to win in modern society is intolerable. The best essays also dealt with the issue of prize money in sport and how it can impact on the idea of fair play.

Question 6

There were many well written essays in response to this title despite its very 'technological' slant. Predictably, the obsession with Internet use, chat rooms, blogging and the like all formed a considerable part of the content of such essays. Most, if not all, agreed that modern society depends far too much on new technology and that personal, face-to-face contact with others is vitally important. A view readily endorsed by linguists!