

SPANISH

Paper 8685/01

Speaking

General

Teachers at the majority of Centres carried out the administration of the tests efficiently and in accordance with the regulations. Moderators greatly appreciate the time and effort spent in these Centres ensuring that candidates are accurately and reliably assessed, and that the requisite samples are sent for moderation together with the correct documentation to facilitate this process.

Regrettably, however, this report again has to re-state previous problems applicable to a small number of cases, but which continue to cause inconvenience and delays to the moderation of candidates' work. Principally, difficulties were brought about by the failure by some Centres to complete their working mark sheets fully and to send the complete set of marks with the recordings: all marks awarded must be shown: section totals or global totals on their own are not acceptable for moderation purposes since Moderators have no way of confirming how the Centre's marks were arrived at. All thirteen columns of the working mark sheets (three for **Part 1** and five each for **Parts 2** and **3**) must be filled in, and please check also that marks do not exceed the maximum for each of the criteria.

Recording quality was generally satisfactory, with an increasing number of Centres using CDs rather than cassettes. Please ensure, however, that names and numbers of candidates are listed on the cassette or CD cover and also announced at the start of each test. A few Centres are still interrupting tests – and, as a result, disorientating candidates – by having to turn the tape over mid-test.

Topic presentation and Topic conversation

An interesting range of relevant topics was offered which potentially allowed candidates to focus on aspects of the Hispanic world.

Candidates should always be reminded that the opening presentation is a formal exercise to serve as an introduction to the ensuing discussion. Communication is important, so organisation of material, appropriate level of language, quality of delivery and clarity of enunciation are all taken into account for assessment.

A weakness in some cases was that candidates dealt with their chosen topic in a rather generalised way – it is important to remember that candidates must show awareness of the culture of the target-language country. As Moderators have repeatedly mentioned, care must be taken in both the preparation by the candidate and in the questioning by the Teacher/examiner to establish a firm link with the region or country concerned. For the higher mark bands candidates must show an ability to go beyond general knowledge. In some Centres there was only implied reference to the specifically Hispanic perspective, particularly with topics such as sport, leisure activities, the environment, health, social problems, etc. Guidance on relevant topic areas for this examination is also given in the syllabus.

The topic conversation should take the form of a discussion. As candidates are assessed for spontaneity and responsiveness, care should be taken to avoid asking a series of prepared questions with pre-learned answers. Although it is expected that Centres will have prepared for the discussion, candidates should not be invited or allowed to give mini-presentations without challenge.

Candidates should be allowed (and reminded if necessary) to ask the Examiner for opinions or information. This is also a requirement for the final part of the examination, the General conversation. Such questioning should form a natural part of the discussion, and be connected to the topic actually being discussed – all-purpose, general or irrelevant questions will not gain the candidate many marks.

General conversation

Although initial questions may deal with topics of a routine nature, candidates should be encouraged to go beyond, for example, topics more appropriate to IGCSE. Focusing on topics such as the candidate's future plans or leisure interests is unlikely to allow the candidate sufficient scope to gain high credit at this level. As has been so often reported, the General Conversation – like the Topic conversation – should encourage and allow the candidate to debate, argue, and back up a point. The use of as wide a range of language as possible should be encouraged and candidates should be able to deal with both factual and abstract concepts to access the higher ranges of marks. A shortcoming in the conduct of the test in some cases was once again when promising candidates were working at a rather low level. All candidates should be given the opportunity to perform at their highest possible level.

SPANISH

Paper 8685/02
Reading and Writing

General comments

This session's paper was handled well by candidates of all levels of ability and there were many very good performances. Most appeared to be familiar with the format of the paper and with the techniques which are required to answer it. There were fewer instances of candidates copying more than four words of the text in their answers to comprehension questions, thereby demonstrating not only good comprehension skills but also linguistic competence.

Very few candidates omitted answering part of a question, although there was an occasional tendency to answer comprehension questions with information which, although valid, had not appeared in the texts and therefore could not be credited. Marks were occasionally lost in **Question 5** either by failure to observe the word limit or by over-generalising in the summary.

Centres should be congratulated on the general presentation of the candidates' work. Leaving extra space between questions made reading easier.

Comments on specific questions

SECCIÓN PRIMERA

Question 1

This question contained some good discriminatory items. Only the very best candidates displayed sufficient depth of vocabulary to score maximum marks. Items **(a)** and **(b)** caused problems, with many falling into the trap of *matrimoniales* for *consortes*, and perhaps being unable to work out the meaning of *acuciante* in the text. In this type of test candidates should always consult the text to see whether the answer they are considering will fit and retain the meaning.

Question 2

The transformation exercises also discriminated well. There were occasional instances of candidates offering alternative answers. When this occurred only the first answer was marked, regardless of whether the second answer was correct or not. Candidates should be aware that their answers must be able to fit back seamlessly into the passage.

- (a)** If the meaning of *dejar de* was known, then this item caused few problems.
- (b)** The conversion of *cuando* to *al + infinitive* appears regularly in this type of exercise. A number of candidates wasted a mark by omitting *tener que*.
- (c)** This was a fairly easy transformation. Candidates who used a construction with the infinitive failed to score as this answer would not fit back into the original text.
- (d)** A passive construction is another regular item in transformation exercises. Answers were sometimes invalidated by the omission of *pueden*.
- (e)** Many variations of the correct answer were possible here. Answers such as *Yo siento aprensión*, which omitted the elaboration, did not score.

Question 3

A few candidates clearly had their own ideas about childcare and lost marks when these were offered rather than what was stated in the text. This was noticeable in **(a)** e.g. *salir una noche es importante para mantener el matrimonio*, **(c)** and **(e)**.

- (a)** A lot of candidates scored only one mark for *dejan a los padres trabajar*. As this question was worth three marks more was needed. Very few candidates scored the maximum by mentioning *las largas horas de trabajo* or *les permiten pagar las cuentas*.
- (b)** Most candidates scored both marks, mentioning the brevity of the maternity leave and the problem of what to do with the child.
- (c)** There were a number of very good, high-scoring answers to this item and also many excellent examples of re-wording quite difficult concepts. However, some candidates lost a mark by directly lifting *entre el bien y el mal*.
- (d)** Items **(i)** and **(ii)** were both fairly accessible to candidates, testing information which could be readily identified in the texts. In **(ii)** a few candidates only supplied one piece of information for a question which was worth two marks, or there was the occasional misinterpretation e.g. *porque son extranjeras*.
- (e)** This item attracted many full, well-written answers which, provided that the explanations of the three adjectives were drawn from understanding of the text, scored well. No matter how appealing other ideas might have seemed e.g. *una niñera debe ser joven porque, si no, el niño va a tener ideas de la generación pasada*, they could not be rewarded.

SECCIÓN SEGUNDA

Question 4

Candidates responded well to this second text which showed how work can affect children in a less privileged society.

- (a)** All the evidence needed to answer this item was to be found in the first paragraph of the text. A personal opinion such as *representa algo malo de nuestra sociedad* was not being sought. A few candidates confined their answers to the number of children working and missed the marks being offered for the ways in which work blights their lives.
- (b)** If candidates failed to score the full three marks on this two-part question it was usually because they lifted rather than explained *el Día Mundial de Lucha contra el trabajo infantil* or, in item **(ii)**, failed to mention that in Argentina the focus was to be on children working in agriculture.
- (c)** This item was generally answered very well with the majority of candidates able to identify the dangers and the adverse conditions experienced by child labourers.
- (d)** Although this item was more a test of ideas, unlike the factual content of the previous one, it also attracted some very good answers. Marks were lost when candidates copied directly the phrase *la pobreza y la falta de oportunidades*.
- (e)** This question was a bit more demanding and discriminated well between the different levels of ability. The less able candidates were usually able to pick up at least one of the marks, whereas the better candidates scored all three. There was the occasional misinterpretation e.g. *cuando un niño trabaja, esto causa esperanza para la familia ya que así alimentará a la familia*.

Question 5

The combined mark of this question amounts to more than twenty-five per cent of the total available for the paper and yet candidates, often the very able ones, still persist in wasting marks here. If a candidate writes 140 words or more for **part (a)**, then **part (b)** will not be marked, thus forfeiting five marks. Introductions, conclusions, opinions, generalisations or even much in the way of eloquence are not required in **part (a)**. They waste words and generally cut down on the number of facts that can be mentioned.

- (a)** What was required here was not a piece of free writing but a factual summary of what was said in both texts about the effects of work on children. There was no need to worry about copying, if necessary, phrases of more than four words from the texts. A comparison of the plight of the children in the two societies was not required.

Candidates who were aware of the technique required scored well.

- (b)** This brief, final section of the exam, as always, produced some interesting answers. Candidates sometimes denied themselves the opportunity of the full five marks either by writing about the customs in their family, rather than in their country, or by failing to offer a personal opinion.

SPANISH

Paper 8685/03

Essay

General comments

There is a pleasing sense of satisfaction amongst Examiners that a solid majority of the candidates performed very well indeed. As has been the case for many years now, the Essay paper offered the opportunity for candidates who were well prepared and who have had many practice runs using previous essay titles to score good marks both for language and for content. As one would expect, essays that showed linguistic flair and precision, coupled with a good degree of insight into the selected topic, managed successfully to access the higher ranges of the mark scheme. The need for relevant illustration of the arguments being made as well as a clear response to the title set (as opposed to a pre-learnt compilation of vaguely connected ideas regardless of the actual title) has now firmly established itself as one of the most important demands of this paper. Previous reports have made it clear that candidates who resort to a simple regurgitation of a previously written essay on a similar topic can expect to lose marks for content. This was indeed the case this year albeit for a small number of candidates. Examiners are also delighted to report that the number of candidates submitting an essay well in excess of the 400 word upper limit was small. A handful of essays failed to reach the 250 word minimum. Such rubric infringements will result in a significant loss of marks. However, Centres are obviously emphasising the importance of the word count to their candidates and this is appreciated by Examiners.

Many candidates were, once again, able to produce essays that displayed a clear understanding of Spanish grammar and its application. Numerous essays showed a self-assured ability to manipulate advanced sentence structure and to employ a good range of appropriate vocabulary in order to put across to the reader a clear line of thought. As is often the case, however, the linguistic problems that did arise were annoyingly predictable and were often the direct result of candidates not bothering to check what they had written. Spanish accents continue to catch a number of candidates out with many resorting to the rather lazy tactic of omitting them altogether. Items such as *jovenes* [sic], *tambien* [sic] and *países* [sic] were all too common, even in essays that were otherwise good. Given the nature of the title on respect between the generations, the words *respeto* and *respecto* were often confused. The subjunctive mood continues to be a mystery for many candidates with utterances such as *los padres quieren que los hijos son respetuosos...* [sic] being commonly presented as grammatically accurate. Another notable error was the use of the phrase *en una manera* instead of *de una manera* in adverbial phrases. Worryingly this year, an increased number of candidates resorted to phrases such as *...los médicos an solucionado el problema...* [sic] and *...la juventud a sufrido mucho recientemente...* [sic] where the auxiliary verb *haber* has simply lost the letter 'h'. The confusion of tenses (in particular the preterite and the imperfect) was quite a common feature, especially amongst the lower ability range. Mercifully this year, there were very few candidates who used English words to make up for a lack of awareness of the existence of a perfectly suitable Spanish word. Recent comments in previous reports with regard to the use of the passive mood have obviously been taken on board by most Centres given that it appeared not to be a problem for the majority of candidates this session.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

As Examiners had anticipated, this was a hugely popular title. Candidates adopted a variety of different approaches to the lack of respect between young people and their parents. Most concluded that a lack of respect for parents is not innate but that it could be explained by social conditions and by peer pressure.

Question 2

This was another popular title on this paper. The topic of tourism is clearly one which many candidates felt well prepared to discuss. The majority of essays presented a coherent argument to the effect that one's horizons are indeed always broadened by foreign travel. Very few essays argued the opposite case.

Question 3

A reasonably popular title on the paper. Most efforts concentrated on concluding that ecologists often exaggerate the harm being caused by pollution, but many felt that this was simply a tactic in order to make a very important environmental point. Pleasingly, most candidates were very familiar with the vocabulary and technical information required to produce an essay on such an issue.

Question 4

The least popular title by a considerable margin. The small number of essays that were produced were well conceived and suggested that co-operation between the two types of medicine would be the best way forward. Those candidates who simply recycled the title in order to boost their word count lost marks quite heavily.

Question 5

This title proved to be more popular than expected. The complexity of the issue of alcohol consumption did not deter candidates. Many essays examined the potential harm that alcohol abuse can have on family life as well as considering its part in what would be considered a healthy lifestyle, with many emphasising the notion that a range of experts believe that moderate consumption of alcohol can actually have health benefits for the individual.