

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/01
Speaking

Key messages

For candidates:

- Candidates' own interests should play a part in the choice of the subject for the presentation. Clear reference should be made to Hispanic culture or society.
- It is important to structure the presentation to fit into the allowed time, and to express not only facts, but ideas and opinions.
- Focus on the questions asked and be sure to answer what is asked.
- Remember to ask the Examiner questions in both conversation sections

For centres:

- The test consists of three distinct sections: **(i)** Initial presentation (maximum $3\frac{1}{2}$ minutes); **(ii)** Topic Conversation (7 – 8 minutes) on issues arising from the Presentation; **(iii)** General Conversation (8 – 9 minutes) on themes completely different from those raised in the Topic Conversation.
- Each section should be clearly identified on the recordings, and the prescribed timings observed.
- Candidates should ask the Examiner questions in both conversation sections and be reminded to do so, if necessary. The Examiner's replies to such questions should be concise: remember it is the candidate and not the Examiner who is being marked.
- Interaction with the Examiner is an important criterion in both conversation sections.

General comments

The performance of candidates covered the usual wide range, from the outstanding to the very basic. Some very good candidates. Most candidates had been suitably prepared for the examination. The chosen topics were generally in accordance with the syllabus and most candidates could speak for the required time.

A few Teachers/examiners did not develop a proper conversation with the candidates or failed to prompt them to ask the required questions. On occasions a good candidate lost up to 10 marks because the teacher failed to prompt the candidate to ask two questions in each section.

It is important to make a clear distinction between the topic conversation and the general conversation, both in content and in timings. Again, this session, the general conversation became an extension of the topic conversation and there were still a few presentations that were not related to any Spanish-speaking country.

The quality of the recordings was generally good; a few suffered from low volume or intrusive background noise. Although candidates' voices should obviously be clearly audible, it is also important for the Teacher/examiner to be heard.

The range of samples followed correct procedure with recordings indicating performance at top, middle and bottom. Some centres supplied recordings of all the candidates entered.

It is important that working mark sheets covering the marks awarded to all candidates examined are sent with the recordings.

There were a few cases of incorrect addition of marks or errors in transferring totals of marks from the working mark sheets to the final mark sheet; centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to check the accuracy of marks submitted.

A few centres failed to observe the correct timings for the separate sections as required by the specification. Failure to comply with the correct timings could disadvantage candidates.

Comments on specific questions

Part 1: Topic Presentation

Guidance on topic areas for the Presentation and Discussion may be found in the syllabus. Topics must relate clearly to aspects of Hispanic life or culture. The content mark out of ten has to be halved where no specific reference to a Spanish-speaking country or context is made.

Centres are reminded that Presentations should be a formal and coherent introduction to the subject: pronunciation and clarity of delivery, as well as content, are assessed. It is important to show evidence of preparation, organisation and relevant factual knowledge. Presentations ideally provided a personal overview of the issue to lead to the basis of a debate in the topic conversation. Candidates who spoke in a casual or disjointed manner and who made little attempt to engage the Examiner lost some credit here.

Many topics showed evidence of well-focused preparation, were convincingly organised and managed to cover quite a lot of ground in the allotted time. The best topics also had a lively element to them and, it would appear, were often selected by candidates on the grounds that they had an interest in the topic in the first place.

Part 2: Topic Conversation

This part of the test should not just be an invitation to the candidate to give a further series of mini presentations, though, as in previous series, a few centres were content to allow this. The Topic Conversation provides the opportunity to develop points arising from the presentation. Interaction is a key criterion. Candidates whose responses were confined to pre-learned answers, with little evidence of spontaneity, could not be awarded high marks for responsiveness. Candidates should actually take part in a discussion by including relevant information and specific examples, and by justifying or refuting a point of view.

Candidates should ask the Examiner at least two substantial questions. Such questions should arise as far as possible within the discussion itself, rather than being isolated or all-purpose questions, unrelated to the topic. Marks could not be awarded for 'seeking information and opinions' where no questions were asked by the candidate, and Teachers/examiners are reminded that candidates must actually ask questions to gain credit and that it is not sufficient in this mark criterion for the Teacher/examiner merely to offer an opinion unbidden.

Centres should remind candidates that merely a repetition of simple questions along the lines of *¿Y tú?* do not score highly.

Part 3: General Conversation

The General Conversation is a separate section from the Topic Conversation and must not be a continuation of the latter. The start of this section should be clearly announced on the recording. It is important that different issues from those addressed in the Topic Conversation should be discussed.

Although there are no prescribed areas for the General Conversation, topics covered should be at an appropriate level. Common areas included current affairs, a news item, the arts, sport, health and diet, the environment, the economy, local politics and social concerns. Almost any topic that allowed adequately sophisticated discussion of ideas, opinions and encouraged a range of higher-level language was acceptable.

Teachers/examiners are reminded that the level of the choice of questions and the treatment of issues in the General Conversation is important. Teachers/examiners determine the issues to be discussed; a few centres incorrectly invited candidates to name the topics.

As in previous years, there were still some cases of questioning at a level more appropriate to IGCSE or GCE Ordinary Level, or lower.. Although the conversation could start with some basic, personal or factual questions, candidates must be moved on to discuss more complex issues; they should have the opportunity

to show they can give and justify opinions on more advanced topics. All conversations should go beyond the descriptive. The range and style of questioning should also allow candidates use more sophisticated language and to show competence in structures at a suitably advanced level to gain access to the higher mark ranges.

As in the Topic Conversation, candidates should ask the Examiner questions to seek information and opinions and be prompted to do so if necessary. Questions should follow naturally in the course of the discussion and be phrased appropriately. Similarly, limited, all-purpose or rhetorical questions did not gain much credit. As in the Topic Conversation, at least two substantial questions should be asked by the candidate.

Language

Quality of language is assessed in all sections. Centres are again reminded to encourage candidates to use as wide a range of language as possible, and those conducting the tests should take care that candidates have the opportunity to do so. An appropriate level of vocabulary and structure is required.

To be awarded the highest marks candidates needed to show competence in dealing with hypothetical and abstract situations as well as factual or descriptive areas. As has been reported previously, accuracy was often lacking in basic structures such as verb endings and tenses, use of *ser/estar*, genders and noun/adjective/verb agreements. In some cases, Teachers/examiners pitched questions at a low linguistic level, possibly denying candidates the opportunity to use a higher level or more adventurous range of constructions and vocabulary.



SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/21
Reading and Writing

Key messages

- **Question 1:** seek a phrase in the text which matches perfectly the one in the question. Candidates should take care not to omit words or to include extra words.
- **Question 2:** rewrite the phrases to include the word(s) in brackets. A grammatical manipulation will be required, and care should be taken to ensure that the answer would fit back into the original text, retaining the same meaning.
- **Questions 3 and 4:** comprehension of texts. Candidates should attempt to answer in their own words. Direct copying of five or more words from the text will usually invalidate an answer.
- **Question 5(a):** summary of relevant details from both texts in answer to the question set. Introduction, conclusions and vague generalisations are not required. Specific, relevant details attract marks.
- **Question 5(b):** personal response. Candidates should give a point of view and, if possible, offer ideas which have not appeared in the texts.
- **Language:** when preparing for the exam, make sure to revise the basic agreements, tenses and verb endings.

General comments

All those candidates who, despite challenges and inconveniences resulting from the pandemic, were still able to sit this examination should be complimented on their achievements. Although preparations must have presented considerable difficulties, there was little evidence of this in the scripts received.

The two texts, contrasting school attendance in Spain and a Latin American country, proved to be a topic which candidates could engage with and discuss. With a few exceptions, responses were generally well presented, with the paper posing suitable levels of challenge which led to the full range of differentiation expected among candidates at this level.

Most candidates attempted all questions and there was little evidence of any difficulty with time management. A few were not entirely certain how they should answer **Question 1** and, as always, the language manipulations in **Question 2** were a challenging test.

In **Questions 3 and 4** a good many candidates showed that they had thought out their answers and so were able to manipulate the text and skillfully paraphrase to convey the comprehension points, without copying more than five words. The practice of introducing 'conscious' grammatical errors into original text as a means of avoiding five word lifts is not rewarded, as it does not demonstrate candidates' linguistic ability or knowledge in any way. Candidates should be reminded to look at the number of marks available for each question: if a question is worth three marks, then they should try to include three comprehension points in the answer.

Candidates were generally familiar with the word limit in **Question 5** and usually stuck to it. Performance in this question is continuing to improve. A number still seemed unfamiliar with the type of *resumen* being sought here: specific detail and not generalisation. A very small minority wrote a very lengthy **5b** first, followed by a much shorter answer to **5a**, seemingly unaware that the latter is worth double the marks of the former.

A considerable number of candidates taking the paper at AS level were of Hispanic descent and the quality of their written Spanish was structurally very sound, if not always accurate in spelling. Candidates of other nationalities, including those with more modest linguistic skills, produced work which thoroughly justified their entry for this level of examination.

Comments on specific questions

SECCIÓN PRIMERA

Question 1

As stated in the Key Message above, candidates should seek a phrase in the text which matches perfectly the one in the question, and take care not to omit words or to include extra words – a feature which sometimes invalidated answers which were otherwise correct.

Candidates generally performed well in this part of the exam, although there were still a few who disregarded the rubric and explained the phrase in their own words or offered no response at all.

- (a) Most candidates identified the correct expression.
- (b) This was also handled well. Occasionally the initial *es necesario...* was omitted.
- (c) An unnecessary *que...* at the beginning or misunderstanding of *esporádicamente* were reasons why this mark was sometimes missed.
- (d) This target expression was successfully identified by nearly every candidate.
- (e) Marks were missed here either by the omission of *...con* or the addition of *...los padres*.

Question 2

As mentioned above, this was the more challenging of the two opening exercises.

In addition to performing the language manipulations required in this question, it is important to check that answers will fit back into the original text and retain the same meaning. A line number reference is given for candidates to check quickly that this would be the case.

- (a) Many alternative word orders were possible, all requiring *a* before *los adolescentes*. This was sometimes omitted, which meant that the mark was not awarded.
- (b) This grammatical manipulation was formed successfully by numerous candidates who remembered to include the idea of *en mayor riesgo* by including a quantifier such as *más* or *mayormente*.
- (c) This was the least well done of all the manipulations with only the strongest candidates being able to use the reflexive *se diferencian*, add a quantifier such as *mucho* or *bien* and then use the correct preposition *de*.
- (d) This was done well by the majority of candidates who recognised the need for a subjunctive verb form after *es necesario que*, although a number did not identify *intervenir* as part of the *venir* family and offered incorrect versions such as *intervena/intervina*.
- (e) To native speakers *no faltan* should have been a natural response but far too many candidates did not appear to realise that by putting *faltan suficientes medios* they were offering the exact opposite in meaning to what was required. Some marks were lost when another cue such as *falta* or *hace falta* was used.

Question 3

Most candidates made a good attempt at answering all five questions. Better answers were written in full sentences and often skillfully manipulated language from the text by use of synonyms, rephrasing and correct constructed verbs.

- (a) Most candidates scored two marks for noting that school was not interesting for candidates and that attending lacked purpose. There was often good paraphrasing for the former, e.g. *ven al colegio y sus intereses como dos cosas diferentes*, although *ajeno* was often a vocabulary issue which sometimes hampered scoring the second point. The amount of statistical detail required to establish the other point – that thirty per cent of Spanish candidates miss school at least one day a

week (whilst still avoiding copying five or more words of text) often proved an insurmountable barrier. Two common lifts were *tres de cada diez alumnos* or *un día o más a la semana*. The use of the verb *'atender'* for *'asistir'* was a common error.

- (b) It was pleasing to see the facility with which candidates were able to convert first person direct speech into third person reported speech. Most candidates noted that *las clases no son entretenidas/interesantes* and many noted that candidates were laughed at in school. With the latter point, although *se burlan de mí* was widely understood, attempts to find a synonym floundered when an unacceptable, more extreme term such as *el bullying* or *acoso* was used. The idea of teachers not paying attention to candidates who are struggling was somehow more elusive for candidates. Some indicated that teachers did not pay attention to those that were doing well. Those who wrote more generally about teachers not being good could not be credited.
- (c) This was a good differentiator. How does *Rebeca Cisternas* distinguish between the types of absentees? Many candidates thought it was too obvious (with 2 marks available) and tended to describe the reasons why candidates occasionally missed school: to play basketball or hang around for a candidate they fancy at another school. Only the more astute realised correctly that the question was seeking a distinction between occasional absence and habitual absence.
- (d) In many ways, this was a challenging question in terms of comprehension: *supone carecer de formación* followed by *lo que le va a marginar social y laboralmente* clearly foxed many. The boldest, while not fully understanding it, ploughed on with tortuous manipulations of the same words whilst with varying degrees of success. Few candidates scored full marks, with some missing out altogether that the candidate will see their training suffer when missing school. Most success was achieved in pointing out that retaking the year costs the State double. The final point was also well answered by saying that the cost of candidates repeating the year ran into millions, although a common lift here was *miles de millones de euros*.
- (e) Some good answers were given by candidates who correctly identified that parents should pay close attention to whether their children get to school, and many candidates also expressed the idea about schools needing to pay close attention to school attendance. Fewer candidates expressed the key idea of schools needing to immediately contact parents, and candidates in future should be reminded to give all the precise details required by the question.

SECCIÓN SEGUNDA

Question 4

The second text contrasted strongly with the first passage, showing the value that less privileged candidates place upon school attendance. Comprehension was good and candidates who gave clear, detailed answers in their own words achieved their just rewards.

- (a) Most candidates scored well on this question, with two marks out of three being the most common outcome. The majority mentioned that school started at 6.30, (although not all succeeded in avoiding the lift *a las 6.30 de la mañana*), or that they started early their long journey to be on time. The next point was generally well answered by stating that they had to walk through water and mud, (a common lift was *chapupear por agua y lodo*). For the final point, most candidates mentioned that the the candidates also needed to negotiate tree branches on their journey and scored the mark if they made it clear that these were *caídas*. Other answers implying this, such as *derrumbadas* or *en el piso* were accepted. Stronger candidates often neatly combined these last two points: *tienen que pasar por agua y barro, intentando no pisar ramas caídas*.
- (b) The idea of the impassable road was expressed well by nearly all candidates, many of whom simply removed or replaced the word *prácticamente* in order to avoid lifting five words from the text. Similarly, a majority of candidates mentioned the fact that drivers were reluctant to drive their vehicles down that road. (A common lift was *no se atreven a ingresar con sus vehículos*). Fewer candidates identified that this reluctance was because of previous drivers on the road getting stuck in the mud, although those who were successful often showed a pleasing knowledge of acceptable synonyms for *atrapado*.
- (c) Most candidates answered this question well, identifying that *Tania's* walk to school was difficult because her footwear got stuck in the mud, often using good synonyms for the words *se quedan pegadas*. The majority also identified the deep holes on the road and the risk of snakes, though

some candidates were too vague, as references to dangerous animals rather than snakes in particular could not be credited. A few candidates thought incorrectly that *Tania* herself got stuck in the mud, or had snakes in her *chanclas*.

- (d) This question was challenging, although most candidates successfully noted *Efraín's* sense of abandonment. Not so clearly stated were the excuses of the council regarding the lack of money to repair the road, with many adding unnecessary information about the lack of electricity or running water in *El Toco*, possibly because the roles of *alcadesa*, *gobiernos municipal and departmental* and *governador* were not fully understood. The rank injustice of officials finding funds to refurbish the road near the governor's residence was successfully identified by better candidates.
- (e) Most candidates understood the contradiction that the government insisted on school attendance but did not help candidates get to school. More challenge was to be found in identifying that better off town-dwelling candidates sometimes have to repeat the year. Some misunderstood this and indicated merely that these candidates skipped classes, or simply contrasted their affluence with those from *El Toco*. There was also a quite common misuse of *faltar* for *suspender/fallar*. If the lift *aprenden y se van superando* was successfully avoided, the mark for pointing out that the candidates from *El Toco* learnt and overcame their difficulties was awarded.

Question 5

As stated earlier, more candidates now appear to be aware of the techniques required for this part of the examination and there were clear differences in marks between those who had practised the summary question, and those who were not used to the demands of the test. The majority paid careful attention to the overall number of words allowed for this question. More summaries gave specific details rather than generalisations, and the better personal responses contained opinions and original ideas.

- (a) Although improvement has generally been made in answering this part of the question, it is still necessary to remind candidates that an answer giving the essence of both passages in beautiful, accurate Spanish will be at risk of scoring only one or two of the ten marks available for content. Similarly, introductions, conclusions and superfluous starters such as *en el primer texto/en el segundo texto* are an unnecessary waste of words.

Here is an example of the sort of answer which, despite scoring well for quality of language (maximum 5 marks), scored next to nothing for content (maximum 10 marks):

Es importante subrayar que ambos textos tratan el mismo tema: la educación. Por una parte el primer texto describe un problema muy grave en España, que es el absentismo. El autor explica las razones según las que los estudiantes faltan las clases y además añade la opinión de la investigadora de educación Rebeca Cisternas.

Por otro lado, el segundo texto examina una realidad totalmente diferente...

These opening lines use up nearly half the words allowed for both (a) and (b) and have scored zero for content.

This style of summary giving the essence of what is in the texts will score very few marks for content. On the contrary, what will score content marks are details of the *razones por las cuales es difícil que algunos alumnos vayan a sus clases*. The following example is a good illustration, scoring six marks in a similar number of words:

Es difícil para algunos porque los profesores no ponen atención a los que lo necesitan ✓ y se burlan de ellos. ✓ Muchos ven la escuela como un sitio fuera de sus intereses ✓ y para ellos no vale la pena ir. ✓ Hay algunos que no van porque tienen que jugar un partido. ✓

Los niños de El Toco tienen que caminar doce kilómetros ✓...

Specific details – many of which have already cropped up in answers to comprehension questions – are required, and not generalisations.

- (b) Apart from a tiny minority who had already exhausted their word allocation by the time they reached this part of the question (and thereby scored zero), most candidates had something to say in response to the question. Many scored high marks, particularly those who brought a new idea to

the table, rather than relying on ideas rehashed from the source texts. There were many detailed and interesting opinions on absenteeism or support available in education, embracing those examples mentioned in the text but also going far beyond, depending on the situation in their own countries.

Quality of Language

The quality of candidates' written Spanish, here and throughout the paper, was generally up to the standard required by this examination. Marks were generally in the Sound to Good range. Unless they had been penalised for scoring zero in any of the comprehension questions, strong candidates who could correctly manipulate the source texts into good Spanish to display clear comprehension, were awarded maximum marks in all three quality of language assessments. Less able candidates often had major difficulties with verb formation, and use of the singular or plural verb forms in particular. Their mark often improved considerably in the final question when their writing was more free-style.

Amongst candidates from Hispanic families, although communication was generally very sound, spelling often left a little to be desired: *halla/haiga* for *haya*, *haser*, *va a ver* for *va a haber*, *lollo* for *los hoyos*, *evede* for *en vez de*, confusion between b/v, and lack of 's' in plurals e.g. *lo estudiantes*.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/22
Reading and Writing

Key messages

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- **Question 5(b):** personal response. Candidates should give a point of view and, if possible, offer ideas which have not appeared in the texts.
- **Language:** when preparing for the exam, make sure to revise the basic agreements, tenses and verb endings.

General comments

All those candidates who, despite challenges and inconveniences resulting from the pandemic, were still able to sit this examination should be complimented on their achievements. Although preparations must have presented considerable difficulties, there was hardly any evidence of this in the scripts received.

The standard of entry was generally very high, especially among the 9719 candidates. Linguistic competence was generally excellent and, provided that there were no penalties for lack of comprehension, top marks for quality of language were commonly awarded. Most candidates showed that they had clearly understood both texts, dealing with some of the pros and cons of 'man's best friend'.

The majority of candidates showed an impressive knowledge of most of the techniques required by this exam. Better candidates produced skillful paraphrasing in their answers to comprehension questions, although lifting, (the direct copying of five or more words from the text), occasionally invalidated a mark. Responses to **Question 5** were still a bit disappointing, with candidate who had scored very well on the previous four questions often stumbling a bit at the last hurdle.

Comments on specific questions

Sección 1

Question 1

The exercise worked well, with errors mostly comprising superfluous words at the beginning or ending of the answer. Very few candidates offered an incorrect phrase.

- (a) Most candidates got off to a good start. Some lost the mark, either by prefacing their answer with *los niños ingresados con...*, or by omitting *con*.
- (b) The vast majority were successful here. Occasionally *gracias a...* was omitted.
- (c) A few invalidated the correct answer by prefacing it with *los perros...* or adding *...para trabajar*.

- (d) The omission of *se*... occasionally resulted in candidates not scoring.
- (e) This proved to be very accessible and, other than the occasional false start with *que*..., there were very few incorrect answers.

Question 2

Most candidates scored well on this more challenging exercise, which requires answers that fit back in the text whilst retaining exactly the same meaning.

- (a) This was generally done well. Sometimes the mark was lost when candidates wrote *acaban* rather than *acababan*.
- (b) This only posed difficulties for less able non-native speaker candidates.
- (c) There were several different ways to express the meaning of this phrase, all requiring a subjunctive. Awareness of this requirement was widespread, although its execution was sometimes flawed amongst non native-speaker candidates.
- (d) This proved to be more of a challenge. The first consideration was to choose one of the several verbs (*van/están/vienen/tienen/cuentan*) which would fit. Having successfully negotiated this, it was then necessary to supply a suitable preposition (or not in the case of *tienen*). Fewer were successful here.
- (e) Identifying and forming the present continuous *están siendo* proved a little tricky, even for native-speaker candidates.

Question 3

Candidates showed good understanding of this text about how dogs are being used for therapeutic purposes.

- (a) Comprehension of the opening paragraph was good with many candidates scoring maximum marks. A few candidates overlooked the fact that the question clearly indicates the paragraph where the answer is located and answered *para los niños aislados, los mayores en residencias y los jóvenes en tribunales*. Here, and elsewhere in **Question 3**, candidates made good use of paraphrases from **Question 1** to avoid copying five words directly from the text, for example, *solos y separados de los demás*. A lift which was not always avoided was *con las defensas muy bajas*.
- (b) A lot of elements were required for this answer which was worth four marks and many scored well. Some difficulty was found in clarifying that the child and the dog were located in different parts of the hospital, and details about how the child was able to see the animal (by using a device such as a mobile or tablet) were sometimes omitted. Most were able to state how this procedure encouraged the patient to talk about their illness and express emotions and feelings. A common lift was *el equipo que maneja el perro*.
- (c) Many candidates picked up two marks for noting that the child's feelings of isolation and fear were diminished by interaction with the dog. The concept of the patient being connected to the outside world was a little lost on some candidates, a few of whom took *ventana* literally.
- (d) The two answers as to how dogs can help elderly people in care homes were almost universally correctly identified. The only real dangers were inaccurate paraphrasing or unsuccessful avoidance of the lifts: *es dar apoyo y cariño* and *el funcionamiento físico y emocional*.
- (e) This question offered a bit more challenge. Less able candidates were not equipped with the vocabulary required to paraphrase *dan testimonio en un proceso judicial* successfully, although those who had correctly used this as their answer to 1(e) were able to use the cue from this question in their answers. Despite being easily avoidable by changing the order of the adjectives, *testimonios más fluidos y detallados* was often copied directly from the text.

Sección 2

Question 4

The second text, concerning some of the negative effects associated with dogs, also appeared to be well understood by candidates.

- (a) This was possibly the most accessible of all the comprehension questions and the majority of candidates scored both marks. Hardly any candidates were unsuccessful in pointing out that stray dogs can be aggressive and threaten our safety, although a few candidates did not clearly note that dogs can transmit illness to humans.
- (b) Only better candidates were successful in scoring all three marks for this question which required a number of specific details to produce accurate answers. Details were frequently missed or were contained in phrases of five or more words which had been copied directly. To score the first point, candidates needed to note that when canine excrement becomes *seco* or *pulverizado*, its particles can be airborne. The next point about the eye inflammation was often not understood, with answers ranging from just mentioning the inflammation (not where), to lifting or trying to rephrase with the same words from the text. This latter ploy was often unsuccessful because of faulty prepositions or word order. More able candidates often used very good ways of expressing this, for example *inflamaciones oculares* or *conjuntivitis*. The third point was usually understood but the idea of food being contaminated was insufficient unless it was qualified by *puestos ambulantes*.
- (c) Most candidates scored at least two of the four marks on offer here, and many scored three or higher. Rather than through lack of comprehension, marks were usually dropped through omission of one of the four answers sought: *son abandonados por sus propietarios*; *porque ya no los consideran tiernos/graciosos*; *porque ya no pueden permitirse los gastos*; *no sancionan a los que abandonan a los perros*. The lifted phrase *no hay leyes o sanciones* often invalidated the final point.
- (d) This was generally done well, with candidates noting widespread rejection of the sterilisation of dogs because of concerns over the safety of the procedure, (*a la seguridad del procedimiento* was a common lift), or over possible changes in the dog's behaviour. With this final point, less able candidates sometimes left it uncertain as to whether the dog's or the owner's behaviour was at risk of being changed.
- (e) Provided that sufficient detail was included of the three ways in which the clinic was attempting to promote responsible animal ownership – *ofrecen programas de sensibilización a los dueños/dan información sobre medicina preventiva/dan consejos sobre el comportamiento de los animales* – most candidates were able to pick up more marks here.

Question 5

Although there were still some exceptions, the importance of adhering to the word count of 140 words for both parts of the question appeared to be understood, but not always observed. It is important to be aware of the need to keep to the limit of 140 words for both parts of the question. Anything in excess of 160 words is disregarded, and in extreme cases can lead to a score of zero for 5(b).

A few candidates overlooked the fact that 5(a) is worth ten marks and 5(b) is worth five, handicapping themselves by writing a brief 5(a) and much longer 5(b).

- (a) Better candidates were rewarded with marks of 8, 9 or 10. Those who achieved more moderate marks usually did so because of superfluous introductions and included generalisations which were usually too vague to score.

To achieve a good mark it is essential to note, in the limited number of words available, details from the texts which answer the question which has been asked, for example:

Los perros benefician a niños aislados en sesiones de streaming. ✓ Estas ayudan al niño a expresar sus sentimientos ✓ y hablar sobre su enfermedad. ✓ El nivel de aislamiento disminuye ✓ y el nivel de miedo se reduce. ✓ En residencias de mayores los perros dan apoyo y cariño ✓...

In fewer than fifty words over half the available marks have been scored, leaving ample room to select further specific, relevant details from the second text and also for a good three or so sentences in 5(b).

Unlike the following answer which offers details that do not really begin to answer the question and uses up a similar number of words which, other than contributing to the quality of language mark, has scored nothing.

En el texto 1 se habla sobre una nueva forma de terapia. Esta terapia se usa con la ayuda de perros. La terapia consiste en un niño interactuando con el perro vía un dispositivo electrónico. Esto le hace al niño sentirse mejor...

- (b) Candidates should be aware that what is required here is one or two details which answer the question, which are, whenever possible, different from anything contained in the texts, and a clear personal opinion. Dogs were generally thought to be well-treated and considered as members of the family in most candidates' countries of residence. Better candidates introduced new ideas such as their companionship during Covid lockdowns, their use with the visually impaired or police, or in hunting or security. In many countries there were established organisations which cared for unwanted or stray dogs. Other candidates repeated ideas from the texts, restricting their chances of scoring maximum marks.

Quality of Language

Most candidates were native speakers of the language and, unless any deductions had been made for lack of comprehension, maximum marks were almost universally awarded. Non-native speakers were well up to the level required by this exam and were rewarded with marks in the Sound, Good or Very Good bands.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/23
Reading and Writing

Key messages

- **Question 1:** seek a phrase in the text which matches perfectly the one in the question. Candidates should take care not to omit words or to include extra words.
- **Question 2:** rewrite the phrases to include the word(s) in brackets. A grammatical manipulation will be required, and care should be taken to ensure that the answer would fit back into the original text, retaining the same meaning.
- **Questions 3 and 4:** comprehension of texts. Candidates should attempt to answer in their own words. Direct copying of five or more words from the text will usually invalidate an answer.
- **Question 5(a):** summary of relevant details from both texts in answer to the question set. Introduction, conclusions and vague generalisations are not required. Specific, relevant details attract marks.
- **Question 5(b):** personal response. Candidates should give a point of view and, if possible, offer ideas which have not appeared in the texts.
- **Language:** when preparing for the exam, make sure to revise the basic agreements, tenses and verb endings.

General comments

All those candidates who, despite challenges and inconveniences resulting from the pandemic, were still able to sit this examination should be complimented on their achievements. Although preparations must have presented considerable difficulties, there was hardly any evidence of this in the scripts received.

The standard of entry was generally very high, especially among the 9719 candidates. Linguistic competence was generally excellent and, provided that there were no penalties for lack of comprehension, top marks for quality of language were commonly awarded. Most candidates showed that they had clearly understood both texts, dealing with some of the pros and cons of 'man's best friend'.

The majority of candidates showed an impressive knowledge of most of the techniques required by this exam. Better candidates produced skillful paraphrasing in their answers to comprehension questions, although lifting, (the direct copying of five or more words from the text), occasionally invalidated a mark. Responses to **Question 5** were still a bit disappointing, with candidate who had scored very well on the previous four questions often stumbling a bit at the last hurdle.

Comments on specific questions

Sección 1

Question 1

The exercise worked well, with errors mostly comprising superfluous words at the beginning or ending of the answer. Very few candidates offered an incorrect phrase.

- (a) Most candidates got off to a good start. Some lost the mark, either by prefacing their answer with *los niños ingresados con...*, or by omitting *con*.
- (b) The vast majority were successful here. Occasionally *gracias a...* was omitted.
- (c) A few invalidated the correct answer by prefacing it with *los perros...* or adding *...para trabajar*.

- (d) The omission of *se*... occasionally resulted in candidates not scoring.
- (e) This proved to be very accessible and, other than the occasional false start with *que*..., there were very few incorrect answers.

Question 2

Most candidates scored well on this more challenging exercise, which requires answers that fit back in the text whilst retaining exactly the same meaning.

- (a) This was generally done well. Sometimes the mark was lost when candidates wrote *acaban* rather than *acababan*.
- (b) This only posed difficulties for less able non-native speaker candidates.
- (c) There were several different ways to express the meaning of this phrase, all requiring a subjunctive. Awareness of this requirement was widespread, although its execution was sometimes flawed amongst non native-speaker candidates.
- (d) This proved to be more of a challenge. The first consideration was to choose one of the several verbs (*van/están/vienen/tienen/cuentan*) which would fit. Having successfully negotiated this, it was then necessary to supply a suitable preposition (or not in the case of *tienen*). Fewer were successful here.
- (e) Identifying and forming the present continuous *están siendo* proved a little tricky, even for native-speaker candidates.

Question 3

Candidates showed good understanding of this text about how dogs are being used for therapeutic purposes.

- (a) Comprehension of the opening paragraph was good with many candidates scoring maximum marks. A few candidates overlooked the fact that the question clearly indicates the paragraph where the answer is located and answered *para los niños aislados, los mayores en residencias y los jóvenes en tribunales*. Here, and elsewhere in **Question 3**, candidates made good use of paraphrases from **Question 1** to avoid copying five words directly from the text, for example, *solos y separados de los demás*. A lift which was not always avoided was *con las defensas muy bajas*.
- (b) A lot of elements were required for this answer which was worth four marks and many scored well. Some difficulty was found in clarifying that the child and the dog were located in different parts of the hospital, and details about how the child was able to see the animal (by using a device such as a mobile or tablet) were sometimes omitted. Most were able to state how this procedure encouraged the patient to talk about their illness and express emotions and feelings. A common lift was *el equipo que maneja el perro*.
- (c) Many candidates picked up two marks for noting that the child's feelings of isolation and fear were diminished by interaction with the dog. The concept of the patient being connected to the outside world was a little lost on some candidates, a few of whom took *ventana* literally.
- (d) The two answers as to how dogs can help elderly people in care homes were almost universally correctly identified. The only real dangers were inaccurate paraphrasing or unsuccessful avoidance of the lifts: *es dar apoyo y cariño* and *el funcionamiento físico y emocional*.
- (e) This question offered a bit more challenge. Less able candidates were not equipped with the vocabulary required to paraphrase *dan testimonio en un proceso judicial* successfully, although those who had correctly used this as their answer to 1(e) were able to use the cue from this question in their answers. Despite being easily avoidable by changing the order of the adjectives, *testimonios más fluidos y detallados* was often copied directly from the text.

Sección 2

Question 4

The second text, concerning some of the negative effects associated with dogs, also appeared to be well understood by candidates.

- (a) This was possibly the most accessible of all the comprehension questions and the majority of candidates scored both marks. Hardly any candidates were unsuccessful in pointing out that stray dogs can be aggressive and threaten our safety, although a few candidates did not clearly note that dogs can transmit illness to humans.
- (b) Only better candidates were successful in scoring all three marks for this question which required a number of specific details to produce accurate answers. Details were frequently missed or were contained in phrases of five or more words which had been copied directly. To score the first point, candidates needed to note that when canine excrement becomes *seco* or *pulverizado*, its particles can be airborne. The next point about the eye inflammation was often not understood, with answers ranging from just mentioning the inflammation (not where), to lifting or trying to rephrase with the same words from the text. This latter ploy was often unsuccessful because of faulty prepositions or word order. More able candidates often used very good ways of expressing this, for example *inflamaciones oculares* or *conjuntivitis*. The third point was usually understood but the idea of food being contaminated was insufficient unless it was qualified by *puestos ambulantes*.
- (c) Most candidates scored at least two of the four marks on offer here, and many scored three or higher. Rather than through lack of comprehension, marks were usually dropped through omission of one of the four answers sought: *son abandonados por sus propietarios*; *porque ya no los consideran tiernos/graciosos*; *porque ya no pueden permitirse los gastos*; *no sancionan a los que abandonan a los perros*. The lifted phrase *no hay leyes o sanciones* often invalidated the final point.
- (d) This was generally done well, with candidates noting widespread rejection of the sterilisation of dogs because of concerns over the safety of the procedure, (*a la seguridad del procedimiento* was a common lift), or over possible changes in the dog's behaviour. With this final point, less able candidates sometimes left it uncertain as to whether the dog's or the owner's behaviour was at risk of being changed.
- (e) Provided that sufficient detail was included of the three ways in which the clinic was attempting to promote responsible animal ownership – *ofrecen programas de sensibilización a los dueños/dan información sobre medicina preventiva/dan consejos sobre el comportamiento de los animales* – most candidates were able to pick up more marks here.

Question 5

Although there were still some exceptions, the importance of adhering to the word count of 140 words for both parts of the question appeared to be understood, but not always observed. It is important to be aware of the need to keep to the limit of 140 words for both parts of the question. Anything in excess of 160 words is disregarded, and in extreme cases can lead to a score of zero for 5(b).

A few candidates overlooked the fact that 5(a) is worth ten marks and 5(b) is worth five, handicapping themselves by writing a brief 5(a) and much longer 5(b).

- (a) Better candidates were rewarded with marks of 8, 9 or 10. Those who achieved more moderate marks usually did so because of superfluous introductions and included generalisations which were usually too vague to score.

To achieve a good mark it is essential to note, in the limited number of words available, details from the texts which answer the question which has been asked, for example:

Los perros benefician a niños aislados en sesiones de streaming. ✓ Estas ayudan al niño a expresar sus sentimientos ✓ y hablar sobre su enfermedad. ✓ El nivel de aislamiento disminuye ✓ y el nivel de miedo se reduce. ✓ En residencias de mayores los perros dan apoyo y cariño ✓...

In fewer than fifty words over half the available marks have been scored, leaving ample room to select further specific, relevant details from the second text and also for a good three or so sentences in 5(b).

Unlike the following answer which offers details that do not really begin to answer the question and uses up a similar number of words which, other than contributing to the quality of language mark, has scored nothing.

En el texto 1 se habla sobre una nueva forma de terapia. Esta terapia se usa con la ayuda de perros. La terapia consiste en un niño interactuando con el perro vía un dispositivo electrónico. Esto le hace al niño sentirse mejor...

- (b) Candidates should be aware that what is required here is one or two details which answer the question, which are, whenever possible, different from anything contained in the texts, and a clear personal opinion. Dogs were generally thought to be well-treated and considered as members of the family in most candidates' countries of residence. Better candidates introduced new ideas such as their companionship during Covid lockdowns, their use with the visually impaired or police, or in hunting or security. In many countries there were established organisations which cared for unwanted or stray dogs. Other candidates repeated ideas from the texts, restricting their chances of scoring maximum marks.

Quality of Language

Most candidates were native speakers of the language and, unless any deductions had been made for lack of comprehension, maximum marks were almost universally awarded. Non-native speakers were well up to the level required by this exam and were rewarded with marks in the Sound, Good or Very Good bands.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/31
Essay

Key messages

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- use Spanish which is accurate and of a suitably advanced nature, as well as demonstrate a good use of idiom and appropriate topic-related vocabulary
- use sentence patterns which show some evidence of complexity in a style which is easy to follow.

General comments

In general terms, there was a good level of ability on display in the essays for this session. It seems to be the case that candidates really do understand the importance of writing an essay that makes valid points that relate very clearly to the title set on the paper rather than simply offering a few random thoughts on the overall topic and hoping that this will suffice. In many essays, the reader's interest was skilfully maintained and the quality of thinking was expressed so articulately that the end result was often a very convincingly structured piece of writing in Spanish that scored well both for language and for content. As has been the case for some years now, the standard of preparation carried out in centres for this particular paper is of a high standard indeed and candidates are duly rewarded as a consequence.

The importance of responding to the title on the paper cannot be overstated, however. Essays where there is a clear focus on the actual title set on the paper and where candidates think methodically about the issues raised by that title are always going to access marks at the higher end of the mark scheme. On the other hand, essays that have little if anything to do with the title will lose marks heavily in the content section of the mark scheme. There were quite a few such essays this session where marks for content were at the lower end of the scale so the point needs to be raised again and made clear to candidates. Nevertheless, in general terms, most candidates were able to write well-structured essays that made good use of paragraphs. The best essays tended to combine good structure and sophisticated language with clearly expressed points backed up by evidence, examples or references. Some candidates also made effective use of short but relevant quotations in order to hammer home the point.

There were occasional problems relating to the word count (250 – 400 words) where, once again, marks for content suffered as a consequence of the candidate not saying enough in response to the title. Inevitably, marks for language were also adversely affected by essays that fell short of the minimum 250 words whilst, at the same time, essays that were well in excess of the maximum 400 words also suffered in terms of both language and content. Despite these observations, the vast majority of candidates managed to produce a piece of writing that abided by the rubric. The point has been made in many previous reports that candidates need to have a clear understanding of the wording in the mark scheme for this paper. The idea that if candidates have a full understanding of the mark scheme then they are far more likely to produce better essays is as true now as it was when this paper was introduced many years ago.

As for the quality of the language used by candidates, it was the case again for this session that many candidates were keen to show evidence of the use of complex sentence patterns, with a good range of advanced grammatical structures and an awareness of the desirability of using a range of tenses where appropriate alongside the judicious handling of topic-based vocabulary that related seamlessly to the topic under discussion. Such essays are always inclined to attract marks in the language categories ranging from 'good' to 'very good' provided the grasp of grammar is at least sound.

As is often the case, there were a number of widespread language errors to report and it will come as no great revelation to teachers responsible for preparing candidates for this paper that there were no real surprises. It was indeed a case of the 'usual suspects'. That said, it is always worth highlighting the most frequent errors so that candidates can be made aware of common pitfalls that are best avoided.

A really common language error this year was the use of plural verbs (and, indeed, plural adjectives) with 'la gente'. Statements such as '...la gente siempre prefieren quedarse en casa para trabajar' (sic) and 'es importante para la gente desempleados buscar un trabajo que les gusta...' (sic) were often seen by Examiners. Equally common was the omission of the letter 'h' when using the perfect tense in sentences such as 'muchos países an tratado de luchar contra la contaminación' (sic) and '...personalmente, e decidido tener un trabajo que paga bien...' (sic). On the subject of the perfect tense, there was also a tendency amongst many candidates to substitute the letter 's' for the letter 'z' in relatively simple phrases such 'la situación no ha avanzado...' (sic). A number of candidates fell foul of some basic spelling errors with examples such as '...una desición difícil...' (sic), '...muchos jóvenes no alludan a sus padres en casa...' (sic) and 'muchos padres prefieren trabar en una oficina y no en casa...' (sic). Other very common spelling errors were 'la necesitad', 'aveces' and 'sobretodo' as one word instead of two and the use of the phrase 'como consecuencia...' (sic).

It has certainly been mentioned before in previous reports but once again this session there were far too many essays in which basic punctuation was noticeably and somewhat painfully lacking, thereby making it far more difficult for Examiners to read and fully understand what the candidate is attempting to say. We are talking here about the most basic use of punctuation, namely full stops, commas and capital letters when needed in a sentence. There is a chance that the point may need reinforcing to candidates for this paper. Without punctuation, clarity of communication suffers every time.

The correct use the verb 'gustar' in some fairly basic sentences was again too much of a challenge for a number of candidates. Examples such as 'muchos empleados no gustan sus trabajos' (sic) and '...en mi opinión yo no gusto cocinar en casa...' (sic) were far too common and tended to spoil the overall impression given to Examiners as they read the essay. As has been said before, every Spanish teacher knows that this particular construction is quite a complicated one and so candidates would be well advised to grapple with it until at least some understanding is achieved and, hopefully, put into practice in essays written in preparation for this examination.

Examples of good use of the language included:

- Spanish accents being used accurately throughout the essay.
- The use of an appropriate range of tenses and moods, all correctly conjugated.
- A clear understanding of the differences between the verbs *ser* and *estar*.
- The correct use of 'hay', especially in the past tense.
- Punctuation used to achieve very clear communication.
- The use of impersonal expressions and idiomatic language in order to enhance the register of the writing.

Common errors included:

- Inconsistent use of punctuation and, on occasions, no punctuation at all.
- The continued lack of accents seriously affecting comprehension, particularly when it came to tenses (tomara/tomará, tomo/tomó, esta/está and so on).
- Confusion regarding the accurate use of singular and plural verbs.
- The dropping of the letter 'h' with an auxiliary verb (e.g. 'los padres an tenido problemas con la actitud de sus hijos en casa' (sic)).
- The lack of understanding of the use of the verb 'gustar'.
- The lack of adjectival agreement.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 *La vida diaria*

Trabajar desde casa en vez de ir a un lugar de trabajo es una opción más atractiva para muchos. ¿Qué opina usted?

This was a very popular title and one which, in the present circumstances worldwide, gave an opportunity for candidates to refer to personal experiences to back up the points they were making. There was agreement that many people have enjoyed the opportunity to work from home in that it offers a little more flexibility to the employee who can save on the costs of commuting to work and it also makes it easier for parents to spend a little more time with their children. The vast majority of essays also went on, however, to spell out the disadvantages of working from home in terms of the lack of contact with work colleagues and the difficulties inherent in virtual meetings if internet signals were unstable.

Question 2 *La gastronomía*

Es una pérdida de tiempo cocinar comida sana en casa cuando hay tantos restaurantes de comida rápida por todas partes. ¿Hasta qué punto está usted de acuerdo?

This was also quite a popular title and was generally well dealt with by candidates. Some felt that healthy food was very much overrated and overpriced whilst many others made it clear they thought healthy eating was the best option by far in terms of the health of the individual. The perceived tastiness of fast food was a factor for many who then went on to say that the healthier options are not always necessarily the tastiest options available. A few candidates also wrote passionately about the joys of cooking at home and how this can give the individual the ability to prepare food that is both healthy and tasty.

Question 3 *El empleo y el desempleo*

Algunos tienen un trabajo bien pagado que no les gusta. Otros tienen un trabajo mal pagado pero que les gusta. ¿Qué preferiría usted?

This title provided a wide range of responses most of which agreed categorically that the best job is the one that pays well and that interests the employee. Those who argued that working is simply a way of earning money to pay the rent, feed the family and have some degree of financial independence suggested that having an interest in the job is not terribly important. Others argued the exact opposite and made it clear that they would prefer an interesting job regardless of whether or not it paid well.

Question 4 *El desarrollo social y económico*

Sin desarrollo económico no hay desarrollo social. ¿Hasta qué punto está usted de acuerdo?

This title proved to be the least popular with candidates. There was, however, a good degree of understanding of the issues surrounding social and economic development. Unsurprisingly, almost all essays argued that the most economically successful countries are the ones with healthy social development and that these two things go hand in hand. Many candidates chose to use examples from their own country to support the points they were making.

Question 5 *El medio ambiente*

El cambio climático no es un problema tan urgente como muchos piensan. ¿Está usted de acuerdo?

As is often the case with this particular topic, this title was very popular with candidates. There was, as one might expect, a clear consensus that climate change is a huge problem worldwide and that the sooner we all get to grips with it, the better. There was much criticism of countries who, in the view of many candidates, are not addressing the environmental issues surrounding climate change with anything like the required urgency. There was, however, praise for world leaders who have indeed committed to the cause of tackling climate change. Many candidates expressed the fear that time may well run out if we do not act collectively and decisively now.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/32
Essay

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Comments on specific questions

Question 1 *La vida diaria*

La situación de las personas que viven en las calles no tiene solución. ¿Qué opina usted?

This was a reasonably popular title with candidates. Most essays accepted the difficulties involved in attempting to solve the problem of homelessness and were sympathetic towards governments that have at least shown a willingness to deal with the issue. There was, however, a widespread conviction that much more needed to be done. Some took the view that developing a healthy economy might be the first important step to take. Many suggested that collaborating with the various charitable organisations might also be a positive step to take on the grounds that such organisations are far more aware of the difficulties faced by the homeless.

Question 2 *La gastronomía*

Si el consumo del alcohol es malo para la salud del individuo, ¿por qué es una actividad tan popular?

This was a very popular title and was generally well dealt with by candidates, many of whom were able to draw upon their own experiences of being exposed to alcohol both within the family setting and in their social lives. Some candidates felt that alcohol should be treated like any other commonly available drug and that advertising alcoholic products should be either completely prohibited or at least more strictly controlled. There was an awareness that the moderate consumption of alcohol is socially acceptable in many societies but a number of essays went on to point out that that is where the problems of alcoholism often start.

Question 3 *El empleo y el desempleo*

Tener trabajo debería ser un derecho humano en el mundo moderno. ¿Está usted de acuerdo?

This title provided a reasonable number of responses most of which agreed wholeheartedly that work should indeed be a basic human right in the modern world. Whilst many agreed with this, some essays were quick to point out that very few, if indeed any, governments can actually guarantee every citizen in their country a worthwhile job. The ambition, it appeared, is a noble one but the conversion into reality is the sticking point. Many essays also discussed the importance to the individual's mental health of having a job and of being valued by society. Some essays simply accepted that unemployment is an unfortunate reality of modern life and that how both the individual and the state deal with this situation is really the issue that we need to address.

Question 4 *El desarrollo social y económico*

Hay más desarrollo social y económico si hay buenas relaciones con los países vecinos. ¿Hasta qué punto está usted de acuerdo?

This title proved to be the least popular with candidates. Nevertheless, the understanding of the issues surrounding international relations was impressive. There was a more or less unanimous view that getting on well with neighbouring countries is crucial to social and economic development and that countries that elected to isolate themselves from the rest of the world were the ones that would struggle to prosper in the long run. A willingness to get along with one's neighbours was, it was felt by many, the best way for the world to avoid major conflicts between countries.

Question 5 *El medio ambiente*

Los océanos contaminados son el precio que tenemos que pagar para tener la vida que queremos. ¿Qué opina usted?

This was also a rather popular title with candidates. Some essays suggested unashamedly that the premise of the title was flawed and that sea pollution is definitely not the price we have to pay for our current lifestyles. Many suggestions were made as to how to avoid such pollution in particular by resorting to increased levels of sanctions (financial and political) against those countries that do pollute international waters. Many felt that the United Nations should have a more proactive role in all this. Equally important for many, however, was the role of the individual in making sure that recyclable materials are always recycled and not absent-mindedly tossed into a waste bin.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/33
Essay

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The importance of responding to the title on the paper cannot be overstated, however. Essays where there is a clear focus on the actual title set on the paper and where candidates think methodically about the issues raised by that title are always going to access marks at the higher end of the mark scheme. On the other hand, essays that have little if anything to do with the title will lose marks heavily in the content section of the mark scheme. There were quite a few such essays this session where marks for content were at the lower end of the scale so the point needs to be raised again and made clear to candidates. Nevertheless, in general terms, most candidates were able to write well-structured essays that made good use of paragraphs. The best essays tended to combine good structure and sophisticated language with clearly expressed points backed up by evidence, examples or references. Some candidates also made effective use of short but relevant quotations in order to hammer home the point.

There were occasional problems relating to the word count (250 – 400 words) where, once again, marks for content suffered as a consequence of the candidate not saying enough in response to the title. Inevitably, marks for language were also adversely affected by essays that fell short of the minimum 250 words whilst, at the same time, essays that were well in excess of the maximum 400 words also suffered in terms of both language and content. Despite these observations, the vast majority of candidates managed to produce a piece of writing that abided by the rubric. The point has been made in many previous reports that candidates need to have a clear understanding of the wording in the mark scheme for this paper. The idea that if candidates have a full understanding of the mark scheme then they are far more likely to produce better essays is as true now as it was when this paper was introduced many years ago.

As for the quality of the language used by candidates, it was the case again for this session that many candidates were keen to show evidence of the use of complex sentence patterns, with a good range of advanced grammatical structures and an awareness of the desirability of using a range of tenses where appropriate alongside the judicious handling of topic-based vocabulary that related seamlessly to the topic under discussion. Such essays are always inclined to attract marks in the language categories ranging from 'good' to 'very good' provided the grasp of grammar is at least sound.

As is often the case, there were a number of widespread language errors to report and it will come as no great revelation to teachers responsible for preparing candidates for this paper that there were no real

surprises. It was indeed a case of the 'usual suspects'. That said, it is always worth highlighting the most frequent errors so that candidates can be made aware of common pitfalls that are best avoided.

A really common language error this year was the use of plural verbs (and, indeed, plural adjectives) with 'la gente'. Statements such as '...la gente siempre prefieren quedarse en casa para trabajar' (sic) and 'es importante para la gente desempleados buscar un trabajo que les gusta...' (sic) were often seen by Examiners. Equally common was the omission of the letter 'h' when using the perfect tense in sentences such as 'muchos países an tratado de luchar contra la contaminación' (sic) and '...personalmente, e decidido tener un trabajo que paga bien...' (sic). On the subject of the perfect tense, there was also a tendency amongst many candidates to substitute the letter 's' for the letter 'z' in relatively simple phrases such 'la situación no ha avanzado...' (sic). A number of candidates fell foul of some basic spelling errors with examples such as '...una desición difícil...' (sic), '...muchos jóvenes no alludan a sus padres en casa...' (sic) and 'muchos padres prefieren trabar en una oficina y no en casa...' (sic). Other very common spelling errors were 'la necesitad', 'aveces' and 'sobretodo' as one word instead of two and the use of the phrase 'como consecuencia...' (sic).

It has certainly been mentioned before in previous reports but once again this session there were far too many essays in which basic punctuation was noticeably and somewhat painfully lacking, thereby making it far more difficult for Examiners to read and fully understand what the candidate is attempting to say. We are talking here about the most basic use of punctuation, namely full stops, commas and capital letters when needed in a sentence. There is a chance that the point may need reinforcing to candidates for this paper. Without punctuation, clarity of communication suffers every time.

The correct use the verb 'gustar' in some fairly basic sentences was again too much of a challenge for a number of candidates. Examples such as 'muchos empleados no gustan sus trabajos' (sic) and '...en mi opinión yo no gusto cocinar en casa...' (sic) were far too common and tended to spoil the overall impression given to Examiners as they read the essay. As has been said before, every Spanish teacher knows that this particular construction is quite a complicated one and so candidates would be well advised to grapple with it until at least some understanding is achieved and, hopefully, put into practice in essays written in preparation for this examination.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 *La vida diaria*

La situación de las personas que viven en las calles no tiene solución. ¿Qué opina usted?

This was a reasonably popular title with candidates. Most essays accepted the difficulties involved in attempting to solve the problem of homelessness and were sympathetic towards governments that have at least shown a willingness to deal with the issue. There was, however, a widespread conviction that much more needed to be done. Some took the view that developing a healthy economy might be the first important step to take. Many suggested that collaborating with the various charitable organisations might also be a positive step to take on the grounds that such organisations are far more aware of the difficulties faced by the homeless.

Question 2 *La gastronomía*

Si el consumo del alcohol es malo para la salud del individuo, ¿por qué es una actividad tan popular?

This was a very popular title and was generally well dealt with by candidates, many of whom were able to draw upon their own experiences of being exposed to alcohol both within the family setting and in their social lives. Some candidates felt that alcohol should be treated like any other commonly available drug and that advertising alcoholic products should be either completely prohibited or at least more strictly controlled.

There was an awareness that the moderate consumption of alcohol is socially acceptable in many societies but a number of essays went on to point out that that is where the problems of alcoholism often start.

Question 3 *El empleo y el desempleo*

Tener trabajo debería ser un derecho humano en el mundo moderno. ¿Está usted de acuerdo?

This title provided a reasonable number of responses most of which agreed wholeheartedly that work should indeed be a basic human right in the modern world. Whilst many agreed with this, some essays were quick to point out that very few, if indeed any, governments can actually guarantee every citizen in their country a worthwhile job. The ambition, it appeared, is a noble one but the conversion into reality is the sticking point. Many essays also discussed the importance to the individual's mental health of having a job and of being valued by society. Some essays simply accepted that unemployment is an unfortunate reality of modern life and that how both the individual and the state deal with this situation is really the issue that we need to address.

Question 4 *El desarrollo social y económico*

Hay más desarrollo social y económico si hay buenas relaciones con los países vecinos. ¿Hasta qué punto está usted de acuerdo?

This title proved to be the least popular with candidates. Nevertheless, the understanding of the issues surrounding international relations was impressive. There was a more or less unanimous view that getting on well with neighbouring countries is crucial to social and economic development and that countries that elected to isolate themselves from the rest of the world were the ones that would struggle to prosper in the long run. A willingness to get along with one's neighbours was, it was felt by many, the best way for the world to avoid major conflicts between countries.

Question 5 *El medio ambiente*

Los océanos contaminados son el precio que tenemos que pagar para tener la vida que queremos. ¿Qué opina usted?

This was also a rather popular title with candidates. Some essays suggested unashamedly that the premise of the title was flawed and that sea pollution is definitely not the price we have to pay for our current lifestyles. Many suggestions were made as to how to avoid such pollution in particular by resorting to increased levels of sanctions (financial and political) against those countries that do pollute international waters. Many felt that the United Nations should have a more proactive role in all this. Equally important for many, however, was the role of the individual in making sure that recyclable materials are always recycled and not absent-mindedly tossed into a waste bin.