

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.
- We remind candidates to ask the Examiner questions in both conversation sections

For centres:

- The test consists of three distinct sections: **(i)** Initial presentation (maximum 3½ 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 a wide range. Some very good candidates were seemingly native or near-native speakers, but occasionally the teacher/examiner allowed the candidate to exceed the required timings. On a few occasions the general conversation became an extension of the topic conversation and there were a few presentations that were not related to any Spanish-speaking country.

Most candidates had been suitably prepared for the examination. They showed their interest in the chosen topics and could speak for the required time.

A few teachers / examiners did not strive to develop a proper conversation with the candidates or failed to prompt them to ask the required questions. This is particularly galling when an otherwise good candidate loses 10 marks because the teacher fails to prompt the candidate to ask two questions in each section. Overall though, teacher/examiners entered into the spirit of the test and helped candidates to produce the best possible recordings.

The quality of the recordings was generally of a high standard with just a few suffering from low volume or intrusive background noise. 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 instances 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.

While most centres carried out the necessary administration efficiently, a few centres failed to observe the correct timings for the separate sections as required by the specification.

Comments on specific sections

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 and it is important that candidates make this relevance clear in their Presentation. The content mark out of ten has to be halved where no specific reference to a Spanish-speaking country or context is made.

Presentations should be a formal and coherent introduction to the subject: pronunciation and clarity of delivery 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.

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. 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.

Part 3: General Conversation

The General Conversation must be a separate section from the Topic Conversation and not 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. As has been reported in previous sessions, there were still some cases of questioning at a level more appropriate to IGCSE. Although the conversation could start with some basic, personal or factual questions, candidates must be moved on to more complex issues and 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.

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. 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 gain access to the higher levels of the mark scheme, 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

The examination provided an appropriate level of challenge and discriminated well amongst the candidates, most of whom seemed to have a native background in Spanish. The linguistic competence was generally excellent and, provided that there were no penalties for lack of comprehension, top marks for quality of language were almost always awarded. The topic of the trustworthiness of information and where best to seek it was one that all candidates were able to relate to, and comprehension was usually clearly demonstrated.

Very few candidates seemed troubled by the time constraints of the examination. Most candidates appeared to have been well coached in the techniques needed. Better candidates produced skilful paraphrasing in their answers to comprehension questions, although lifting, (the direct copying of five or more words from the text), occasionally invalidated a mark.

There was still a significant number who seemed to have misunderstood **Question 5(a)**, with many appearing to have been trained to answer this question as a general summary or comparison of the two texts rather than focusing on the question asked. Also, a small number of candidates exceeded the permitted number of words for this question which meant that part, or sometimes all, of **5(b)** could not be assessed.

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, although one or two disregarded the rubric and simply explained the phrase in their own words.

- (a) The majority of candidates identified this phrase. A few attempted incorrectly to answer with *expandió rápidamente*.
- (b) Most candidates were successful in identifying this phrase. Some lost the mark by adding *...con que circulan*.

- (c) This was readily identified. The answers that were not accepted omitted ...*y escribir*, and or were prefaced by *que..* or *la gente que...*
- (d) Widely well-answered, with the commonest error being omission of the initial *es...*
- (e) This proved to be very accessible and there were very few incorrect answers.

Question 2

Two main points in this exercise are worth noting: the resulting sentences or phrases need to fit back in the text with exactly the same meaning, and linguistic knowledge is needed in order to complete the task successfully.

- (a) Candidates were familiar with this transformation to a passive construction and most answered correctly. A common error was to use *fueron* or *han sido* instead of *son* *publicados*.
- (b) Candidates from a native speaker background had very little trouble at all in successfully forming a suitable equivalent phrase using *dejado*.
- (c) This proved to be much more of a challenge. Virtually the only way to produce an equivalent phrase incorporating *rareza* was by using *tal* or *tanta*. Answers such as *hay mentiras de mucha rareza* did not convey the same meaning as *hay mentiras de tal/tanta rareza*.
- (d) This should have been relatively straightforward although marks were carelessly lost by the omission of *específicamente* or the addition of an ungrammatical *de* after *intentando*.
- (e) Most candidates were aware of the need of a subjunctive after *es probable que...* Unfortunately there were a few cases where candidates left out the verb *es* and so the mark was not awarded.

Question 3

The text, commenting on the rapid spread of fake news on social media, was generally well understood.

- (a) Most candidates got off to a good start with many scoring at least two marks out of three, usually for stating that residents left their homes and the authorities announcing that it was a lie. The mark for three being arrested proved more elusive, perhaps being considered too obvious to warrant inclusion. Sometimes answers such as *se desmintiera la noticia* were given without specifying who announced that the news was false. There was a lot of lifting of ...*huyeron a los cerros antes de que...*
- (b) Most candidates understood that fake news spread quickly and that it filters through to users according to their profiles. A number of candidates did not add the detail that it reached so many because of advances in technology.
- (c) The most common mark for this question was two. The majority of candidates understood that fake news is generally believed because it is spread by friends or family, and that it all depended on the level of education, (a common lift was *depende del nivel educativo de la*). The point about some lies being so absurd that nobody believes them was sometimes missed out altogether, insufficiently explained, e.g. *algunas mentiras son muy extrañas* (without the follow up that nobody believes them) or incorrectly rendered, e.g. *la gente no cree mucha información falsa*.
- (d) Nearly everyone understood the two types of false information, but some struggled to indicate how to deal with it. Either this was missed out altogether or answers were vague, such as *hay que tomar medidas*, lacking the detail that those who control social media should take appropriate steps and that users should exercise greater caution.
- (e) This presented a bit of a challenge. Candidates needed to identify what the problem was. They need to be fully aware that if they use pronouns there has to be a referent. For instance in the sentence *porque solo es un problema si la gente lo cree* there is no clear referent and so a mark cannot be given. The correct answer would have been *porque solo es un problema si la gente cree la información falsa*.

Sección 2

Question 4

The second text, describing how the younger generation's approach to acquiring information is changing, also appeared to be well understood by most candidates.

- (a) A score of two marks was the most common outcome. Candidates clearly understood that only a quarter of young people read printed newspapers and that they get their news from social media. Only a minority offered the third point: that they do value news. Many found it hard to avoid lifting expressions such as *solo el 25% de los jóvenes* or *16 y 30 años lee...*
- (b) A range of marks was awarded. Quite a few candidates were not specific enough and referred to the preferences of people in general rather than of young people, e.g. *el 77% de las personas se informa por las redes sociales*. Other missed the detail that this is more popular than even the television. Also some candidates only mentioned reading in general, e.g. *genera un problema porque pierden lectores*, which could be interpreted as if people were not reading books, for example. Others did not mention that it was young people who were not reading newspapers. Most candidates understood that the problem was also that there will be no newspaper readers in the future.
- (c) For many candidates the first point in this question, that it was young people who did not want to pay to read newspapers, was often missed because *jóvenes* were not referred to. Most understood that *Montes* thinks reading the news should be free, but many muddled the equation money equals less impartiality giving contrary answers such as *mientras el dinero esté involucrado habrá más imparcialidad*.
- (d) This question was generally done well, although not so many candidates picked up the first point about young people not trusting traditional media. Most candidates indicated that *Montes* is against traditional media because these only publish what they are interested in and are biased, and also that there is no freedom of the press. (A few candidates lost the final mark when they directly lifted five or more words from *que la libertad de prensa ya no existe*).
- (e) This question proved to be very accessible and full scores of three marks were not uncommon. Most candidates were successful in expressing that the press should use social media, that it should reflect young people's preferences and be readily available free of charge.

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. There was often a tendency for candidates to exceed the word limit by a small amount, often meaning that the final sentence or so of **5(b)** could not be considered. 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) There was a lot of generalisation often focusing on what the press should do rather than the problems it faced. That said, although top marks were rarely awarded, a number of answers scored 7, 8 or 9. There was still a tendency to give general summaries of the texts, to point out how the two were linked, to waste words with superfluous starters such as *en el primer texto/en el segundo texto* and to make generalisations which were usually too vague to score. A very few candidates wrote a general essay with scant regard to the texts.

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:

Las noticias falsas siguen existiendo y gracias a las redes sociales ✓ su alcance es masivo ✓ y su difusión rápida. ✓ Algunas se generan para engañar ✓ y otras son producto del descuido. ✓ Muchas veces proceden de conocidos ✓ y la gente las cree...

In about forty words over half the available marks have been scored, leaving ample room to select specific, relevant details from the second text and also for a good three or so sentences in **5(b)**. Unlike the following answer which, because of generalisation, uses many more words to score a single mark:

Los problemas asociados con la publicación de información actualmente son complejos. Con los tiempos modernos, la forma en que la información conecta con sus receptores ha cambiado. Hoy en día son más los jóvenes que se informan a través de redes sociales ✓ que por los medios convencionales como la televisión...

- (b) Most candidates were 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.
The nature of this particular question often made it difficult for candidates to come up with highly original answers to this question. Most gave a very similar response: that it was mainly the older generation who read newspapers, either from force of habit or discomfort in using technology. One or two original observations included that kiosks were closing down, and that fewer newspapers would be good for the planet as more trees would be saved.

Quality of Language

The quality of candidates' written Spanish was excellent. 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.



SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/22
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

The examination provided an appropriate level of challenge and discriminated well, with a wide range of marks awarded to candidates from across the ability range. The topic of tourism, highlighting very different problems being experienced in Central America and the Balearics, was one that every candidate appeared to be familiar with. There was an understandable difference in performance between the 9719 candidates, many of whom were native speakers, and those taking 8685, who were invariably students of Spanish as a foreign language.

The presentation of the papers was generally good, and very few candidates seemed troubled by the time constraints of the examination. Most candidates appeared to have been well coached in the techniques required although lifting, (the direct copying of five or more words from the text), often invalidated a mark for comprehension among 8685 candidates. Better candidates produced skilful paraphrasing in their answers to comprehension questions; less able candidates often deconstructed and then reordered parts of sentences in the text with very variable degrees of success. A small number of candidates exceeded the permitted number of words in **Question 5** which meant that part, or sometimes all, of their personal response could not be assessed.

Comments on specific questions

Sección 1

Question 1

The exercise worked well, with errors mostly comprising superfluous words at the beginning or ending of a phrase.

- (a) Quite a few answers incorrectly added *quienes* at the beginning.
- (b) Most candidates were successful in identifying this phrase. A few omitted *cuando...*
- (c) This was readily identified, with commonest error being the omission of se....

- (d) Widely well-answered, although some answers were invalidated when prefaced by *por...* or by the omission of *promoción*.
- (e) This proved to be very accessible. Some answers omitted *hay*.

Question 2

- (a) Several alternatives were possible although most required the use of the subjunctive. This was often not recognised by less able candidates and, where it was, the orthographical change to produce *lleguen* was sometimes overlooked.
- (b) Only a minority of candidates recognised that *no / nada más de* is an alternative way of expressing *solo*. Many attempted to use the cue word in ways which altered the meaning eg *más o menos*. Some invalidated an otherwise correct answer by omitting the initial *de...*, and others by writing *más que*.
- (c) There was a better response to this manipulation with more candidates showing an ability to use *sober* + infinitive.
- (d) There were many possible ways of adapting this phrase to incorporate the noun *mención* in place of the verb *mencionaba*, although not many candidates were successful in doing so. Many candidates either omitted *tampoco* or were unable to use it correctly in the phrase. Some otherwise correct answers were marred by use of a verb tense other than the imperfect or preterite.
- (e) This was well done by 9719 candidates. Quite a few 8685 candidates did not supply the subjunctive after *es esencial que...*

Question 3

The text, commenting on the decline in visitors to the archaeological parks in *El Salvador*, was generally well understood. A common trend among less able candidates was, after identifying parts of the text that would answer questions, to rearrange the word order of phrases to avoid copying directly. Only when this technique produced coherent answers was it rewarded. Candidates who showed comprehension by answering in their own words fared better, especially in the mark awarded for quality of language.

- (a) Most candidates got off to a good start with many scoring at least two marks out of three. There was some misunderstanding of the distinction between *visitantes nacionales* and *extranjeros*. Five or more words were often copied from *la cultura de las antiguas ciudades de la comunidad Maya*.
- (b) Provided that they could cope with the double negative, most candidates were able to score a mark for noting *Iribas's* opinion that the parks were safe to visit. The word *ubicados* caused some confusion and fewer candidates were able to state that the problems of violence were to be found in the areas surrounding the parks. The recommendation not to walk around in the vicinity of the parks was well understood.
- (c) Understanding of this paragraph appeared to be good, although reproducing the three facts required in answer to the question – that only 150 attended and numbers had decreased when they normally increase for this type of event – was often incomplete. Several candidates insisted on using *nombre* for *número* which removed coherence from their answers.
- (d) After being sidetracked by the Ministry's lack of enthusiasm for promoting the archaeological parks, most went on to consider the *nota*, (which is what the question asked), and picked up two marks for saying that there was no mention of opening hours or programmes of activities. Only the more able candidates went on to convey the idea that the parks were only listed among other tourist destinations, with no specific focus on them.

- (e) Provided that lifts were avoided, (*no entran a los museos* was often copied directly), many were able to score all three marks here. That people treat archaeological parks like any other park, do not set foot in the museums and generally show ignorance of what they are visiting, appeared to be well understood.

Sección 2

Question 4

The second text, describing how *Mallorca* is suffering in the opposite way from *El Salvador*, with too many visitors, was well understood by most candidates.

- (a) A common outcome for this question was for candidates to score two of the three marks available. Invariably, these were in answer to the first element of this two part question: that the historic centre of *Palma* was being overcrowded with tourists, forcing local residents to move out from certain areas. Only the more able candidates were able to understand the remedy being sought: *suspender indefinidamente la concesión de licencias para alojamientos turísticos*. Many either lifted too many of these words or incorrectly stated that the aim was to stop tourists from going to the island.
- (b) Three relatively straightforward, factual answers were sought here and many scored full marks. Those who did not, perhaps in an attempt to avoid lifts, often omitted words which the mark scheme was seeking eg *privados, de alquiler*. Five or more words were commonly copied from *cortes en el suministro de agua para la población*.
- (c) Provided that lifts were avoided most candidates were able to note that the cruise ships made heavy demands on natural resources. Perhaps because of unfamiliarity with *escaso* there was some confusion over whether these ships had a positive or negative effect on the local economy. The last point – *Palma* being treated as a kind of theme park – occasionally proved a little elusive. Some candidates generalised that all ports were like theme parks.
- (d) Only more able candidates scored both the marks on offer here. To do so it was necessary to say that *Silvestre* wanted to improve infrastructure in order to alleviate the feeling of saturation experienced by local residents and that the way to do this was to extend the tourist season throughout the whole year. A number of students lost marks by lifting *a lo largo del año*.
- (e) The initial part of *Balaguer's* proposals proved to be quite challenging for the majority of 8685 candidates, who frequently resorted to lifting or unsuccessful rearrangement of the word order of his first suggestion: that tourist apartments should be regulated in order to prioritise residents' right to housing. 9719 candidates were more successful in unpicking this. The second suggestion of levying an ecotax which would be used to repair environmental damage was well understood, enabling most candidates to score at least two marks.

Question 5

The majority of candidates had been well prepared in the techniques needed to answer this question. A very few candidates wrote a general essay on tourism with scant regard to the texts. There was also a tendency for candidates to exceed the word limit by a small amount, often meaning that the final sentence or so of **5(b)** could not be considered. 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.

- (a) 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. In this exercise, candidates are not penalised for copying directly from the text(s). It should be remembered, however, that any copied material will not be considered in the Quality of Language mark. Candidates should also refrain from offering personal opinions in this part of the question. Better scores were often achieved by candidates who wrote in their own words, allowing themselves to be considerably more concise than those who relied heavily on sentences from the texts. Quite a few candidates scored 5/6. Some candidates still persisted in wasting words on unnecessary introductions: *En el texto 1 se habla sobre El Salvador y la Ruta Maya, que son ocho parques arqueológicos que atraen a muchos turistas por su cultura y el medio ambiente...* This wastes thirty words without a mark having been scored.

An example of an answer which uses the very limited number of words far more profitably begins: *Los parques arqueológicos enseñan una disminución de turistas. ✓ Esto es porque la sociedad los ve peligrosos. ✓ El transporte público no deja a los visitantes dentro de los parques. ✓ El Ministerio no incluye muchos detalles en sus promociones. ✓ Hay desconocimiento de la sociedad ✓ al no haber promociones en las escuelas...* ✓ Six marks have been scored in fewer than fifty words, leaving ample room to select specific details from the second text which answer the question which has been asked, and also for a good three or so sentences in **5(b)**.

- (b)** Most candidates were 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. Additionally, this is an opportunity to display familiarity with more complex linguistic structures.

The countries where most candidates lived often reaped considerable benefits from tourism and many opinions were justifiably positive. Examples of problems caused by tourism which had not featured in the texts included private beaches where local residents were not allowed, rudeness and bad behaviour, litter and drunkenness.

Quality of language

The quality of candidates' written Spanish, here and throughout the paper, was generally well up to the standard required by this examination, with most 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

The examination provided an appropriate level of challenge and discriminated well, with a wide range of marks awarded to candidates from across the ability range. The topic of property purchase, highlighting very different issues being experienced in Cuba and Spain, was accessible to all.

The presentation of the papers was generally good, and very few candidates seemed troubled by the time constraints of the examination. Most candidates appeared to have been well coached in the techniques required, although lifting, (the direct copying of five or more words from the text). Better candidates produced skilful paraphrasing in their answers to comprehension questions; less able candidates often deconstructed and then reordered parts of sentences from the text with very variable degrees of success. A small number of candidates exceeded the permitted number of words in **Question 5** which meant that part, or sometimes all, of their personal response could not be assessed.

Comments on specific questions

Sección 1

Question 1

The exercise worked well, with errors mostly comprising superfluous words at the beginning or ending of a phrase.

- (a) This was answered correctly by the vast majority of candidates.
- (b) Many more problems were encountered here. There were several incorrect attempts to base the answer around ...*significan ciertas frases*... Those who did target the correct phrase often omitted *lo que*... or ...*en realidad*.
- (c) This was more readily identified, with commonest error being the omission of *se*...
- (d) Mixed results were achieved here. A number of candidates added ...*de hacerlo*.

- (e) This proved to be relatively accessible. Candidates from an English-speaking background were able to latch on to the cognate *puzzle*.

Question 2

- (a) Only a minority of candidates recognised that *no/nada más que* is an alternative way of expressing *solo*. Many attempted to use the cue word in ways which altered the meaning e.g. *más o menos*.
- (b) Many recognised the need for a subjunctive construction after *es imprescindible que*, and more success was achieved here than in any other of the manipulations. A number of candidates overlooked the fact that *entender* is an orthographical changing verb.
- (c) Only a minority of candidates appeared to be aware of the expression *tener ganas de*.
- (d) The main issue here appeared to be the formation of the adverb *permanentemente*. Many incorrectly thought their work had been done by answering *extranjeros que residen permanente*. The only acceptable way to use *permanente* was in constructions such as *de forma permanente*. A few candidates invalidated an otherwise correct answer when they wrote *permanentemente*.
- (e) Some candidates produced correct answers, while other candidates incorrectly treated *interesa* as a noun. Many who recognised it to be a verb were unable to use it impersonally with an appropriate relative pronoun prefaced by *a*.

Question 3

The text, on the topic of house purchase in *Cuba*, discriminated well. A common trend among less able candidates was, after identifying parts of the text that they thought would answer questions, to rearrange the word order of phrases to avoid copying directly. Only when this technique produced coherent answers was it rewarded. Candidates who showed comprehension by answering in their own words fared better, especially in the mark awarded for quality of language.

- (a) Most candidates got off to a good start with many scoring at least two marks out of three. The mark scheme required answers to state that Cubans now had the opportunity to both buy and sell houses. Some difficulty was noted in using an appropriate tense to say that only house exchange had been allowed prior to 2011. Many quite legitimately borrowed the paraphrase prompt from **1(a)** to note that cheap properties were available.
- (b) Although it appeared in quotation marks in the text the six words of *vivienda cercana a hoteles y hospitales* still counted as a lift – and one that was very easily avoidable e.g. *cerca de/hospitales y hoteles*. Many picked up the mark for the importance of understanding jargon. Details were sometimes omitted from the true meaning of *Bermúdez*'s example, that the district had running water and low risk of power cuts.
- (c) Apart from the word *codiciadas* – which could be used successfully in answers without full knowledge of its meaning – understanding of this paragraph appeared to be good. The main reason why more scores of three or four marks were not recorded was direct lifting, possibly involuntary on occasions, of *casas construidas antes de la Revolución* and *casas construidas después de la Revolución*. The differences between the two types of houses were usually clearly stated.
- (d) This was one of the more accessible of the comprehension questions and, provided that full details were given – properties could be purchased by Cuban or foreign residents or through Cuban friends or partners – good marks were achieved.
- (e) Even though they may not have fully understood the meaning of *hipotecas* most candidates scored a mark for saying that these were not available in Cuba. Only more able candidates picked up the second mark for a full answer which stated that wealthy Cubans were allowed to own two houses, thereby reducing supply for outsiders wishing to invest.

Sección 2

Question 4

The second text, dealing with the younger generation's attitudes towards property purchase, provided a similar challenge to that of the first.

- (a) Most candidates scored at least one mark for noting that young people preferred to rent. (All that was necessary was to find an alternative to *preferen* to insert before *optar por el arrendamiento*). The verb *hipotecarse* proved harder to negotiate than the noun had been in the previous exercise, and a number were unsuccessful here. Most seemed to understand that young people didn't want to be caught out by a new economic crisis, although there was some difficulty in expressing this.
- (b) This paragraph was well understood and two or three marks were usually scored. The facts that jobs were less stable, there would be greater mobility and also marriage were readily identified. There was occasionally some confusion over whether these steered young people towards or away from property purchase.
- (c) Perhaps because of misunderstanding *una vez conseguida la hipoteca* in the question many candidates began their answer with an irrelevant sentence about savings and taxes. This sometimes led to the omission of some of the very accessible items of household expenditure – furniture, services and maintenance.
- (d) The first two details concerning young people's fears of being tied to their property – being unconvinced by the argument that they can always sell and that this can take time – were often clearly stated. Greater difficulty was encountered in attempts to express the reasons for a reluctance to rent the property out.
- (e) Most candidates availed themselves of the very accessible mark for noting that homeownership entails a great deal of stress. The example given of problems with neighbours being difficult to resolve was also often clearly stated. Many noted that repairs would have to be made to the property, but few were able to add regardless of cost.

Question 5

The majority of candidates had been well prepared in the techniques needed to answer this question. 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. There was often a tendency for candidates to exceed the word limit by a small amount, often meaning that the final sentence or so of **5(b)** could not be considered. 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) 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. In this exercise, candidates are not penalised for copying directly from the text(s). It should be remembered, however, that any copied material will not be considered in the Quality of Language mark. Candidates should also refrain from offering personal opinions in this part of the question.

Better scores were often achieved by candidates who wrote in their own words, allowing themselves to be considerably more concise than those who relied heavily on sentences from the texts. Quite a few candidates scored 5/6.

Some candidates still persisted in wasting words on unnecessary introductions and on information which did not give details of the problems relating to house purchase and ownership: *Los dos textos 1 y 2 son sobre las dificultades de la vivienda que puede afectar la vida de los ciudadanos. En Cuba la historia de comprar una casa es muy diferente. Después de 2011 la gente puede comprar una casa a precio de ganga...* This wastes forty-five words without a mark having been scored.

An example of an answer which uses the very limited number of words available far more profitably begins: *En Cuba es difícil entender la jerga del mercado. ✓ Las casas construidas después de los 50 son de calidad mixta. ✓ Solo los cubanos residentes ✓ o los extranjeros con residencia permanente pueden comprar. ✓ No hay hipotecas...* ✓ Five marks have been scored in fewer words, leaving ample room to select specific details from the second text which answer the question which has been asked, and also for a good three or so sentences in **5(b)**.

- (b) Most candidates were 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. Additionally, this is an opportunity to display familiarity with more complex linguistic structures.

In the countries where most candidates lived houses were mostly owned by the older generation or foreign investors. Young people were unlikely to get on the housing ladder, especially in the cities where most jobs were to be found and prices were highest. Candidates who gave an opinion railed against the injustice of the situation and thought the government should intervene or build more houses.

Quality of Language

The quality of candidates' written Spanish, here and throughout the paper, was generally well up to the standard required by this examination, with most marks in the Sound, Good, or Very Good bands.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/31
Essay

Key messages

In order to perform well in this paper, candidates should:

- select the title with which they feel most comfortable
- write a response that is clearly relevant, well-illustrated, coherently structured and well-informed
- 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

There was a wide variety of ability levels on display in the essays for this session. Many essays were easy to read, interesting, well structured and full of intelligently expressed thoughts and ideas in response to the title selected. As is often the case, the manner in which many candidates were able to deal with their chosen essay thoroughly as well as convincingly was a clear reflection of their linguistic ability and the meaningful preparation carried out both by centres and by learners. As always, those involved with preparing learners for this paper and indeed the learners themselves deserve much praise for the professional approach to this particular task.

Those essays where it was obvious that the candidates were properly focused on the actual title set on the paper and where great determination was shown to deal with the issues raised by the title were the essays that attracted more marks at the upper end of the mark scheme. Those candidates who elected to write in very general terms about the overall topic (as opposed to the more specific title) tended to let themselves down, especially in terms of the marks for content.

There were relatively few essays that exceeded the stipulated word count (250 – 400 words) and equally few essays that gave the clear impression that they had been pre-learnt and which had little, if indeed anything, to do with the title set and were mainly a collection of superficial thoughts on the general topic (e.g. *La guerra y la paz*) rather than on the actual title set. These messages appear to have been fully understood by candidates and their essays are all the better for it. As has been stated before on many occasions, Examiners will always award content marks in the upper sections of the mark scheme to candidates whose essays are relevant to the title set whereas those essays that are inclined to show scant understanding of the actual title or which deal vaguely and arbitrarily with the issues are highly unlikely to attract such good marks for content. The mark scheme states that for an essay to be awarded a 'very good' mark for content, it needs to be 'detailed, clearly relevant and well-illustrated' as well as being 'coherently argued and structured'. The very best essays ticked these important boxes. If candidates have a clear understanding of the mark scheme, it follows that they are far more likely to produce better essays.

In terms of the quality of Spanish used by candidates, there were many essays which showed great confidence in the use of complex sentence patterns and advanced grammatical structures. Such essays tended to show a good sense of idiom as well as an ability to draw upon extensive vocabulary that was relevant to the issues under discussion. Equally, there were plenty of essays that also read reasonably well and showed a generally sound grasp of Spanish grammar with some attempts at varied vocabulary. Again, it is worth mentioning that the mark scheme clearly states what is expected in the essays written by candidates in order to attract marks in the various language categories ranging from 'very poor' to 'very good'.

The more common issues with the Spanish language are, as always, worth highlighting in order that future candidates can be made aware of the most common pitfalls that tend to present themselves with each

examination session. We recommend to centres and teaching to pass this information on to candidates preparing for this examination.

An extremely common but nevertheless very mistaken tendency of some candidates is to use singular verbs with plural subjects and vice-versa. Examples such as '*la gente son importantes*' (sic), '*el respeto entre amigos son necesarios*' (sic) and '*muchas ciudades está contaminadas*' (sic) were not unusual. This is such a basic error that it really is worth informing candidates just how widespread the misunderstanding is in order that it can be avoided in future. The lack of understanding with regard to the need for adjectival agreement in Spanish was also prevalent in numerous essays. Utterances such as '*...los criminales determinado...*' (sic), '*la contaminación atmosférico*' (sic) and '*las empresas exitosos*' (sic) were not uncommon and inevitably had an adverse effect on the marks awarded for language.

A good number of candidates were inclined to drop the letter 'h' when using the perfect or pluperfect tenses, especially in examples such as '*el gobierno a decidido*' (sic) and '*muchas tropas abían invadido...*' (sic) and, indeed, some candidates managed to insert the same letter unnecessarily into certain lexical items (e.g. '*...el viaje ha a la ciudad*' (sic) and '*los problemas no van ha desaparecer...*' (sic). Some candidates were inclined to use a gerund instead of a verbal noun in sentences such as '*...viviendo en la ciudad es difícil*'. Equally common was the tendency of many candidates to disregard the importance and the proper application of basic punctuation, thereby rendering certain sentences almost incomprehensible. The use of the letters 'c' and 's' continues to cause confusion amongst a number of candidates with items such as '*desisión*' (sic) and '*construcción*' (sic) used liberally. For reasons unknown, the word '*consecuencia*' also caused some considerable grief for candidates with many of them spelling it with 'qu' instead of a 'c'..

Examples of good use of the language included:

- The passive voice being used correctly.
- Accents being used accurately throughout the essay.
- The use of a variety of appropriately constructed tenses.
- A clear understanding of the differences between the verbs *ser* and *estar*.
- The correct use, depending on context, of *por* and *para*.

Common errors included:

- The continued misunderstanding of the differences between *hay* and *es/tiene*.
- Poor use of punctuation and occasionally hardly any punctuation at all.
- The lack of accents seriously affecting comprehension, particularly when it came to tenses (*tomara/tomará, tomo/tomó, esta/está* and so on).
- Confusion over the use of the verbs *ser* and *estar*.
- The dropping of the letter 'h' with an auxiliary verb (e.g. '*los padres an tenido problemas con el comportamiento de sus hijos*' (sic)).

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 *Las relaciones humanas*

Tener amigos que confían en ti no es un derecho automático. Es un privilegio que hay que ganar. ¿Hasta qué punto estás de acuerdo?

This was a popular title with candidates, perhaps unsurprisingly. Good answers were characterised by a variety of highly relevant points stating not just the reasons why trust had to be earned but also highlighting the damage caused when friends were trusted for superficial reasons such as money or trendy clothing. The best answers pointed out the difficulties of trying to achieve a balance between trust and the need to socialise. Personal examples enhanced many of the points made in this particular essay.

Question 2 *La justicia y el orden público*

Meter a los criminales en la cárcel es una pérdida de tiempo y de dinero. ¿Qué opinas tú?

This was also quite a popular title and was generally well dealt with by candidates. The more convincing responses provided a degree of balance with examples of the advantages of rehabilitation as well as the need to protect vulnerable people in society. The weakest answers tended to be extremely one-sided and consisted mainly of simplistic statements (such as, by way of an example, that all criminality should attract corporal punishment) with little development of the ideas.

Question 3 *El trabajo y el ocio*

Las actividades de ocio siempre hacen el trabajo diario más tolerable. ¿Estás de acuerdo?

This title also provided a variety of balanced answers with detailed examples of how leisure pursuits could actually benefit work as well as providing relaxation for employees. The weakest answers were repetitive and simply listed favourite past times. Many candidates were also keen to point out that the leisure industry itself provides many employment opportunities. A point well made.

Question 4 *La guerra y la paz*

¿Hay sitio para la moralidad en la guerra?

This title proved to be slightly less popular with candidates. Most candidates who attempted to respond were inclined to agree that there needs to be a moral code of some sort that governs conflict but went on to lament the ease with which such a code can be easily ignored. There were also many impassioned pleas for war to be avoided at all costs.

Question 5 *La contaminación*

En el país donde vives, ¿hasta qué punto han tenido éxito las medidas tomadas por las autoridades para luchar contra la contaminación en general?

This was also a popular title with candidates. As expected, there was a wide range of responses. Good answers were characterised by a variety of points stating not just what pollution was caused in countries around the world but also the methods adopted to combat the problem and whether or not they were successful. Some essays were critical of the efforts made by some countries to deal with pollution, in particular the larger and more economically successful countries.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/32
Essay

Key messages

In order to perform well in this paper, candidates should:

- select the title with which they feel most comfortable
- write a response that is clearly relevant, well-illustrated, coherently structured and well-informed
- 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

There was a wide variety of ability levels on display in the essays for this session. Many essays were easy to read, interesting, well-structured and full of intelligently expressed thoughts and ideas in response to the title selected. As is often the case, the manner in which many candidates were able to deal with their chosen essay thoroughly as well as convincingly was a clear reflection of their linguistic ability and the meaningful preparation carried out both by centres and by learners. As always, those involved with preparing learners for this paper and indeed the learners themselves deserve much praise for the professional approach to this particular task.

Those essays where it was obvious that the candidates were properly focused on the actual title set on the paper and where great determination was shown to deal with the issues raised by the title were the essays that attracted more marks at the upper end of the mark scheme. Those candidates who elected to write in very general terms about the overall topic (as opposed to the more specific title) tended to let themselves down, especially in terms of the marks for content.

There were relatively few essays that exceeded the stipulated word count (250 – 400 words) and equally few essays that gave the clear impression that they had been pre-learnt and which had little, if indeed anything, to do with the title set and were mainly a collection of superficial thoughts on the general topic (e.g. *La guerra y la paz*) rather than on the actual title set. These messages appear to have been fully understood by candidates and their essays are all the better for it. As has been stated before on many occasions, Examiners will always award content marks in the upper sections of the mark scheme to candidates whose essays are relevant to the title set whereas those essays that are inclined to show scant understanding of the actual title or which deal vaguely and arbitrarily with the issues are highly unlikely to attract such good marks for content. The mark scheme states that for an essay to be awarded a 'very good' mark for content, it needs to be 'detailed, clearly relevant and well-illustrated' as well as being 'coherently argued and structured'. The very best essays ticked these important boxes. If candidates have a clear understanding of the mark scheme, it follows that they are far more likely to produce better essays.

In terms of the quality of Spanish used by candidates, there were many essays which showed great confidence in the use of complex sentence patterns and advanced grammatical structures. Such essays tended to show a good sense of idiom as well as an ability to draw upon extensive vocabulary that was relevant to the issues under discussion. Equally, there were plenty of essays that also read reasonably well and showed a generally sound grasp of Spanish grammar with some attempts at varied vocabulary. Again, it is worth mentioning that the mark scheme clearly states what is expected in the essays written by candidates in order to attract marks in the various language categories ranging from 'very poor' to 'very good'.

The more common issues with the Spanish language are, as always, worth highlighting in order that future candidates can be made aware of the most common pitfalls that tend to present themselves with each examination session. We recommend to centres and teaching to pass this information on to candidates preparing for this examination.

An extremely common but nevertheless very mistaken tendency of some candidates is to use singular verbs with plural subjects and vice-versa. Examples such as '*la gente son importantes*' (sic), '*el respeto entre amigos son necesarios*' (sic) and '*muchas ciudades está contaminadas*' (sic) were not unusual. This is such a basic error that it really is worth informing candidates just how widespread the misunderstanding is in order that it can be avoided in future. The lack of understanding with regard to the need for adjectival agreement in Spanish was also prevalent in numerous essays. Utterances such as '*...los criminales determinado...*' (sic), '*la contaminación atmosférico*' (sic) and '*las empresas exitosos*' (sic) were not uncommon and inevitably had an adverse effect on the marks awarded for language.

A good number of candidates were inclined to drop the letter 'h' when using the perfect or pluperfect tenses, especially in examples such as '*el gobierno a decidido*' (sic) and '*muchas tropas abían invadido...*' (sic) and, indeed, some candidates managed to insert the same letter unnecessarily into certain lexical items (e.g. '*...el viaje ha a la ciudad*' (sic) and '*los problemas no van ha desaparecer...*' (sic). Some candidates were inclined to use a gerund instead of a verbal noun in sentences such as '*...viviendo en la ciudad es difícil*'. Equally common was the tendency of many candidates to disregard the importance and the proper application of basic punctuation, thereby rendering certain sentences almost incomprehensible. The use of the letters 'c' and 's' continues to cause confusion amongst a number of candidates with items such as '*desisión*' (sic) and '*construcción*' (sic) used liberally. For reasons unknown, the word '*consecuencia*' also caused some considerable grief for candidates with many of them spelling it with 'qu' instead of a 'c'.

Examples of good use of the language included:

- The passive voice being used correctly.
- Accents being used accurately throughout the essay.
- The use of a variety of appropriately constructed tenses.
- A clear understanding of the differences between the verbs *ser* and *estar*.
- The correct use, depending on context, of *por* and *para*.

Common errors included:

- The continued misunderstanding of the differences between *hay* and *es/tiene*.
- Poor use of punctuation and occasionally hardly any punctuation at all.
- The lack of accents seriously affecting comprehension, particularly when it came to tenses (*tomara/tomará, tomo/tomó, esta/está* and so on).
- Confusion over the use of the verbs *ser* and *estar*.
- The dropping of the letter 'h' with an auxiliary verb (e.g. '*los padres an tenido problemas con el comportamiento de sus hijos*' (sic)).

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 *Las relaciones humanas*

¿Es verdad que el dinero causa problemas en las relaciones personales?

This was a reasonably popular title. Candidates adopted a wide range of approaches, as one would expect with any essay on the theme of human relationships and money. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there were many personal examples called upon by candidates to illustrate many of the points made in response to this title. Most agreed that money does indeed the potential to cause problems in relationships with friends or family but that this need not be the case all the time.

Question 2 *La justicia y el orden público*

Algunos políticos opinan que los castigos más severos reducen la tasa de criminalidad. ¿Hasta qué punto estás de acuerdo?

This was a less popular title but it was, however, generally well dealt with by candidates. The importance of punishment being seen as a deterrent was raised as the main issue and there was some agreement that the more serious crimes do indeed need to be dealt with firmly by the justice systems around the world. There was also some discussion around the idea that tackling poverty could also be a way to reduce crime rates.

Question 3 *El trabajo y el ocio*

El ocio es el enemigo del trabajo. ¿Qué opinas tú?

This title was dealt with intelligently by candidates and it was clear that many were in a position to draw upon personal experiences in order to illustrate how free time pursuits can affect work as well as mental and physical wellbeing. The best answers provided a balanced view of the situation and talked about the importance of both work and leisure in everyday life.

Question 4 *La guerra y la paz*

Aunque es difícil aceptarlo, la guerra puede tener consecuencias positivas. ¿Estás de acuerdo?

Those candidates who wrote on this topic were able to produce essays of a good standard that provided detailed examples of the indirect positive consequences of war, such as advances in technology. They also went on, however, to point out the devastation invariably caused by the loss of lives and the destruction of property, as well as the negative impact on the economy.

Question 5 *La contaminación*

La contaminación atmosférica en nuestras ciudades no tiene solución. ¿Qué opinas tú?

Candidates who responded to this title were, on the whole, well informed about the types of air pollution and the effects that such pollution can have on the individual. The best answers were more inclined to look at how air pollution was being tackled around the world and the success or not of these efforts.

SPANISH LANGUAGE

Paper 8685/33
Essay

Key messages

In order to perform well in this paper, candidates should:

- select the title with which they feel most comfortable
- write a response that is clearly relevant, well-illustrated, coherently structured and well-informed
- 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

There was a wide variety of ability levels on display in the essays for this session. Many essays were easy to read, interesting, well-structured and full of intelligently expressed thoughts and ideas in response to the title selected. As is often the case, the way in which many candidates were able to deal with their chosen essay was a clear reflection of their linguistic ability and the meaningful preparation carried out both by centres and by learners. As always, those involved with preparing learners for this paper and indeed the learners themselves deserve recognition for the professional approach to this particular task.

Those essays where it was obvious that the candidates were properly focused on the actual title set on the paper and where great determination was shown to deal with the issues raised by the title were the essays that attracted more marks at the upper end of the mark scheme. Those candidates who elected to write in very general terms about the overall topic (as opposed to the more specific title) tended to let themselves down, especially in terms of the marks for content.

There were relatively few essays that exceeded the stipulated word count (250 – 400 words) and equally few essays that gave the clear impression that they had been pre-learned and which had little to do with the title set and were mainly a collection of superficial thoughts on the general topic (e.g. *La guerra y la paz*) rather than on the actual title set. These messages appear to have been fully understood by candidates and their essays are all the better for it. As has been stated before on many occasions, Examiners award content marks in the upper sections of the mark scheme to candidates whose essays are relevant to the title set whereas those essays that are inclined to show scant understanding of the actual title or which deal vaguely with the issues are highly unlikely to attract such good marks for content. The mark scheme states that for an essay to be awarded a 'very good' mark for content, it needs to be 'detailed, clearly relevant and well-illustrated' as well as being 'coherently argued and structured'. The very best essays ticked these important boxes.

In terms of the quality of Spanish used by candidates, there were many essays which showed great confidence in the use of complex sentence patterns and advanced grammatical structures. Such essays tended to show a good sense of idiom as well as an ability to draw upon extensive vocabulary that was relevant to the issues under discussion. Equally, there were plenty of essays that also read reasonably well and showed a generally sound grasp of Spanish grammar with some attempts at varied vocabulary. It is worth mentioning that the mark scheme clearly states what is expected in the essays written by candidates in order to attract marks in the various language categories ranging from 'very poor' to 'very good'.

An extremely common but nevertheless very mistaken tendency of some candidates is to use singular verbs with plural subjects and vice-versa. Examples such as '*la gente son importantes*' (sic), '*el respeto entre amigos son necesarios*' (sic) and '*muchas ciudades está contaminadas*' (sic) were not unusual. This is such a basic error that it really is worth informing candidates just how widespread the misunderstanding is in order that it can be avoided in future. The lack of understanding with regard to the need for adjectival agreement in

Spanish was also prevalent in numerous essays. Utterances such as '*...los criminales determinado...*' (sic), '*la contaminación atmosférico*' (sic) and '*las empresas exitosos*' (sic) were not uncommon and inevitably had an adverse effect on the marks awarded for language.

A good number of candidates were inclined to drop the letter 'h' when using the perfect or pluperfect tenses, especially in examples such as '*el gobierno a decidido*' (sic) and '*muchas tropas abían invadido...*' (sic) and, indeed, some candidates managed to insert the same letter unnecessarily into certain lexical items (e.g. '*...el viaje ha a la ciudad*' (sic) and '*los problemas no van ha desaparecer...*' (sic). Some candidates were inclined to use a gerund instead of a verbal noun in sentences such as '*...viviendo en la ciudad es difícil*'. Equally common was the tendency of many candidates to disregard the importance and the proper application of basic punctuation, thereby rendering certain sentences almost incomprehensible. The use of the letters 'c' and 's' continues to cause confusion amongst a number of candidates with items such as '*desisión*' (sic) and '*construcción*' (sic) used liberally. For reasons unknown, the word '*consecuencia*' also caused some considerable grief for candidates with many of them spelling it with 'qu' instead of a 'c'.

Examples of good use of the language included:

- The passive voice being used correctly.
- Accents being used accurately throughout the essay.
- The use of a variety of appropriately constructed tenses.
- A clear understanding of the differences between the verbs *ser* and *estar*.
- The correct use, depending on context, of *por* and *para*.

Common errors included:

- The continued misunderstanding of the differences between *hay* and *es/tiene*.
- Poor use of punctuation and occasionally hardly any punctuation at all.
- The lack of accents seriously affecting comprehension, particularly when it came to tenses (*tomara/tomará, tomo/tomó, esta/está* and so on).
- Confusion over the use of the verbs *ser* and *estar*.
- The dropping of the letter 'h' with an auxiliary verb (e.g. '*los padres an tenido problemas con el comportamiento de sus hijos*' (sic)).

Comments on specific questions

Question 1 *Las relaciones humanas*

Cuidar a los ancianos debería ser la responsabilidad de la familia. ¿Hasta qué punto estás de acuerdo?

This proved to be a reasonably popular title. Most essays suggested that the main responsibility for looking after elderly members of the family should reside indeed with the family. There was also much discussion about the need for a fair system of social care in order to support those families where such help is difficult to offer within the family itself (in cases such as ill health or geographical separation.) Perhaps unsurprisingly, there were many personal examples drawn upon by candidates to illustrate the points made in response to this title.

Question 2 *La justicia y el orden público*

La falta de respeto hacia la policía es un problema muy serio hoy en día. ¿Estás de acuerdo?

This was also quite a popular title with candidates. There was much agreement that a lack of respect for the police is indeed a problem in today's society. Many felt that this was not helped by a lack of funding in many countries for the police force. Some also pointed out that corruption within the police force in some countries did not help the cause. There was, however, widespread agreement that society in general should be more respectful towards law enforcement officers.

Question 3 *El trabajo y el ocio*

En cualquier empresa exitosa, el bienestar de los empleados debe ser una prioridad. ¿Qué opinas tú?

Most candidates who responded to this title agreed that the welfare of employees should be a priority for all employers. Others were keen to point out in addition that each individual employee has a responsibility for his or her own personal welfare, both physically and mentally. Successful companies, it was suggested, tend to be the ones that look after their employees on a day to day basis.

Question 4 *La guerra y la paz*

Los que más sufren en una guerra son los inocentes. ¿Compartes esta opinión?

There was very little disagreement amongst candidates that the innocent are the ones who suffer most in any given conflict. There was also much discussion about the perceived need for armed conflict in certain extreme situations but that the idea of winners and losers in war was somewhat outdated. Everybody loses in war, it was felt. An approach against which it would be difficult to argue, perhaps.

Question 5 *La contaminación*

La energía alternativa no va a eliminar la contaminación atmosférica. ¿Hasta qué punto estás de acuerdo?

This was a popular title amongst candidates. Most of the essays that were written in response to the title showed an impressive clarity of thinking around the issues involved. Alternative energy sources are crucial to the planet's survival, it was argued, but they could not completely get rid of atmospheric pollution. Most felt, however, that traditional fossil fuels will soon be a thing of the past. Accordingly, it was pointed out, we need to adapt.