

PRINCIPAL COURSE SPANISH

Paper 9781/01
Speaking

General comments

The overall quality of speaking was impressive and the candidates gave the impression of being well prepared. The discussion of the wider theme was a differentiator, with better candidates willing to take positions and show initiative, thereby avoiding waffle. Some successfully adopted the approach (associated with the Paper 3 discursive essay) of presenting both sides of the case. It was gratifying that those whose studies of the Spanish-speaking world had covered issues such as *indígenas* in Latin America, the Spanish *crisis*, drugs/security in Mexico or Colombia, the different approach of an Argentine Pope or the rise of Podemos in Spain were able to deploy this knowledge to their advantage. Many were impressively up to date with the fluid situation in Spanish politics at the time of the exam.

Comments on specific questions

Section A (Newspaper Article Discussion)

Centres welcomed the use of more than four cards for the Discussion of Article. Card 4 was the most favoured option, presumably because 'Young people' sounded unproblematic. However, a number of candidates did not understand the reference to Spain's economic problems in the text. Instead, many thought that the *ni-nis* were the scions of wealthy families who had been spoiled so rotten that they were too idle to work. Others attributed *ni-ni* syndrome solely to laziness. The wider conversation, covering *inter alia* values/influences/concerns among young people and whether the political system recognized their aspirations, proved just as challenging as questions on other cards.

On Card 2 some candidates misconstrued the *Comisión* as a government rather than a think-tank. On Card 6, most candidates did well in hypothesizing on the reasons for the health habits described. Cards 3 and 5 provoked often profound discussion on religion in contemporary society and indigenous rights, though surprisingly few candidates who chose Card 5 referred to the importance of ancestors or belief systems for indigenous cultures.

Many candidates started their Discussion of Article with '*Este artículo se trata de...*' even though the 'se' is not required in that context. *Párrafo* was a useful word for summarizing the article, though some candidates offered incorrect alternatives.

Section B (Prepared Topic Discussion)

In this section, candidates were able to cope well with questions that arose naturally (ie rather than from their headers) and with their headers being drawn on in whatever order seemed most natural at the end of their introduction. Topics that allowed easier scope for voicing opinion were wiser choices than more descriptive or narrative subject matter. Most candidates chose topics closely linked with a cultural aspect of a Hispanic country, contributing to contextualize the topic as required by the syllabus. Statistical evidence was often helpful (though needs to be accurate – it is not hard to check). In at least one case a candidate's fluency was clearly impaired by his attempts to recall pre-learned material. *Que yo sepa* was perhaps a curious idiom to choose when setting out factual points on topics the candidates had spent the previous year researching.

Control of grammatical accuracy remained a challenge. Adjective agreement is a requirement for a candidate's Spanish to be deemed 'accurate'. The present tense posed a number of challenges, as did *gustar*. To score over half-marks in Range and Accuracy requires – even for native-speaker candidates – a conscious and deliberate effort to use broader vocabulary and complex sentence patterns, including

accurate subjunctives. Around half the type 2 or type 3 *si* clauses attempted did not achieve the correct combination of tenses. Correct use of the imperfect subjunctive, where required by the sequence of tenses, was a differentiator.

Frequent language errors included the incorrect assumption that *depende* was a stem-changing verb and some fanciful permutations of *mostrar*. There was muddling of *bien / bueno* and *falta / culpa*. Many offered incorrect variants on *el resultado* and many more used feminine articles with *problema*. *Enseñanza* was not always recognized. The most commonly occurring higher-register word was *arraigado*, with *infractores* and *malhechores* also impressive on Card 2. *Micromesenazgo* was the most striking newcomer of the year. On idioms, candidates often attempted anglicisms in place of *cada vez más/cada vez menos* + adjective. Time structures using *desde hace* or equivalents were often overlooked in favour of anglicised variants. 'Personas' was overused: there is usually a more accurate term available (*usuarios, pasajeros, transeuntes, consumidores, espectadores, ciudadanos, vecinos, votantes, aficionados....*). 'Según' would have helped the flow on occasions.

On pronunciation, the letter 's' was often lisped or, at the end of a word, pronounced like an English 'z'. *Europa* and *uropeo* proved tricky, and *aceptar* was often pronounced as though it had a double c. *Legalización* and even *ejercicio* proved a mouthful for some candidates who chose Cards 2 and 6 respectively. The more problematic stress doubts covered words like *cárteles* (for drug cartels), *cánceres*, and, as ever, *Guernica* and *difícil*. Attempts at *-ara* imperfect subjunctives missed the mark when stressed as though the future tense.

Lighter moments included assertions that young people '*deben hacer ejercicio después de tomar alcohol*', that Mrs Thatcher was a '*líder feroz*', that '*el gobierno debería crear escuelas para enseñar los crímenes*' and the term *obtener cáncer*.

PRINCIPAL COURSE SPANISH

<p>Paper 9781/02 Reading and Listening</p>
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Key messages

In order to do well in this examination, candidates should:

- focus only on the required information and communicate it precisely in their answers
- pay particular attention to conveying the required information to the Examiner in unambiguous language.

General comments

This report will look at candidates' performance in this session, but will also concentrate on giving advice and guidance for future examinations.

This is a mixed-skills paper which allows candidates to show their Spanish-language skills in Reading and Listening. Candidates have 2 hours 15 minutes to complete the paper. They are advised to spend 1 hour 15 minutes on the Reading exercises and 1 hour on the Listening exercises. They may choose the order in which they prefer to tackle the exercises.

Comments on specific questions

Part I – Reading (30 marks)

There are two passages with a combined limit of 500–650 words. The first passage has reading comprehension questions in Spanish requiring answers in Spanish. Although these answers are not assessed for quality of language, candidates must not 'lift' phrases from the passage. The second passage has questions in English that require answers in English. The third exercise is a retranslation from English into Spanish of a paragraph of about 75 words based on the stimulus of the earlier second reading passage.

Reading Text 1 was a passage about an experiment to introduce electronic tablets into Spanish classrooms. The test is marked positively and the objective is to communicate the correct response, but not to reproduce the original text word for word. It is important for candidates to use their own words. Full sentences are not required in the answers but the correct information must be conveyed successfully. Accent errors are only penalised if they affect meaning and slight spelling errors are accepted if the word is recognisable, but not if the spelling error leads to another word. **Question 1** was well answered by most candidates but some had difficulty identifying *patrocinan* or *patrocinadores* for **Question 2**. Whilst most candidates understood the material for **Questions 3, 4, 5, 6 and 8**, there was some confusion in **Question 7**, with candidates believing that the expression *perderá peso* referred to tablets physically weighing less than textbooks, rather than the fact that textbooks will become less important in the future. This type of exercise can be demanding in places, but overall the Examiners found that the majority of candidates displayed a good understanding of the Spanish material and were able to write their answers with an appropriate standard of Spanish language.

Reading Text 2 was about young Mexicans trying to get over the border into the United States. The material was generally understood by the candidates, who succeeded in answering the English questions set on the passage in a fluent, comprehensible way. Many candidates scored high marks on this exercise. Most started well by gaining the marks for **Question 9** but when certain vocabulary items, such as *oxidado* and *hierro*, were not known, some incorrect alternative answers included ideas such as 'polluted grey seas', etc. For **Question 10** most candidates understood that Óscar's aunt had a residence permit to live in the United States but the expression *me hizo pasar por uno de sus hijos en la frontera* caused some difficulty. The correct answer was that 'his aunt passed him off as one of her sons at the border' but various incorrect versions were given. It would have been impossible for Óscar to 'pretend to be one of her sons', as he was

only a few months old at the time, the aunt's sons were not involved in getting him across the border and his aunt did not 'make him cross the border'. For **Question 11** it was necessary to state that Óscar's father had been 'caught' or 'arrested', as 'drink-driving' was not considered to be a full answer on its own. Whilst most candidates understood the material to gain the two marks for **Question 12**, a few wrote 'confounded' rather than 'confused'. It was important to give full information to gain the marks for **Questions 13** and **14**, as the omission of items such as 'dangerous', 'dollars' or 'minors' meant that full marks could not be awarded.

Reading Text 3 was a paragraph in English based on the material in **Reading Text 2**. Candidates had to translate this into Spanish. The previous text contained words and phrases that could help them, but generally some manipulation of language was required. For marking purposes, the text is divided into 30 boxes and these are each awarded one mark or zero. The total score is converted to a final mark out of 10. The correct information should be communicated and suitable and accurate alternative renderings are accepted. Slight spelling errors are disregarded, but not if the meaning of the word is altered. The final mark scheme document gives a detailed list of versions that were accepted or not. Most candidates performed well in this exercise this year. Although slight errors are permitted, the Examiners point to several common errors. These include wrong spellings (sometimes French) of Spanish numbers, such as *trente millones*, *cuarente*, *mil/mille* for *millón* or *cien* for *cientos/centenares*; *desde los 40 años pasados* for *durante los últimos 40 años*; *medio de ellos* for *la mitad de ellos*; anglicised or invented words, for example, *relativos* for *parientes*, *destinación* for *destino* or *adresar* for 'to address'; basic mis-spellings such as *mez* for *mes* or *seperados* for *separados*; missed subjunctives after *es ... que* and *para que*; confusion between *traficante* and *tráfico* and some lexical items not known, such as 'disgraceful' and 'delay'. The Examiners were pleased to see that most candidates wrote the correct gender for *este problema*.

Part II – Listening (30 marks)

Candidates have control of their own individual listening equipment. They may stop, rewind and replay the recording at will, and they may make notes and write their answers at any point. There are three passages with a combined limit of 700 to 850 words. The first has listening comprehension questions in Spanish requiring answers in Spanish, whereas questions for the second passage are in English and require answers in English. Answers in the target language are not assessed for quality of language but for communication. Candidates then listen to a third recording of about 250 words and summarise it in English using bullet points for guidance (maximum of 100 words).

The extract for **Listening Text 1** was an interview with Carmen Romero, director of the Chilean theatre festival *Santiago a Mil*. The test is marked positively and the objective is to communicate the correct response, but not to reproduce the original text word for word. It is important for candidates to use their own words. Vocabulary items need to be understood but they should be conveyed in an answer that is a logical response to the question. Full sentences are not required in the answers but the correct information must be conveyed successfully. Accent errors are only penalised if they affect meaning and slight spelling errors are accepted if the word is recognisable, but not if the spelling error leads to another word. It would appear that candidates understood the material well and produced sound responses. Many candidates scored highly in this exercise and no specific question caused particular difficulty. Errors included *eran tampoco* for **Question 17** and *apollos* for **Question 18**. Also for this latter question, grammatical manipulation was needed, as the original statement '*recibimos apoyos desde el Gobierno*' needed to be converted to '*el Gobierno dio apoyos al festival*'. Most candidates understood the material and gave good answers for **Questions 19, 20** and **21**, whereas not everyone understood the actions of her father Félix and of Carmen herself to answer **Question 22** correctly. Finally, most candidates understood the importance of her *educación gratuita*, although a few thought erroneously that *libre* was synonymous with *gratuita*.

Listening Text 2 was a news report about a police operation in Málaga. Candidates appeared to understand the material well and produced some good, thoughtful answers. Occasionally, however, rather than weak comprehension of the Spanish material, a candidate might have lost marks because of failing to give full information. For example, in **Question 24** it was not sufficient to write 'growing marijuana'. It was necessary to make clear that it was a large quantity, so 'greenhouse or hothouse or factory' was needed. Most candidates gained the first mark for 'drug trafficking' in **Question 25** but awkward English expression such as 'fraud of the electrical fluid' for 'illegal use of electricity' could not be awarded the second mark. For **Question 26**, many candidates did not realise that *agentes* referred to 'policemen' and it was necessary to state that 'the smell of marijuana was coming from a building'. **Question 27** again gave rise to many answers in awkward English language. The correct answer was 'to obtain a search warrant' or 'to get a court order to enter the building' but some incomprehensible answers such as 'asked for a judicial correspondent to be sent from the entrance of the register' were offered. Candidates are advised that their answers must make sense. Generally, candidates gave good answers for **Questions 28** and **29** and many achieved high scores as a whole in this task.

Listening Text 3 involved an interview with Juan, a young Spaniard who believes in living with less money and following the philosophy of reducing growth. The test required a summary of his views in no more than 100 words in English. There were four bullet points of information to be covered. The full gist of the passage needs to be understood, there has to be detail and it needs to be well selected. The material should be expressed concisely, read well and be informative. The 10 marks available are awarded positively according to these criteria. Length is important. A summary with fewer than 80 words is likely to be self-penalising, as all the above criteria are unlikely to be met. On the other hand, candidates should beware of writing over-long summaries. It should be stressed that the Examiners operate a cut-off point and any material written beyond that point cannot be assessed, even if it is correct. Many candidates appeared to find the material accessible and there were some high marks awarded in this exercise. They appeared to be familiar with the vocabulary and concepts in the extract. Candidates were able to infer ideas and showed an ability to select key facts and to communicate this information concisely. Sometimes, however, candidates wrote in note form, only using isolated phrases that they had heard in the text without attempting to make sense of them in coherent statements. Although continuous English prose is not required to answer this test and bullet points are acceptable, they must contain enough information with logical links and coherent statements. Otherwise, the marks cannot be awarded. This year some common errors included understanding that *unos 75 kilos* meant '175 kilos'; thinking that this figure referred to 'general waste' instead of 'food waste'; omitting essential information such as 'covering/putting lids on saucepans' and 'mending leaking taps'; confusing *beneficios* as 'benefits' rather than 'profits' and *ecológico* as 'ecological' rather than 'organic' in the context of the extract. Generally, however, most candidates produced a suitable summary and gained good marks.

Advice and Guidance to candidates

Listening and Reading Comprehension

What comprehension skills are required?

- The material for the texts may come from any of the Topic Areas in the Syllabus;
- the material could be factual or abstract;
- inference – you have to work out the answers;
- manipulation – you will be expected to manipulate the language;
- explanation – you will need to explain;
- synthesis – you may need to combine points of information;
- full information is always required – answers may be long;
- a high level of Quality of Language is expected – accuracy and sophistication are needed.

Answering Spanish questions set on the texts

- Remember that full sentences are not required. However, the full information asked for must be given;
- highlight the question words (*¿quién?*, *¿cómo?*, *¿cuándo?*, etc.), so that it is clear what information is needed;
- note how many marks are awarded for each question, so that no essential information is omitted;
- try to use your own words and do not reproduce the language of the texts word for word;
- practise building a wide Spanish vocabulary, so that you are at ease using synonyms for words in the texts;
- remember that your Spanish answers must make sense. If they do not, then there is something wrong.

Answering English questions set on the texts

- Write your answers in good English and check your spelling;
- beware of 'false friends' (words that look alike in Spanish and English but have different meanings);
- realise that some Spanish words can often have two meanings; choose the correct one;
- find the appropriate English word, not necessarily one that looks similar to the Spanish word;
- make sure your whole answer sounds like real English and makes sense to someone reading it;
- make sure that you give the full information required; do not omit any essential information.

Retranslation for Reading Task 3

- Study the Spanish stimulus passage in Reading Task 2 carefully: it gives vocabulary and structures to be used and re-worked;
- read the English passage and understand what is required;

- study the setting, context and tone of the extracts;
- use sensible and intelligent guesses where vocabulary is not known;
- never leave gaps;
- think carefully about the grammar of the sentence being translated; examiners regularly point to the failure of candidates to translate tenses correctly, to spot adjectival agreements and to link pronouns with the nouns to which they refer;
- beware of literal translation and poor/meaningless Spanish;
- beware paraphrasing – do not stray too far away from the original;
- but, on the other hand, do not be afraid to change word order, parts of speech, etc.;
- remember that accuracy is more important than creativity.

Summary skills for Listening Text 3

What are summary skills?

- All the bullet points have been covered.
- The gist of the passage has been understood.
- There is detail and it is well selected.
- The material is expressed concisely.
- The material reads well and is informative.
- There is no incorrect information.

Advice on summary skills

Writing a good summary is a matter of regular practice and also of acquiring the correct technique. An unsuccessful attempt at a summary may be due to lack of understanding of the original text, but more often than not, it is the way the exercise has been tackled that is at fault.

- Listen to the passage until you have a good idea of what the whole text is about;
- do not start summarising (or even translating) every sentence; you will not be discarding the less significant details and you will quickly run out of words;
- make rough notes on the question paper; you are not likely to have time to write out a full version of the summary and then write out a clean copy;
- it is often not necessary to know the meaning of every word – don't panic if you don't understand something;
- remember this is a summary – be selective – you cannot include every bit of information;
- make sure that you cover all the bullet points;
- spread the words: it is a common error to say too much about the first half of a passage and too little (or nothing at all) about the last parts;
- 'prune' written summaries, removing unnecessary words without deleting the main points that you wish to convey;
- absolutely stick within the word limit – do not exceed 100 words;
- check the accuracy of everything you have written.

The Quality of your Spanish Language

- Remember that essential Spanish grammar knowledge is required; you should aim for responding in accurate language;
- be confident in your use of all Spanish tenses, in particular the present, preterite, imperfect and conditional, both regular and irregular;
- be able to use tenses with all persons, not just the first person;
- be able to switch between the first and third persons with confidence, as this is often required in comprehension passages;
- use pronouns with confidence, in particular *le* and *se*, and be able to switch from first person to third person pronouns and adjectives with ease (e.g. *mi* to *su* and *mío* to *suyo*, etc.);
- use *gustar* and similar verbs properly in all tenses;
- be strict when applying the correct articles and adjectival endings (e.g. *un problema*, *cinco rosas rojas*, etc.);
- know when accents are important (e.g. *trabajo* or *trabajó? esta, esta or ésta?*);
- be familiar with the subjunctive mood: know when and how to use it successfully;

PRINCIPAL COURSE SPANISH

Paper 9781/03
Writing and Usage

Key messages

When choosing an essay title in Part 1, candidates should:

- read all the titles carefully before choosing the ones on which they wish to write
- consider what they know about the issue involved, as well as their capacity to tackle it linguistically.

When writing the essay, candidates are advised to:

- spent time planning the essay before they begin writing it
- write an introduction, well-structured paragraphs and a conclusion
- write in clearly defined paragraphs.

General comments

Many candidates continued to take full advantage of the opportunities afforded by the discursive essay style questions. There were lots of lively and engaging answers, often demonstrating very skilful manipulation of the language and a confident approach to essay writing. Candidates were expected to produce a piece of extended writing in which they have the opportunity to demonstrate their linguistic competence in terms of complexity, accuracy and range of structures, vocabulary and idiom. Time should have been spent on planning the essay prior to writing it. There should have been evidence of an introduction, well-structured paragraphs and a conclusion. A system of positive marking was used, rewarding both accuracy and ambition. A number of essays lacked clearly defined paragraphs. Candidates are advised to explore different strategies to help them give a better structured response, avoiding repetition. Those who did produce a plan were able, when followed, to produce more coherent essays.

Some candidates had chosen a topic which was of interest to them but for which they did not have the necessary vocabulary to communicate a clear message. Although candidates showed more discipline in relation to word-count than in previous years, many candidates persist in writing rather more than is required by the rubric.

Comments on specific questions

Part I: Writing

Question 1

Candidates are given a choice of five essay titles and have to write a response of 350–450 words in Spanish. The response is marked following the published marking grids. The essay is marked for accuracy and linguistic range out of 24 marks. The development and organisation of ideas are then assessed out of 16 marks. Candidates are expected to use a variety of lexis and structures to convey ideas and arguments which are effectively organised and illustrated with relevant examples. Candidates should show they possess a wide range of vocabulary and a good sense of idiom.

- (a) ***“El mundo ya no necesita armas nucleares” ¿Estás de acuerdo con esta afirmación? Da tu opinión, justificando tu respuesta.***

This was one of the most popular titles. Most candidates showed engagement in their answers. The vast majority of candidates clearly understood the scope of the essay title well and felt they could relate to the problems presented, regardless of their own ideas and beliefs on the matter. There were many well-structured essays in which candidates explored the question in depth and came to a logical conclusion. It was gratifying to see that many candidates were well aware of the numerous challenges nuclear weapons present and were able to quote a range of problems and try to get to a logical solution.

- (b) ***¿Hasta qué punto deberían los hijos seguir el ejemplo de los padres? Discute, justificando tu respuesta.***

A few candidates were able to fully do justice to this question. Many did not have an angle to analyse and discuss the topic without being very simplistic. Among the attempts at this question, there was again the tendency to ignore the rubric of the question and write to an alternative title. The best answers gave a considered account of the different roles within a family and society and the expectations placed on young people.

- (c) ***“Intentar conservar las especies animales en peligro de extinción va en contra de las leyes de la evolución”. Da tu opinión, considerando ejemplos particulares.***

Many candidates expressed strong views about the laws of evolution and the role humans play in it. Some candidates emphasised the lack of care shown to animals by humans and how we place most animals in danger by our actions. They provided many examples to support their argument. Better candidates were also able to show that all is not doom and gloom and that more is being done to improve the situation.

- (d) ***“Ver la televisión influye excesivamente en lo que los niños piensan del mundo”. ¿Estás de acuerdo?***

This was also a very popular topic which appealed to many candidates. However some candidates consistently misunderstood the words *niños* and *jóvenes*. Those who attempted it often did not include relevant examples. This was another example of candidates tending to ignore the rubric of the question and write to an alternative title on the advantages and disadvantages of the television. On the whole, essays were rather superficial with candidates struggling to present a coherent argument and often failing to bring their essay to an effective conclusion.

- (e) ***«El teléfono móvil es una forma contemporánea de esclavitud». Discute esta afirmación justificando tu respuesta.***

This was a popular title. Many candidates were able to consider the how mobile phones can enslave us and free us at the same time. There were many references to the new pace of life and changes in society and in how we relate to others. The main problem for weaker candidates was the desire to write the essay which they would have preferred to have been set rather than the one which appeared on the paper, and thus some wrote an essay about the advantages and disadvantages of mobile phones. In spite of the aforementioned, there were some excellent essays in which what the candidates started by defining what they understood by slavery, and therefore setting the parameters of their essay.

Part II: Usage

Exercise 1 Question 2–6

This exercise again proved to be the hardest part of the test for many candidates. Candidates seemed to find **Question (6)** the most difficult to answer. Many candidates lost marks by answering with missing accents or accents on the wrong vowel on **Questions (3)** and **(4)**.

Exercise 2 Questions 7–11

This exercise was quite well accomplished by many candidates. The main problems occurred in **Question (9)**, where the idea of **desde hace** caused some problems, and in **Question (10)**, where some candidates wrote **la posibilidad que** instead of **la posibilidad de que**.

Exercise 3 Questions 12–31

This exercise is based on a short article about the difficult relationship between Spain and Gibraltar: *Vecinos en conflicto*. Candidates had to choose the right answer from a choice of four options. This exercise was quite well accomplished by many candidates. Where mistakes were made, they usually occurred on **Questions (13), (19), (21), (25), (28)** and **(29)**.

PRINCIPAL COURSE SPANISH

Paper 9781/04
Topics and Texts

Key messages

To achieve high marks for content a focused, wholly relevant and analytical response to the question is required. Essays should keep to the recommended length of 350-500 words for **Part I** and 450-600 words for **Part II**.

General comments

This year's candidates answered questions on six of the eight Texts, a wider range than before, and on three of the five Topics. The overall level of attainment remained good, with most candidates able to make valid critical judgements on the works they had studied. The results demonstrate that there are no 'easier' or 'harder' Topics or Texts: what matters is that centres study works that enthuse teachers and students alike.

Language marks in the Topics section maintained the improvement noted in 2015. A good proportion of answers included enough 'complex sentence patterns' to meet the requirements of the higher end of the grid (which even native speakers must satisfy to gain full language marks). *Si* clauses look good when used successfully, although most attempts at 'type 3' (counter-factual) *si* clauses went astray by including the imperfect subjunctive where the pluperfect subjunctive or the conditional perfect was required.

Specific language issues included confusion over *audiencia pública* and when to use *tanto como...* rather than *ambos*. *Gustar* remains a challenge and there were some fanciful conjugations of *mostrar*. *El esfuerzo* was often feminised and *nos* incorrectly inserted before *vemos*. It is helpful for candidates to understand when to use *los* or *las* before *protagonistas*. Perhaps the year's most common error was the use of *a* after *intentar*.

Quotations were extensively used, but a high proportion were inaccurate. The use of adverbs such as 'incredibly' to qualify adjectives is rather out of step with the academic focus encouraged in this Paper.

Candidates are year by year showing a greater awareness of the different functions of introductions and conclusions. However, a number of introductions remain ineffectual: e.g. statements of the obvious about the text(s), or statements of intent about answering the question. In the Texts section, a 'comprehensive introduction and conclusion' are needed to score the full 5 marks for 'structure'. Many candidates made little attempt to make their introductions and conclusions 'comprehensive', leading to scores of 4 marks for an 'adequate' introduction or conclusion, or 3 for 'weakness' in those areas.

Comments on specific questions

Part I: Cultural Topics

Question 1

- A** Answers were varied as different interpretations of *positiva* led candidates into different paths. Most candidates addressed the importance of Santi's role as the driving force that would hold the group of children together in difficult times. By contrast, adults were depicted as irresponsible and generally unkind. Monsieur Bogaerts' proactive and positive approach to supporting Santi and his sister was a common omission. There were different interpretations of the symbolic meaning of *las bicicletas*, but the highest-achieving candidates identified freedom and innocence as the main concepts.

B There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

Question 2

A There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

B There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

Question 3

This year's questions again reflected the usefulness to candidates of familiarising themselves with Almodóvar's comments on these films, as published on his websites or contained in online interviews. These comments are familiar to the examiners and should always be attributed.

Candidates should be careful over terms such as *normal* or *raro* to describe characters in these films (Almodóvar's goal is to free our thinking of such conventionalities). Likewise, the term *humanizar* can be useful, though it risks implying that the person *humanizado* was less than fully human before receiving the Almodóvar treatment.

Examiners were treated to a wide range of explanations of the colour-coding in Almodóvar films. A candidate wishing to argue that blue denotes motherhood (or passion, or *machismo*, etc...) would be well advised to cite some authority to sustain this interpretation, rather than to make an unsubstantiated claim. There were likewise varied explanations of the *Tajabone* song from *Todo sobre mi madre* (and even claims that Manuela travelled to Barcelona by air...).

Most candidates answered with reference to *Todo sobre mi madre* and *Volver*. This led some to declare that Almodóvar's films focus on women: it would perhaps be helpful for candidates to see all three films on the syllabus to avoid this misconception, even if they only study or refer to two in the exam.

A Few candidates understood the term *estructura*, despite structure being a fundamental feature of any work of literature or cinema. Had they understood it, it is likely that a number of candidates could have tackled this question successfully along the lines of the indicative content offered in the Mark Scheme.

B Many candidates gave convincing explanations of Almodóvar's vision of how Spain has become a more humane society, and the importance of *solidaridad* in that process. Less successful candidates treated *solidaridad*, *maternidad*, *amistad*, *apoyo* and *amor* as synonymous. Listing characters' good conduct without explaining Almodóvar's underlying vision was unproductive. Valid points were made about Almodóvar's childhood memories of female *solidaridad* (although, curiously, often not until the conclusion of the essay). Nor was it always clear in candidates' answers that Almodóvar's comments on his childhood refer to the specific circumstances of domestic life under *el franquismo*. In *Volver*, many candidates overlooked that Regina is paid to help Raimunda dispose of the freezer. The best essays usually referred to Agustina as the *vecina solidaria*.

Question 4

A There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

B There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

Question 5

All candidates answering on this Topic referred to the two plays. Better answers showed a full understanding of the pressures on Yerma to have a child and were able to explain Lorca's use of symbolism in support of the key themes. An understanding of the significance of La Vieja in *Yerma* and María Josefa in *La casa de Bernarda Alba* was necessary to demonstrate 'comprehensive knowledge'.

A The challenge here was to meet the question's requirement of analysing the importance of death as a theme in these works, rather than simply listing which characters die and for what reason. More successful answers looked at the figurative and symbolic manifestations of death within the rural culture. Interpretations of the deaths of Juan and Adela in the two plays varied between the

perceptive and the implausible. Some candidates lapsed into writing about the repression of women rather than addressing the question.

- B** Productive answers looked at how Yerma upholds the honour code and Bernarda Alba promotes the socio-economic hierarchy of their male-dominated society. It was helpful for candidates to refer to the role of the five daughters in upholding Bernarda's regime. Some candidates overlooked that Bernarda is a woman contributing to the oppression of women. Others wrote more generally about the subservient role of women, without addressing the terms of the question.

Part II: Texts

Question 6

- A** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- B** This question generated much excellent analysis.
- C** Candidates answering this question needed to be clear about the difference between 'realistic' and 'historically accurate'.

Question 7

- A** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- C** Candidates generally addressed the question by contrasting aristocratic honour (with its social status) with moral honour, of which Frondoso and Laurencia are the clearest examples. The most successful candidates discussed the way that honour goes beyond social status, and is a value shared by both the Catholic Monarchs and most villagers of Fuenteovejuna. A good number of candidates developed their analysis of the honour theme into consideration of such related topics as justice or freedom. Candidates needed to avoid focusing so intently on concepts of honour that their analysis of the text became too cursory.

Question 8

- A** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- C** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

Question 9

- A** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- C** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

Question 10

This Text inspired much of the best analysis in this year's exam.

- A** The best answers identified in this passage insights into the characters of the two investigators. The final paragraph's depiction of both external reality and Lönnrot's thought processes offered candidates the chance to identify a transitional moment in the story. Successful candidates were able to identify evidence of Lönnrot's arrogance, self-esteem and *ennui*, all of which contribute to the disorientating shift in the narrative at the end of this extract.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

- C** In a few cases, candidates (rather in the manner of Lönnrot...) were distracted from the texts by esoteric reflections. On *El encuentro*, it is worth bearing in mind that the gauchos who originally owned the knives are now *polvo*: the text does not refer to their 'spirits' guiding the knife fight (as claimed by some candidates) but rather to the *rencor humano*, the malign archetype identified in the final paragraph.

Question 11

- A** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- C** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.

Question 12

A number of candidates attempted to locate the novel in relation to Colombian history (specifically, the Civil War and *La Violencia*), with some doing so correctly. There were differing accounts of how long the colonel has been waiting for his pension at the time of the narrative.

Don Sabas was commonly misconstrued as a government official, rather than a businessman/ property dealer. The colonel and the *gallo* are low priorities for him, and his inconsistent valuations of the bird seem to reflect the habit of a ruthless businessman rather than an attempt personally to do down his *compadre*. We know he is 'corrupt' because of the deal he did with the mayor to buy up cheaply the property of those the mayor expelled from the *pueblo*, but it is hard to see how his dealings with the colonel imply 'corruption', as some candidates claimed. Many candidates vilified him, one even calling him 'power crazed', but the text suggests a more nuanced image. The 60 peso advance he gives the colonel in their last encounter – while only a fraction of the assistance he could offer him, and an inducement to the colonel to enter into an unfavourable business deal – is better than sending him away empty-handed.

There was some tendency to exaggerate other aspects of the text. The colonel running out of coffee in the opening scene was interpreted by some candidates as a condemnation of the Colombian government; none mentioned that the colonel pops out to buy another jar at the end of the first chapter. Likewise, the villainy of the mayor was stressed by some candidates, despite his very brief appearance. There was some muddle about the priest's disapproval of the films on at the cinema: he is not an agent of government censorship.

A commonly overlooked element of the text is the Colonel's sense of legal entitlement. His side's surrender in the war – and the reputation of his revered leader – depend on the validity of the Treaty negotiated by the latter. The non-payment of the pension indicates that that the Treaty is not being respected, and is thus an affront to the Colonel's honour as well as to his well-being. Like Agustín's death, it reflects a lack of respect for the rule of law. This in turn implies corruption, but it is not in itself evidence of corruption.

- A** A number of candidates declared this a highly significant passage in the text. Many successfully divided it into three sections in order to structure their analysis. Some misconstrued the colonel as 'trying to sell' the bird to Don Sabas at the start. Perceptive answers understood that the colonel's *torcedura en las tripas* is a response to the 900 pesos reference: the temptation it represents makes him uncomfortable, hence his uncommon rush to the post office in the hope that news about his pension will make his need for money less acute and negate the temptation.
- B** Assertions such as 'the weather represents political oppression' needed justification (would the weather be different under a more just regime?). The term 'corruption' was used too sweepingly, as though it were synonymous with repression and inefficiency. The application of the term 'communist' to the colonel (or even, in one case, to the rooster) needed justification.
- C** Various plausible interpretations of the colonel's relationship with his wife were offered. Not all candidates could differentiate between officialdom and government, nor between inefficiency (reflecting a lack of caring) and repression (indicating hostility).

Question 13

- A** Candidates approached this question from a variety of angles, but most commented on realism, friendship and literature as being the main themes relevant to the passage. The autobiographical dimension of the novel was commented on in most cases.
- B** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.
- C** There were too few answers to make comment appropriate.