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FOREWORD

This booklet contains reports written by Examiners on the work of candidates in certain papers. **Its contents are primarily for the information of the subject teachers concerned.**

SPANISH

GCE Advanced Subsidiary Level

Paper 8685/01

Speaking

General comments

Presentation

Performance on the prepared topic was somewhat mixed. Centres must ensure that candidates' topics are firmly based on an aspect of Hispanic interest and this was done in most cases. There were still, however, a few candidates or Centres who did not appear to be aware of the syllabus requirement and who spoke in a general way on topics such as sport (particularly football), their own leisure interests, or information technology and the internet. Candidates who failed to deal with Hispanic topics, or who did not make implicit the essential link with the Hispanic context, could not have access to the highest marks in the initial speech.

On the credit side, the majority of candidates had thought about their topics and had prepared their speech accordingly. The highest marks were gained by those candidates who organised material effectively, kept to the time limits, provided a coherent introduction to the topic and indicated a personal dimension from which the discussion could follow. Paradoxically, it was sometimes the outwardly more fluent candidates who lost credit: they either tended to ramble in a somewhat disorganised way or spoke in generalisations with little evidence or examples to back up the Hispanic dimension. Weaker candidates generally were unable to go beyond poor presentation, with little factual information and much mental reading or recitation of prepared notes.

There were, however, some highly commendable presentations. Candidates who had not only prepared sufficient relevant information, but who also, and this is frequently overlooked, delivered the material in a lively and involving way.

Topic and General conversations

The Topic and General conversations should be the more challenging sections for most candidates. Here, a degree of spontaneity and improvisation is to be expected. The worst scenario was the repetition of an over-rehearsed pseudo dialogue; candidates in such situations cannot score highly for fluency. This said, however, the majority of Teacher/Examiners were suitably prepared to ensure that candidates were given every opportunity to think on their feet and to deal with some unexpected angles. Obviously, weaker candidates will be limited in their ability to go beyond restating points made in the initial presentation; nevertheless, all candidates should be offered the opportunity to give opinions, back up a point with a specific example or encouraged to initiate a debate. Such opportunities are necessary, not only to widen the scope of the discussion in terms of content, but, perhaps more importantly, to allow or encourage the production of a wider range of language and register.

Indeed, many candidates showed that they were prepared to rise to such challenges and were able to show that they had ideas and opinions on various topics. Linguistic accuracy and fluency of course varied, but most candidates were able to show comprehension and attempt a reply. Inevitably, there were some candidates for whom these oral examinations were a real difficulty and who struggled to venture a reply. Teachers who conducted tests in such cases, for the most part showed commendable ingenuity and patience in encouraging their candidates to perform as well as they were able.

Administration and conduct of tests

Assessment was generally in accordance with the stipulated mark scheme. The majority of Centres understood and complied with the published standards. More importantly, Centres had marked consistently. The Moderators accordingly thank those conducting the tests for their professionalism and attention to detail. There are still a very few Centres who tend to be over-optimistic in their assessment, particularly in over-marking a presentation when the syllabus requirements are not met, or for overall linguistic competence. There were still a very few Centres whose candidates did not elicit information from the Examiner in the Topic and General conversations (as required in the syllabus) and who lost marks (2 x five marks) as a result, or in some cases (particularly with more 'fluent' candidates) erroneously were awarded marks as if by implication. A couple of Centres awarded each criterion in the assessment a mark out of ten, where some maxima were five, in one case exceeding 100%.

Recording quality was noticeably better this year. Those Centres who had made every effort to ensure that their candidates were clearly audible on the sample tapes are thanked for this. Examiners remind all Centres, however, please to identify clearly on the tape and on the tape box insert the candidate being tested.

Timing was generally correct – only a couple of Centres failed to comply with the stipulated limits.

Documentation enclosed with the tapes was generally correct. Centres are reminded to include the working mark sheet, which shows clearly the breakdown of marks under each assessment category, for each candidate. Although this was generally done, some Centres had merely summarised the total for each section (Presentation, Topic conversation, General conversation); this is not sufficient to allow moderation to be carried out effectively.

<p>Paper 8685/02 Reading and Writing</p>
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General comments

Examiners are pleased to report that the overall performance of candidates in this Paper was good. The overall standard of Spanish used was reasonably high and in a good number of Papers, extremely high. Once again this year, the vast majority were able to follow the rubrics very closely indeed, but a worrying number were completely unaware of the importance of keeping to the word limit stipulated in **Question 5**, where candidates are instructed to write a maximum of 140 words in Spanish. It is worth repeating that candidates who exceed this limit can only harm their cause. Responses in **Question 5** that go way beyond the word limit will only have the first 140-150 words marked. Centres need to make it absolutely clear to all their candidates that exceeding the word limit is to be avoided at all costs.

The content of the stimulus articles clearly motivated the majority of candidates and many were able to write with conviction and enthusiasm about the issues raised by the texts.

It needs to be repeated once again that candidates who simply lift from the text in response to **Questions 3** and **4**, when the clear instruction is to avoid doing so (*...sin copiar frases completas del texto*), will fail to score any marks at all. The idea is that candidates interpret, paraphrase or remodel the original, not simply copy it word for word.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This question was, once again, well answered by almost all candidates. There were very few problems encountered here.

Question 2

This question was answered competently by the vast majority of candidates although a small number forgot to use the exact form of the word or words given in brackets (and so lost marks).

Question 3

- (a) Most candidates encountered few problems with this question.
- (b) Most candidates found this question a relatively straightforward one to answer.
- (c) Generally well answered by most candidates.
- (d) Another reasonably well answered question with most candidates able to score at least three of the four marks available. Many misinterpreted *tampoco* (line 27) and understood incorrectly that young people actually wanted to have children as a matter of urgency as soon as they were married.
- (e) Too many candidates with this question decided to write eloquently (but irrelevantly) about the issue of women's liberation movements over the last few decades. The answer was meant to come from the last paragraph of the text.

Question 4

- (a) Those candidates who lifted *ceguera* and *tolerancia* for their answer scored no marks.
- (b) A difficult question for many candidates and one which was widely misunderstood by candidates. It is suggested that Centres consult the mark scheme for clarification.
- (c) A reasonably well answered question although, disappointingly, many candidates only gave two details when it was clear that three were being asked for by the question.
- (d) There were some excellent responses to this question although for some candidates *esa ceguera paterna* proved too complicated an idea to explain clearly.
- (e) There was much lifting from the text in response to this question and so many candidates lost marks needlessly.

Question 5

- (a)(b) Too many candidates wrote far too much in response to this question. They lost marks heavily as a consequence. Part of the exercise is to write concisely in order to summarise the issues highlighted in both texts. There are ten marks available for this and five marks for the personal response. Too many candidates wrote very briefly for part (a) and then went on to write a great length for part (b) despite the mark allocation that is clearly stated in the rubric. Good candidates wrote within the word limit, kept an eye on both texts and offered their own personal response to the issues raised by the question and did all this within the overall word limit of 140 words. Such candidates were rewarded with high marks.

There were, nevertheless, some very good answers here with a number of candidates scoring maximum marks by showing a clear understanding of both texts and being able to convey their thoughts in top quality Spanish with hardly any lifting from the texts.

Paper 8685/03

Essay

General comments

The essay titles this session once again proved to be accessible to the vast majority of candidates. As is often the case, certain titles were more attractive to candidates than others, but on the whole the message seems to have been taken on board by Centres that candidates need to respond to the actual title set on the Examination Paper, rather than regurgitating a pre-learnt piece in the hope that it will score high marks – it will not. Many candidates wrote thoughtfully, used vocabulary relevant to the topic chosen and showed a well-balanced mastery of the skill of essay writing. These essays were rewarded with high marks.

As was the case last June, the overwhelming majority of essays this year were written with full attention to the stipulated word limit of 250–400 words. It would give Examiners immense pleasure to be able to report in future that not one single essay exceeded the word limit. Candidates need to understand that marks are available for essays that show a clear line of thought with tight structure. Keeping to the word limit is a very much part of this tight structure. It is almost always the case that essays well in excess of 400 words tend to lose marks for language as well as content. Centres would do well to inform their candidates of this fact.

Once again it is pleasing to report that the number of essays that proved extremely difficult to read as a result of bad handwriting was small. It is, however, worth repeating the comments made in last summer's report, namely that an essay in which the handwriting is impossible to decipher cannot score high marks on the grounds that Examiners can only mark what they can read.

The most common language errors occurring in answers were the confusion of *ser* and *estar*, incorrect use of the subjunctive (*creo que haya un problema...*), inappropriate use of past tenses, adjectival agreement and the inaccurate use of the passive voice (*la gente es explotado...*).

Comments on specific questions

El turismo: ¿amigo o enemigo? Contesta con referencia a España y/o el mundo hispánico.

This was a popular choice for many candidates. Generally speaking it was well answered, although some candidates simply mentioned the facilities available for tourists in their particular Spanish-speaking country and thus lost marks for failing to address the issues raised by the title.

Rehabilitar es más importante que castigar

The least popular title on this Paper. Those that did attempt it wrote with great conviction and personal interest in the issues generated by the title. Some failed to take into account both sides of the title and just concentrated on the importance of punishment in the modern world. There were, however, some fine pieces of writing in response to this title.

La libertad de expresión de los medios de comunicación es un símbolo importante de una sociedad civilizada.

This essay was reasonably popular and attracted a good number of candidates who were able to present carefully supported views on the importance of freedom of speech. Weaker essays with this title simply dealt with the different sorts of media and new technology now available and failed to mention freedom of expression.

La pobreza en el tercer Mundo es una consecuencia directa de las acciones de los países más ricos del mundo.

Not a particularly popular title for candidates. The best efforts, however, were able to discuss third world debt, exploitation of resources and the efforts of various international aid organisations in a highly convincing way.

Mantenerse en forma debería ser el objetivo principal de cada individuo.

Another very popular title. There were many different points of view expressed on the issues raised by the title and personal views were strongly expressed by most candidates who chose this title.

La idea de la familia no tiene tanta importancia hoy como hace veinte años.

This was by far the most popular title on this session's Paper. Many candidates were happy to draw upon their personal experiences with regard to family life in order to illustrate their points of view. A small number of essays lost marks because they simply mentioned the advantages of being brought up in a large family in today's world.