



# **JUNIOR CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS**

**1999**

***SPANISH***

**HIGHER LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT  
ORDINARY LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT**

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The total number of candidates was 2,131. This is a 6.5% decrease on the 1998 entry. The average entry for the five years 1995 – 1999 was 2,160. The Ordinary Level paper was taken by 34.3% of candidates.

Of the total entry, 44.6% achieved a Higher Level C+ grade while 14.1% failed to achieve a minimum Grade D (at either level).

### 1.2 Table I: General Statistics (1995 – 1999)

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Year	Total Entry	O. L. %	A + B + C (H. L.) % of Total	E + F + NG (H. L. + O. L.) % of Total
1995	2,103	28.5	46.8	13.6
1996	2,275	34.1	44.7	15.0
1997	2,007	28.5	49.0	10.8
1998	2,280	34.3	37.5	17.6
1999	2,131	34.3	44.6	14.1
<b>Average '95-'99</b>	<b>2,160</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>44.3</b>	<b>14.3</b>

A summary analysis of Table I indicates that:

- Overall “failure” rates (Col. 5) are high. This aspect is considered in detail in commentary on performance at Ordinary Level. (See 3.2 *infra.*);
- The number of candidates achieving an “honours” at Higher Level, as a percentage of total entry, is high (Col. 4);
- Approximately one third of candidates opt for Ordinary Level (Col. 3);
- Uptake of Spanish (Col. 2), at Junior Cycle, is virtually static. It should be noted, however, that total candidate numbers (2,131) were 9.7% up on the number (1,943) who took the exam in 1992 – the year in which the Junior Certificate Programme was first examined.

This does not necessarily indicate a lack of interest in Spanish at second level; rather, it may reflect the practical difficulties encountered by schools seeking to promote language diversification.

- 1.3** Any objective consideration of the validity of the Spanish Junior Certificate Examination, as a fair and equitable instrument of assessment, must take account of the fact that (at both levels) it is a “discriminating”, as distinct from a “qualifying”, exam. In effect, discrimination requires that each Paper (and each Section of each Paper) shall contain elements – texts and/or questions – of varying degrees of difficulty. This is essential to ensure appropriate grading of candidates and to avoid clustering.

## HIGHER LEVEL

### 2.0 General Statistics

The results, as detailed in Table II and Table II (a), were good. They reflect a significant improvement on 1998 performance levels and the re-emergence of the more satisfactory grade pattern of earlier years.

**Table II: Higher Level Grades (1995 – 1999)**

Year	Total Entry	Grade (%)						
		A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
1995	1,504	7.0	23.2	35.2	25.3	8.2	1.1	0.0
1996	1,500	9.5	26.1	32.2	22.7	7.7	1.7	0.1
1997	1,436	7.4	24.4	36.7	25.3	4.9	1.1	0.1
1998	1,498	6.2	19.3	31.6	31.6	9.3	1.9	0.1
1999	1,401	9.6	22.6	35.5	25.2	5.9	1.0	0.1
<b>Average '95-'99</b>	<b>1,468</b>	<b>8.0</b>	<b>23.1</b>	<b>34.2</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>7.3</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>0.1</b>

**Table II (a): Higher Level C + and E – (1995 – 1999)**

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Average '95-'99
C + (%)	65.4	67.8	68.5	57.1	67.7	65.3
E – (%)	9.3	9.5	6.1	11.3	7.0	8.7

The average mark scored in 1999 was c. 63%. This relatively high average should be viewed in the context of a not insignificant number of high scoring candidates whose marks tend to inflate all averages. This observation is supported by the figures in Table II(b) which gives the average % mark scored in each grade in 1999.

**Table II (b): Higher Level Average Mark per Grade (1999)**

Mark (%)	85 – 00	70 – 84	55 – 69	40 – 54	25 – 39	10 – 24	0 – 9
Grade	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
Average Mark (%)	90.6	76.6	62.8	47.5	33.8	19.4	N/A

### 2.1 Candidate Performance: Comment and Analysis

### 2.1.1 Part I: Listening Comprehension

Average mark c.70%. In the most recent Report issued on the Spanish Junior Certificate Examination (1996) it was stated that “numerals continue to cause problems for many candidates”. The situation in this regard at Higher Level has improved to the extent that the same Chief Advising Examiner remarked this year that “most candidates at this level handle them (numerals) without great difficulty”.

- A. DIÁLOGOS: Average mark c.87%. Many candidates (c.53%) scored full marks; a small number (c.7% of the sample) scored less than 40%. The only recurring difficulty was with 4 (b) where candidates mentioned the correct time but not the fact that the supermarket would be closing.
- B. UNOS ANUNCIOS: Average mark c. 69%. Clearly more challenging than A. c. 15% of candidates scored full marks; c. 10% scored less than 40%.

Most common difficulties were with 3 (c) “Take their seats” and 4 (c) – “Reductions/discounts”.

- C. UNA NOTICIA: Average mark c. 51%. Proved to be the most demanding Section of Part I: c. 13% of candidates scored full marks; c. 32% scored less than 40%. Many candidates missed essential points: “border” in (a); “gas” in (c); “searching” in (d). This is the only Section in Part I in which candidates (c.10% of sample) scored zero. Performance here is, in some cases, not in line with a candidate’s overall performance: half of those who scored zero went on to achieve a D or a C Grade. It is possible that the difficulty may be one of perception rather than reality.
- D. DESCRIPTIVO: Average mark c.62%. This Section continues to prove an effective discriminator and scores are often indicative of overall performance. A – Grade candidates generally scored 34+ (out of 40), B – Grade 28+, C – Grade 22+, etc.; c. 12% of candidates scored full marks; c. 17% scored less than 40%.

Examiners suggested that, while the two texts were satisfactory as regards level of language, content could be more “age appropriate”. (Second text, in particular).

Questions on the first text were generally well and fully answered. In (c), some candidates did not know the number of zeros in two million. In (f), many gave one example only and there was evidence of guesswork.

In the second text, only (d) and (e) were generally correctly answered. The other questions, and (f) in particular, were correctly answered only by candidates who achieved high grades.

### **2.1.2 Part II: Reading Comprehension**

Average mark c. 66%

**Section A:** Average mark c. 74%.

In 3, most candidates thought *Un abrelatas* was a “Bouncer”; in 4, few could say what was sold in a *Joyería*.

**Section B:** Average mark c. 62%

- B.1** Few candidates got the correct answer: “Stop!” in (e).
- B.2** Most candidates scored full marks; some had difficulty with the number of zeros in nineteen million.
- B.3** High standard of answering by majority.
- B.4** Proved too challenging for all but a few. A large number gave “Pornography” as the answer to (a) while few, if any, got the idea of a “sting-type” operation in (b).
- B.5** Well answered, though few scored the maximum – they failed to get the third reason (“Lack of heating”) in (a).
- B.6** Most candidates scored full marks.

**Section C:** Average mark c. 60%

- C.1** Most answered (a), (i) and (ii), correctly although some gave *Banyoles* as the answer to (ii)! In (b), very few gave the correct answer: “Too many passengers”.

- C.2** Challenging, an effective discriminator. All candidates (in the sample) answered (a) correctly; most answered (d), (i) correctly; (c) and (d), (ii) seemed to be at the same level of difficulty and were correctly answered only by candidates who achieved higher grades. In the case of (b), few gave the full, correct answer: “Long-awaited recognition for their language”.
- C.3** All candidates (in the sample) answered (a) correctly and completely. The small number who gave a wrong answer (or no answer) to (b) may not have read the full written text (including caption).

**Section D:** Average mark c. 74%

- D.1** Candidates had no difficulty except with (c), (ii) where most took *diario* to mean “diary”.
- D.2** No difficulty except with (c), (ii) where many candidates did not give the full, correct answer: “Killed by natives/Indians when he was exploring the territory/after he left his ship”.

### 2.1.3 Part III: Written Expression

Average mark c. 49%

**Section A:** Average mark c. 60%. Candidate’s confidence when handling numerals continues to grow. Most common difficulty was with (d): *Dos kilos y medio*.

**Section B:** Average mark c. 50%. Performance here showed an improvement on previous years. Vocabulary was not a problem and most candidates seemed to be familiar with the structures/idioms being tested. Verbs (tense, person, and number) continue to cause difficulty for many candidates.

The following were the verbal forms required:-

- (a) *Tengo(que) estar*: Present, first, singular + Infinitive.
- (b) *Me acostaré*: Future, first, singular (reflexive) **or** *Voy (a) acostarme*: Present, first, singular + Infinitive (reflexive); *Estoy*: Present, first, singular.
- (c) \* *Compraste*: Preterite, second, singular.  
*Costaron*: Preterite, third, plural.
- (d) *Está*: Present, third, singular.
- (e) *(Me) gustan*: Present, third, plural; *Son*: Present, third, plural.  
\* *Dime*: Imperative, second, singular (optional in this context).

It is reasonable to expect that candidates at this level would be familiar with these verbal forms.

**Section C:** Average mark c.45%. Performance in this Section is extremely unsatisfactory; that the average mark is as high as 45% is due solely to the high scoring of a relatively small number of candidates. In fact, c. 15% of candidates scored less than 10 (i.e. 25%) and c. 43% less than 16 (i.e. 40%) out of a maximum of 40 marks.

The following comment was made by the Chief Advising Examiner: “The letter was a fair test but badly answered in general. While showing some familiarity with common place idioms, candidates’ grammar is poor and their manipulation of verbs particularly bad”.

## 2.2 Conclusions

- The Higher Level Examination was an effective discriminating instrument and produced an appropriate scatter of grades.
- The average mark awarded to candidates was c. 63%, as compared with c. 60% in 1996 and c. 59% in 1994. (The most recent years in which detailed reports were prepared.) As these percentage marks are averages, they do not necessarily signal a corresponding improvement in overall candidate performance over the period concerned. (See comment re “average mark” in 2.0 supra).
- There are definite indications of overall improvement in Part I: Listening Comprehension.
- In Part II marks, as usual, were high in Sections A and D. Standards of answering in Section B and C were marginally lower than in previous years.
- In Part III, there are definite indications of improvement in Sections A and B. Performance in Section C is not satisfactory and this is one element of the exam which is in need of review.



## ORDINARY LEVEL

### 3.0 General Statistics

The results (Table III) show a high E- rate. This has been the case for some years past as is clear from Table III (a).

**Table III: Ordinary Level Grades (1995–1999)**

Year	Total Entry	Grade %						
		A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
1995	599	2.3	13.4	27.7	32.1	17.7	6.3	0.5
1996	775	0.9	11.9	33.3	28.4	16.9	7.7	0.9
1997	571	0.9	12.6	32.6	31.7	13.3	7.4	1.6
1998	782	1.0	8.6	27.1	33.6	20.2	8.3	1.2
1999	730	2.2	13.7	25.8	30.7	19.0	7.4	1.2
<b>Average '95–'99</b>	691	1.5	11.9	29.2	31.2	17.6	7.5	1.1

**Table III (a): Ordinary Level E- (1995 – 1999)**

Year	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	Average '95 – '99
<b>E- (%)</b>	24.5	25.5	22.3	29.7	27.6	26.2

The average mark scored in 1999 was c. 50%. It is clear from Table III (b) that this high average is the result of good marks scored by candidates in Grades A to D.

**Table III (b): Ordinary Level Average Mark per Grade (1999)**

Mark (%)	85 – 100	70 – 84	55 – 69	40 – 54	25 – 39	10 – 24	0 – 9
Grade	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
<b>Average Mark (%)</b>	92.2	75.0	60.3	48.1	30.3	18.7	3.3

### 3.1 Candidate Performance: Comment and Analysis

Comment and analysis are less detailed than in the corresponding section on Higher Level (2.1 supra). The main emphasis will be on Conclusions (3.2 infra).

### 3.1.1 Part I: Listening Comprehension

Average mark c. 48%. Numerals are a major problem for most candidates. The Chief Advising Examiner makes the point that “the weak student finds it difficult to deal with big numbers even in English”.

- A. DIÁLOGOS: Average mark c.59%. Standard of answering generally satisfactory. Main difficulties: 3(a), 3(c) and 4 (b).
- B. UNOS ANUNCIOS: Average mark c. 38%. It is suggested that the wording of the questions may have caused difficulty in 1.(a), 1(b) and 3(a). Answering was generally satisfactory in 2. and 4.
- C. UNA NOTICIA: Average mark c. 73%. Well answered but a lot of guessing in (c).
- D. DESCRIPTIVO: Average mark c. 38%. Many candidates seem to be intimidated by this Section and do not attempt to answer any question. This is unfortunate as, for example, 1(a), 1(d), 1(e), 2(c) and 2(d) are quite straightforward.

### 3.1.2 Part II: Reading Comprehension

Average mark c. 65%. Comments re numerals and wording of questions made in the context of Part I (3.1.2 supra) apply here also.

**Section A:** Average mark c. 70%. Only problem with 4, where many presumed that *Tapas* corresponded to “Tap”.

**Section B:** Average mark c. 75%. Best answered Section of Paper. Items 1, 2, 4 and 5 caused no difficulty. Item 3 proved too difficult for the vast majority of candidates. In 6, most candidates seem to have just looked at the photograph and had a guess at the answers with the result that they got (a) right and (b) wrong.

**Section C:** Average mark c. 59%. Guesswork evident in 1(a) and (b). In 2, (a) and (b) caused problems. No difficulty with 3. Item 4 proved difficult and many candidates did not attempt it.

**Section D:** Average mark c. 47%. The relatively low marks scored by candidates in this Section is surprising, all the more so given the undemanding nature of the Dialogue and the questions based on it. The continuous passage was more demanding but candidates should have been well able for questions (c) and (e).

### 3.1.3 Part III: Written Expression

Average mark c. 28%. General performance here is not encouraging. Every year a large number of candidates leave one or more of the three Sections blank and many of those who attempt them score zero in one or more of the Sections. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that many candidates are convinced that this Part of the exam is too difficult for them and do not bother to look at the questions.

**Section A:** Average mark c. 29%. In this Section c. 65% of candidates scored less than 4 (i.e. 40%) and c. 35% scored zero. The importance, in any language, of some familiarity with basic numerals is self-evident. One third of candidates did not know the Spanish for 16 or the date (22) of the exam or the current year (1999) or could not say (or write) *un kilo*, *un hombre*, *un amigo*, etc.

**Section B:** Average mark c. 17%. In this Section c. 90% of candidates scored less than 10 (i.e. 40%) and c. 50% scored zero. The communicative value of the type of item tested in this Section is obvious. Items (a), (b) and (c) would be considered fair tests of communicative competence at this level.

**Section C:** Average mark c. 40%. In this Section c. 53% of candidates scored less than 10 (i.e. 40%) and c. 13% scored zero. The Chief Advising Examiner made the following observation: “The rationale behind this type of question is sound . . . . . But there are many candidates at this level who regard essay-type questions as a ‘no-go area’”.