



LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2000

SPANISH

HIGHER LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

ORDINARY LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

Contents

Higher Level Report

1. Introduction 2

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2. Breakdown of Results 3

3. Listening Comprehension 3

4. Reading Comprehension 4

5. Written Production 7

6. Oral Examination 10

7. Overall General Comments 11

8. Recommendations for Teachers and Students 12

1. 2. **Introduction**

1.1 It is hoped that this review of the 2000 Leaving Certificate Examination will prove helpful to both teachers and students in their preparation for future examinations. The report, together with the marking schemes, clarifies standards required for this examination and the type of answers required in the examination.

This year's examination scripts supply evidence of much that is good by providing examples of outstanding work. They also inevitably show some areas of weakness. This report aims to present both strengths and weaknesses in a constructive way, thereby helping both teachers and pupils to review progress.

2. **Format of Examination**

The Leaving Certificate Higher Examination is comprised of three components: an aural test, an oral examination and a written paper which contains both reading comprehension and written production. The marks are allocated as follows:

a) Aural 80 marks

b) Oral 100 marks

c) Written Paper 220 marks

Total 400 marks

a) This year, in the Aural examination, there were 32 distinct questions averaging between 2 and 4 marks each.

b) The Oral examination consists of two elements:

- a. General Conversation – 70 marks
- b. Roleplay - 30 marks

c) The Written Paper contains 3 Sections:

Section A: (70 marks)

Question 1 (50 marks).
Pupils choose between questions on an optional prescribed literary text or a journalistic passage.

Question 2 (20 marks).
This part of Section A is made up of two short information retrieval passages with 5 questions in total.

Section B: (100 marks)

This part of the examination combines both reading comprehension and written production. Four main questions are intended to examine the students' ability to understand an authentic text in Spanish and a fifth question examines the students ability to write about his/her opinion on a connected topic. (50 marks)

Section C: (50 marks)

Students answer two questions, choosing two different types of productive Spanish writing.

Question 1: This year students chose either a dialogue construction or a letter.

Question 2: Students chose between a diary entry or a note.

Note: In the productive writing sections of the paper, equal marks are allocated for content (including communication) and language.

2.0 Breakdown of Results

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2.1 The total number of candidates for the Higher Level was 820. This was a decrease of 18.5% on the 1998/99 entry. As can be seen from the Leaving Certificate Statistics for Higher Level for the year 2000 (the top half of Appendix A at the end of the Report), 516 of these candidates were female and 304 were male. Of the total entry 67.5% obtained a Grade C or higher, 25.7% obtained a Grade D and 6.9% obtained a Grade E or lower. A breakdown of sub-grades achieved is also given in Appendix A.

3.0 Listening Comprehension

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3.1 Competence in aural comprehension was tested by taped authentic material covering a range of announcements, dialogues, descriptive passages and news items, including a weather forecast. A total of 62% of candidates scored a Grade C or higher in the Listening Comprehension. The percentage of candidates failing to obtain a Grade D or higher was 11%.

Questions 1 to 5 produced good answers although some candidates lost marks through lack of accuracy. For example, in Question 1, some students lost marks by not specifying that Dana had won the Eurovision Song Contest or that she had been in Bilbao to record a new album.

In Question 2(b), which was about musicians raising money for Kosovo, some candidates did not understand the word '*voces*', but this question overall did not cause many problems.

In the interview with a famous tennis player in Question 3, most students understood that he wanted to win Wimbledon but not the notion that he had to struggle (*'luchar'*) to fulfil his dream. In Question 3(b) most candidates were able to get the *advantage* but not the *disadvantage* – (*'hacer y deshacer las maletas'*).

While Question 4, where Pepe visits the Tourist Office, was well understood overall, '*el casco viejo*' caused some difficulty for a few students, and in 4(b) some students did not include enough details for full marks. (i.e. some failed to mention the offer of a '*free drink*' in each place.)

Question 5, about Niki the dolphin, caused no problems for the majority of candidates, although there were some unusual answers for (b) and (c). A few candidates confused '*despues de*' with '*antes de*', thus losing marks in 5(d).

Question 6 (about Courtney Love) posed some difficulty for candidates, with only the more able students scoring full marks here. Some students were unable to pinpoint the phrase '*debido a su personalidad rebelde*' as the answer to 6(b).

The weather forecast was reasonably well attempted, although some students lost a mark by not giving both details about the wind in Question 7(b).

The item on the *Titanic* was well understood by most students, although the word '*trozo*' was interpreted in a variety of ways in Question 8(a).

In the news item about a student stealing a credit card from her teacher in Question 9, most students found the last question quite demanding although any relevant answer was acceptable. Some candidates lost marks by not giving enough details in 9(b). (For example, some

failed to mention that she took the card from his jacket when he wasn't looking.) Students should be encouraged to give full answers to questions at this level.

2. Conclusions and Recommendations

All questions in the Listening Comprehension test were fully attempted and the vocabulary was well within the competence of a Leaving Certificate Higher level candidate. Some candidates performed excellently – approximately 34% of the total number of candidates achieved a Grade A or B in this section of the examination. However some candidates lost marks by not giving enough information. Students should be reminded to answer questions fully for maximum marks. The average mark achieved was 60%, which improved overall performance in the examination as a whole. It is evident from the candidates who did well in this section of the examination that there is good work being done in schools and, for this, teachers are to be congratulated.

4. Reading Comprehension

4.1 Questions on Prescribed Literature

A total of 21 students attempted the questions on *Bibiana y Su Mundo*. Of these, ten candidates also answered the questions on the Journalistic Text (QA2) and did not attempt Question 5 in Section A1. It was obvious that the latter had not studied the literary text, and therefore scored better marks in A2. (As very few students are choosing to take the literary option, perhaps the inclusion of a prescribed literary text on the syllabus should be reassessed.)

Those who had studied *Bibiana y Su Mundo* answered the questions well and had no difficulty with this section of the paper. Question 5 was particularly well answered while some students had some difficulty with Question 4 as they failed to identify the technique of describing the senses which Olaizola used to describe the turning point in Rogelio's recovery.

2.

3. Journalistic Text

This section aims to test both the gist and detailed comprehension of a journalistic text, together with the ability to match synonyms in the language. In all of the comprehension passages the criterion used in the marking of the answers is the level of understanding of the texts shown by the candidate.

The average mark for this section of the paper (from a total of 50 marks) was 31 marks. Overall questions were well answered and only a few students had difficulty with this section.

The responses to Question 1 were good and most students had no great difficulty in understanding the content of the passage. There is still a tendency for some students to elaborate on answers and to go beyond the information given in the text. Some candidates, on the other hand, did not give enough detail in their answers, leaving out important facts which appeared in the text. The candidate is penalised for (a) quoting irrelevant or wrong superfluous material; and (b) partial or inadequate answers. (For example, in Q.1(b), some students gave the reaction of her parents and did not mention the neighbours, thereby losing some marks.) Question 1(e) had three possible correct answers, any of which were awarded full marks.

Most students coped very well with the parallel phrases in Question 2 and the average mark here was high.

Quite a few of the answers to Question 3 were vague and unclear. Many students seem to have difficulty conveying the meaning of phrases accurately, clearly and without ambiguity. There is a tendency to translate the sentence word by word so that often the main message is lost. There is evidence that students need practice at both identifying the message conveyed in the sentence and expressing this in English. For example, in 3(c), the words '*para que*' are important to the meaning of the sentence, and some students lost marks by not realising this. It is important to remind candidates that it would help to look at these sentences within the context of the passage.

Question 4 caused difficulty for many candidates. Most chose the second option and some coped admirably with this, but only the more able students scored the full 6 marks for this question.

4. Short Comprehension Passages

These two short passages were particularly advantageous for weaker candidates. The questions were well answered by the majority of students. However, some students lost marks by not giving full answers to the questions, particularly in (a)(2), where there were marks allocated for both '*the British SS discovered the existence of the spies*', and '*by studying documents etc*'. The word '*reclutar*' caused difficulty for some students in question 1, although many managed to guess that it meant '*to recruit*'.

5.

6. **Section B (Longer Comprehension Passage)**

Again the aim of the first four questions of this section of the examination was to test both basic and detailed comprehension of the passage. Some of the questions required the candidate to think conceptually – this proved difficult for the weaker candidates.

From the 50 marks allocated to the first four questions in this section (excluding the linked question, No. 5) the average mark achieved (as per the sample 20s) was 30 marks.

One of the main problems encountered by examiners was over-transcription on the candidates' part. Questions 1 and 3 in this section aim to test the candidate's comprehension of the precise meaning of phrases and words as they are used in the text. They require very specific answers, and this year, as in other years, some students lost one or two marks in Question 1 by quoting too many words from the text. It is a useful exercise to get the students to replace the phrase which they have chosen for the answer by the given phrase to see if it fits into the text. (It is important to impress upon the students that they will be penalised for quoting full sentences per se.) Taken from the sample 20s returns, the average mark for Question 1 was 65% and for Question 3 the average mark was 56%.

Question 2 proved quite difficult for many candidates. The examiners found that only the stronger candidates showed an understanding of the concepts contained in the sentences. While 2(b) was fairly well answered, many candidates had problems with the phrase '*todos los implicados*' in 2(a) and '*una carta de derechos y deberes*' in question 2(c). While the marking scheme did not penalise the candidates for mistranslation of the word '*carta*', many did not realise that '*deberes*' in this context did not mean '*homework*' and failed to understand '*derechos*'. The average mark scored for this question was 7 marks out of the possible 15.

The summary question (Question 4) elicited good answers from most students. Some candidates failed to mention two measures for 4(a) thereby halving their marks for this question, but answers to 4(b) and

4(c) were mostly correct. The average mark achieved for this question was 10 marks out of a possible 15.

7. Conclusions and Recommendations

Examiners expressed general satisfaction with the passages set for comprehension. It was felt that this section was accessible to the majority of candidates. Most of the candidates had a fairly good understanding of the passages and coped well with the questions. It is important that students experience different types of reading material throughout their years of study and this is made easier nowadays with the availability of authentic material via the Internet, and the increased access to magazines and novels from Spain and South/Central America.

4.

5. WRITTEN PRODUCTION

5.1 The three exercises in written production revealed a wide discrepancy of ability. This section of the paper clearly revealed not only the linguistic strengths and weaknesses of the candidates, but Question 5 in Section B (the linked question) showed also their ability to develop and express their ideas. The marking scheme for the written production exercises allocated equal marks for

(a) content/communication and (b) language/grammatical content.

5.2 The Linked Question (Section B, Question 5)

In this section the candidates are invited to express a personal opinion on a statement related to the comprehension passage. They are not expected to refer to the comprehension text and the statement is meant to act as a springboard for their own ideas. The candidate is marked on the intelligibility, relevance and accuracy of his or her writing. (The Guidelines issued to

examiners for marking this question are shown in Appendix B at the end of this Report.)

In this examination candidates were given the choice of two options, the second statement proving to be slightly more popular than the first. Some of the candidates performed well in this section, but there was a tendency for some students to produce learnt-off artificial chunks of material rather than to react to the topic in a personalised way. There was a lack of fresh ideas - students should be encouraged to address the topics given in a more relevant and individual way. The better candidates showed a high standard of grammatical accuracy and range of vocabulary but students should be discouraged from using too many 'stock' phrases with subjunctives thrown in for good measure. Some of the weaker students failed to come up with any ideas of their own, and lost marks as they mainly quoted from the passage. Other candidates lost marks for content, as their work was not relevant to the question. It is worth noting that many of the students who scored high marks in this question wrote at least 100 words as they needed this to develop their ideas. It is recommended that candidates write a minimum of 80 words and will not be penalised for writing over 100 words. As there appears to be a diversity of opinion among candidates as to the length of this piece of productive writing, in future years a suggested maximum of 150 words will be shown on the examination paper. The average mark for this question, as shown by the sample 20s returns, was 30 out of a possible 50 marks.

Some of the most common grammatical weaknesses were as follows:-

- Lack of use of personal 'a'
- Use of tenses of verbs
- Agreement of adjectives
- Confusion of '*bien*' and '*bueno*'
- Use of pronouns.

5.3 Section C: Question 1

Candidates chose between a dialogue construction and a letter about bullfighting in Spain. The majority of students chose the dialogue construction, while most of

the candidates who chose the letter option achieved high marks. The average mark, again taken from the sample 20 returns, was 59%.

Dialogue Construction

Many students achieved very good marks in this question and overall it was reasonably answered. However, it was noticeable that many students ignored clues which were given on the paper. For example, although '*guitarra*' appeared in the dialogue, many misspelt this word. Weaker students had difficulty with certain grammatical constructions, such as the use of the subjunctive and conditional in the second turn. While the vocabulary was well within the range of a Higher Level Leaving Certificate student, surprisingly many had difficulty with the word for '*musician*'. It was evident that some candidates' knowledge of tenses, such as the Imperfect tense, was insufficient. The following are some of the most common errors:

- Use of '*mayor*' instead of '*mejor*'.
- '*drugas*' instead of '*drogas*'.
- '*un tiempo*' used for '*una vez*'.
- confusing '*mi guitarra*' and '*su guitarra*' (some students did not realise that the dialogue referred to Clapton's guitar, and not their own guitar.)
- agreement of adjectives: '*son muy caro(s)*'.
- pronouns.
- use of '*jugar*' instead of '*tocar*'.
- many students did not get the Imperfect tense in turn 3.
- confusing the use of '*ser*' and '*estar*' (even though clues were given on the paper).

Letter

A small minority of students opted to do the letter. Of those, a large percentage scored high marks and produced excellent work. Some students attempted both questions instead of choosing only one, and of these, mostly scored better in the letter option. In the marking scheme for the letter, 5 marks are allocated to each of six points made by the candidate, making a total of 30 marks. (These marks are, again, divided equally between content and language.)

5.4 Section C: Question 2.

Candidates had the option of producing a Diary Entry or a Note for this question. Slightly more chose to do the Note and the average mark for this question was 67.4%. While some of the constructions called for in 2(b) caused difficulty for some of the weaker students, overall the question was well answered.

Diary Entry

The first and last points in the guidelines for this diary entry caused most problems for students. Many could not express '*difficulties*' or '*looking forward to*' in Spanish. Once again some candidates confused '*bien*' and '*bueno*'. The second and third points were dealt with well overall.

Note

While most candidates dealt with this question reasonably well, there were a few components which caused difficulty. Very few candidates used the familiar imperative where necessary, and opted instead to use '*poder + infinitive*', not all of whom did so accurately. The following were some of the problem areas:

- '*el problema*' – many students were unaware that this word is masculine.
- Use of '*poco*' instead of '*pequeño*'.
- Unable to express '*it wouldn't start*' in Spanish.
- Unable to express '*I had to.*'
- Unable to express '*could you meet*' or '*could you bring*'.
- Very few candidates produced the phrase '*ningún dinero*'.

Both 2(a) and 2(b) contained four main points to be made by the candidate. Five marks were allocated for each of these points, and minor inaccuracies which did not distort the message were not penalised. (Accurate verbs were considered vital to the correct communication of the message.)

5.5 Conclusions and Recommendations

This section of the examination paper always proves the most demanding for the candidates. Training pupils in written production is one of the most demanding tasks facing the modern language teacher, and research has

shown that it is vital to integrate the other language skills in preparation for written production. A newspaper article or an extract from a radio or TV programme could serve as a starting point for class discussion. Idioms, structures and vocabulary could then be noted, and the students' ideas could be brought together through more detailed discussion or as a formal debate, and then summarised on the board or overhead. Students would then be encouraged to re-use creatively the language that they have met in the programme or text. A subsequent activity could be group-work by students to put together some ideas on paper before individual pupils are asked to produce their own written work. It is important to stress that the students should be trained to express their own ideas. The maximum use of Spanish in the classroom cannot be underestimated as this plays a vital role in enabling students to communicate their ideas adequately in the language.

6.0 ORAL EXAMINATION

6.1 Format

The Oral Examination consisted of two sections: General Conversation (70%) and a Roleplay (30%). None of the candidates chose to introduce the 'literary option'.

6.2 Report

The performance of the majority of candidates in the oral examination enhanced their overall result in the examination. It was most reassuring to note that, at the Higher Level of the examination, where up to 100 marks were allocated, 90.8% of candidates scored a Grade C or higher in this section, and only .86% of students failed to score a Grade D or higher. The group of oral experienced examiners carried out their tasks efficiently, professionally and with consideration for the candidates who were taking the examination. (This report on the oral examination is largely based on the information supplied by the examiners whose co-operation in this regard is much appreciated.) The whole process ran smoothly and the majority of schools ensured that the examination took place under the best possible conditions for the candidates. Candidates were, on the whole, well prepared for the examination and credit is due to teachers for this. While standards varied from centre to centre, most candidates were able to maintain a satisfactory conversation and in most schools

students were well prepared for the roleplay situations. Quite a high percentage of candidates were able to discuss topics of current interest while others had a vocabulary which was limited to basic conversational topics, such as family and hobbies. There were a few schools where the standard of the candidates was noticeably poorer than the average and this is a matter for some concern. While many of our students have the opportunity to visit Spain during their school years, it was heartening to note that many of the high scoring pupils had never had the opportunity to visit Spain, yet were very enthusiastic about the country and its culture.

6.3 Common problem areas:

- Confusion between 'ser' and 'estar'. (*Mi casa es(tá) cerca...*)
- Using 'ser' instead of 'tener' with age.
- Mis-use and over-use of the verb 'gustar'.
- 'fue' instead of 'fui'.
- Answering a past tense question with a present tense. (*¿Qué hiciste el verano pasado? - Voy a España.*)
- Inability to use future and conditional tenses.
- Lack of vocabulary – topics such as school rules, local industries, food, weather expressions and clothes caused problems for some students.
- Agreement of adjectives.
- Responding to a question by repeating the verb used by the examiner. (e.g. *¿Cómo vienes al instituto? Vienes en coche.*)
- Verbs such as 'ir', and 'hacer' in all tenses.

(It should be noted that these problem areas related to the overall cohort of candidates which included both Ordinary Level and Higher Level candidates.)

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

Evidence has shown that consistent use of Spanish as the language of the classroom is one of the most effective ways of improving oral communication skills. Students at this level of language acquisition should be able to go beyond the basic topics of conversation to discuss current topics, future plans, and to express their opinion on the issues of the day. It was reassuring to note that most of the examiners reported an improvement in the performance of candidates overall and, for this, recognition must be given to the good efforts of their teachers.

7.0 Overall General Comments

7.1 Examiners expressed general satisfaction with this year's examination paper. While certain sections were demanding, the paper was accessible to most students at this level. The performance of candidates in both the oral and the aural examinations improved the Grades of almost all candidates at Higher Level. The percentage of candidates who achieved a Grade A on the written paper alone was 9.0%, yet when the oral and aural components were added, a total of 13.2% achieved a Grade A. As can be seen from the statistics in Appendix A, the total percentage of candidates who failed to achieve a Grade D or higher overall was 6.9% while on the written paper alone the percentage of candidates who failed to achieve a Grade D or higher was 12.4%. Of the 6.9% of students who failed the examination, it was clear that some students are opting to take the Higher Level when they should be taking the Ordinary Level. Examiners noted that a small percentage of candidates were not suited to Higher Level and should have taken Ordinary Level instead.

7.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

The following overall strengths were noted from this year's examination:

- An ability to comprehend authentic written texts.
- An ability to comprehend spoken Spanish and answer factual questions from recorded material.
- An ability to converse and to undertake situational roleplay in the language.

Examiners would agree that some weaknesses were apparent in some cases in the following areas:

- Grammatical constructions (as mentioned previously in each Section).
- Talking and writing about events in tenses other than the present.
- Writing about their own views in Spanish.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

The following recommendations are a summary of the recommendations already mentioned in this Report:

- While pupils are well prepared for the Listening Comprehension test, they should be reminded that marks are deducted for omitting parts of answers to questions and for giving insufficient details.
- When answering reading comprehension questions students should be reminded that they should base their answers only on information given in the text and should give full and complete answers.
- Practice is needed at interpreting the meaning conveyed in sentences and expressing this clearly and accurately in English.
- When asked '*escribe en español las frases/las palabras del texto que tengan el mismo sentido que las siguientes*' students should only quote the relevant phrase or words as marks will be deducted for quoting too much from the text.
- In the written production question in Section B (the 'linked question'), students should be encouraged to react to the topic in an individual way rather than to reproduce tracts of artificial, learnt-off phrases.
- A recommended minimum of 80 words and a maximum of 150 words is suggested for the 'linked question'.
- It is important that students study different types of authentic reading material during their years of study of Spanish.
- All the language skills should be brought into play when preparing students for written productive exercises.
- The consistent use of Spanish as the language of the classroom is one of the most effective ways of improving both oral and written communication skills in the language. Pupils then see the language as a genuine means of interaction.

- **Suggestion**

Any link or contact with Spanish schools or people is to be encouraged. Contact with students (especially of their own age) in Spain motivates pupils to learn more about the country, its people and the language. Even if students cannot travel to the country, links can be made by letter, faxes, e-mail contact, audio tapes or videos.

Contents

Page

Ordinary Level Report

1. Introduction 14
2. Breakdown of Results 15
3. Listening Comprehension 15
4. Reading Comprehension 16
5. Written Production 17
6. Oral Examination 19
7. Overall General Comment 20
8. Recommendations for Teachers and Students 21

Appendix A: Examination Statistics 22

Appendix B: Marking Scheme – Linked Question 24

Appendix C: Marking Guidelines for Section B 25

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Format of Examination

The Leaving Certificate Ordinary Examination consists of three components: an aural test, an oral examination

and a written paper which contains both reading comprehension and tests of written production. The allocation of marks is as follows:

- a) Aural 100 marks
- b) Oral 80 marks
- c) Written Paper 220 marks

Total 400 marks

(a) This year, the Aural comprehension test consisted of questions on nine different segments of authentic material covering a range of announcements, dialogues, descriptive passages and news items, including a weather forecast.

(b) The Oral examination consists of two elements:

- a. General Conversation 70% of total 80 marks
- b. Roleplay 30% of total 80 marks

(c) The Written Paper contains two main Sections:

Section A: (160 marks)

This Section consists of five reading comprehension passages of varying levels of difficulty. In Question 1 candidates are expected to answer the questions in Spanish, and for the remaining four texts, the questions are to be answered in English. The marks this year were allocated as follows:

Question 1 50 marks

Question 2 25 marks

Question 3 20 marks

Question 4 25 marks

Question 5 40 marks.

Section B: (60 marks)

Students are required to answer two questions. Question 1 consists of a guided letter, for which a maximum of 40 marks is allocated, and Question 2 consists of a choice between a message or a diary entry, for which a maximum of 20 marks is allocated. In the letter there are five messages to be communicated, each of which can be awarded a maximum of 8 marks. There are four main points to be conveyed in both the message and the diary entry, each of which can be awarded a maximum of 5 marks. (The guidelines for examiners for Section B is attached to this Report as Appendix C.)

2.0 Breakdown of Results

2.1 The total number of candidates for the Ordinary Level was 602. This was an increase of 9% on the 1998/99 entry. As can be seen from the Ordinary Level Leaving Certificate Statistics (Appendix A at the end of this Report), 365 of these candidates were female and 238 were male. Of the total entry 60.2% obtained a Grade C or higher, 26.6% obtained a Grade D and 13.4% obtained a Grade E or lower. A breakdown of sub-grades is given in Appendix A.

3.0 LISTENING COMPREHENSION

3.1 In this section of the examination, 72.9% achieved a Grade C or higher and 9.5% scored a Grade E or lower. The average mark, which was taken from the sample 20 returns, was 62%. Overall the questions, of which some were multiple-choice this year, were accessible to most of the candidates, as can be seen from the above figures.

3.2 The first segment about Dana International caused no great difficulty for candidates although some answered '*singing*' for (a)(ii), thus losing marks.

In the second *Anuncio* about the musicians' contribution to Kosovo, '*disco compacto*' was misinterpreted by some students and '*este año*' was translated as '*last*

year' by some. (For 2(b) either '*April and May*' or '*this year*' were acceptable for full marks.) Most students answered 2(c) correctly.

The interview with the famous tennis player was reasonably easy for candidates and Section 5, about Pepe's visit to Madrid was well answered by the more able students. Questions (a) and the second part of (c) proved rather tricky for weaker candidates. Some candidates lost one mark by giving '*drink*' or '*wine*' as the answer for (b) instead of '*a glass of wine*'.

In the extract about Niki the dolphin, questions (a) and (c) caused no problems for the majority of candidates, but quite a few did not answer the question '*How did Niki's mother die?*' in (b).

In the next section about Courtney Love, examiners reported that many candidates confused the numbers 6 and 16 in the first question. Quite a few gave the wrong answer ('*for taking drugs*') to question (b) thereby losing marks, but most students were able to answer that Kurt Kobain was her husband or that he had died.

The weather forecast caused problems for quite a few students who failed to pick out the correct multiple-choice answers. Part (c) caused less difficulty with many candidates getting the temperatures correct.

The *Titanic* extract produced some good answers although it was surprising that some candidates did not recognise the word '*veinte*'. Numbers again caused difficulty for some candidates in the last section about the stolen credit card, where there was some confusion between '*diez mil*' and '*cien mil*'. While (b) caused no great difficulty, many candidates only answered one detail correctly in question (c).

3.3 Conclusions and Recommendations

Of all three components of the examination candidates achieved highest results in the listening comprehension test. The introduction of multiple-choice type questions into this level of the examination was considered beneficial to candidates. While most candidates coped well overall with this section of the examination, examiners noticed some weak points:

- Numbers
- General vocabulary: for example, cds, dress, glass

- Weather vocabulary

However, it is evident that most candidates have developed good listening skills and that much good work is being done in this area in schools.

4.0 Reading Comprehension

4.1 Candidates answered ten questions (in Spanish) about the first comprehension passage, and approximately twenty-two factual questions (in English) about four remaining texts. The criterion used in the marking of the answers to the comprehension questions is the level of understanding of the texts shown by the candidate. Most students achieved reasonably high marks in the first three comprehension exercises but Questions 4 and 5 proved to be more demanding overall for candidates and separated out the stronger candidates.

4.2 The average mark, taken from the sample 20 returns, for the first comprehension passage about Carlo Sainz was 31 marks out of a possible 50 marks. Most of the questions were well understood by candidates, with only (c) and (h) causing any difficulty. Many students did not understand the verb '*se casó*'.

Most students coped well with the next passage about Pelé, the famous football player, although, surprisingly, a few candidates did not recognise '*viernes*'. The words '*relojes*' and '*sombrero*' also caused some confusion for a small number of candidates. The average mark, taken from the sample 20 returns, was 15 marks out of a possible 25 marks.

The responses to the questions on the article about smoking (Question 3) were on the whole good, with only (d) causing a problem for some students, as they did not understand the word '*publicidad*'. The average mark for this question was 14 marks out of a possible 20 marks.

The text about the blind actors from Cádiz was a demanding one for almost all candidates and only the students who understood the word '*ciegos*' or those who

guessed that it was a handicap of some sort managed to answer (a) correctly. (Students who mentioned a '*handicap*' but not '*blindness*' specifically were also awarded full marks for this question.) Questions (b) and (e) were mostly well understood and answered correctly, but (c) and (d) caused problems for weaker candidates especially. (It was noted that the word '*ciego*' had already been tested in question 1. However, any candidate who suggested the idea of '*lograr transportar al público*' for this answer was, of course, awarded full marks.) The average percentage mark for this question (as per sample 20 returns) was 24%.

Quite a few candidates had some difficulty with the article on *Los Coches del Futuro* although the average mark achieved was 42.5% of the total marks. Many students managed to find the key phrases to enable them to answer questions (a), (b) (e) and (f)(i), with only (c) and (f)(ii) proving difficult for most students.

4.3 Conclusions and Recommendations

Examiners felt that, while some of the comprehension passages were demanding, the questions were accessible to the majority of candidates. Pupils can be helped to pinpoint certain key-phrases within the text to enable them to understand the gist of the passage and to answer relevant questions. During their study of the language, it is important that students encounter a variety of different types of reading material, thereby widening their range of vocabulary and improving their comprehension of authentic texts.

5.0 Written Production

Students were asked to produce two pieces of written Spanish: a) a letter (40 marks) and b) either a note or a diary entry (20 marks). The written production is the most demanding section of the examination, and a very small minority of candidates did not attempt the section at all.

5.1 Question 1: Letter

The average mark (again taken from the sample 20 returns) for this question was 22 marks from a possible 40 marks. Many candidates scored full marks for the first point while some students had difficulty expressing '*last week*' in Spanish. Many candidates did not know how to express the idea of '*have just returned*' in Spanish and so lost marks in the second point. A surprising number of students could not spell '*mes*' or '*irlandés(a)*'. There were some very good answers for the third and fourth points – it was obvious that many students had prepared the subject of holidays well. Some students still have difficulty writing about past events, and this is an area where practice is needed. However, it was reassuring that many candidates were able to talk about their holiday plans using either future tenses or '*voy a*' + *infinitive*. The final point about the weather was rather disappointing as the majority of candidates had difficulty expressing '*rainy*' and '*windy*' and were not aware of the use of '*hacer*' with weather expressions.

5.2 Question 2: Note / Diary Entry

Slightly more candidates opted to do the note rather than the diary entry. Statistics show that the average mark for this question was 8 marks from a possible 20 marks. Each question tested a variety of tenses and students were expected to be able to express themselves in the present, past and future tenses. This caused difficulty for weaker students.

Note

The first point was quite well expressed by most candidates and the message was communicated clearly. One common error (which did not detract from the communication) was the use of '*por la tarde*' instead of '*de la tarde*' when used with a specific time. In the second point many candidates had difficulty with the phrase '*there will be*' but some managed to convey the communicative message adequately in other ways. '*Después de*' was not familiar to some candidates. The imperative in the third point proved to be a problem for the majority of candidates, many of whom could not express '*bring*' in Spanish. Quite a few students confused '*beber*' with '*bebida*'. Scarcely any students mentioned the word for '*lunch*'. The final point elicited

good answers from the students overall and most had little trouble conveying the full details.

Diary Entry

Almost all of the candidates were able to express how they felt about their supermarket job, although very few mentioned that it was a '*summer job*'. Most candidates coped well with the second point but it appeared that many were being grossly underpaid because salary levels in some cases amounted to 20 pesetas a day! (It was surprising to note how few knew the value of Spanish currency.) The third point was more problematic for most students as they lacked the vocabulary for '*match*', '*atmosphere*' and '*team*'. While the second half of the final point was reasonably well expressed, many had difficulty with the word '*cansado*'.

5.3 Conclusions and Recommendations

Again, as in the Higher Level, there was a wide range of ability in this section. It was reassuring to note that examiners felt that, with the exception of a small group of centres, the standard of written production had improved this year. However, some areas which could be improved are as follows:

- Past tenses
- Weather expressions
- Vocabulary for food items and meals
- Everyday imperatives (e.g. '*Bring*').
- Vocabulary dealing with sport, e.g. football / basketball matches.

Many of these language elements could be practiced in normal everyday classroom conversation. The regular daily use of Spanish in the classroom for instructions and general communication would reinforce both constructions and vocabulary for these students. By communicating with the teacher and each other within a classroom context, students would become familiar with most of the above lexical items. Research has proved that the regular use of Spanish as the language of the classroom is one of the best methods of improving the pupils' fluency and competence in both oral and written Spanish and also reinforces the message that the pupils are learning a language for communication.

4. Oral Examination

6.1 Format

The Oral examination consisted of two sections: General Conversation (70%) and a Roleplay (30%). None of the candidates chose to introduce the 'literary option'.

6.2 Report

From the total cohort of Ordinary Level candidates, 44% were awarded a Grade C or over, and 22.5% failed to achieve a Grade D or higher in the Oral section of the examination. The remaining 33.5% scored a Grade D in the oral examination. Thanks are due to our group of experienced examiners who carried out their task professionally with consideration for the candidates who were taking the examination. Their co-operation in helping furnish information for this report is also much appreciated. While some candidates were well prepared for the oral examination and credit is due to their teachers for this, there was a small number of Ordinary Level students who were unable to maintain a satisfactory conversation with the examiner. Examiners noticed a great diversity between centres. There were some schools where the standard of the candidates was noticeably poorer than the average. However, examiners reported an improvement in the performance of candidates overall.

6.3 Common Problem Areas:

- Confusion between 'ser' and 'estar'. (*Mi casa es(tá) cerca...*)
- Using 'ser' instead of 'tener' with age.
- Mis-use and over-use of the verb 'gustar'.
- 'fue' instead of 'fui'.
- Answering a past tense question with a present tense. (*¿Qué hiciste el verano pasado? - Voy a España.*)
- Inability to use future and conditional tenses.
- Lack of vocabulary – topics such as school rules, local industries, food, weather expressions and clothes caused problems for some students.
- Agreement of adjectives.

- Responding to a question by repeating the verb used by the examiner. (e.g. ‘¿Cómo vienes al instituto? Vienes en coche’.)
- Verbs such as ‘ir’, and ‘hacer’ in all tenses.

(It should be noted that these problem areas related to the overall cohort of candidates which included both Ordinary Level and Higher Level candidates.)

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6.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

While it is reassuring that examiners noted an improvement in the performance of candidates overall, the percentage of marks allocated to students at Ordinary Level shows that work needs to be done in some schools to enable students to converse adequately in Spanish. Some of the weaker students had difficulty maintaining a conversation with the examiner and, in a small number of schools, some candidates had not adequately prepared the Roleplays. Most candidates, however, were able to respond appropriately in the Roleplay situation and it was felt by examiners that the Ordinary Level candidates gained from the inclusion of Roleplays in the examination. In the general conversation, while quite a few students found difficulty expressing events in the past tense, most were able to communicate adequately about themes which related to their lives. Again it should be stressed that consistent use of Spanish as the language of the classroom is one of the most effective ways of improving oral communication skills.

7. Overall General Comment

7.1 Examiners expressed general satisfaction with this year’s examination paper. While some of the sections were demanding, questions were within the capability of most of the students. The inclusion of multiple-choice questions in the more demanding sections of the aural examination was beneficial to candidates. The performance of students in the aural test improved the Grades of almost all candidates while the oral examination had the effect of bringing the candidates’ mark down by a sub-grade in many cases. Examiners noted, from a small number of centres where candidates performed particularly badly, that some students were

not adequately prepared for the examination and this is a matter of some concern.

7.2 Strengths and Weaknesses

The following overall strengths were noted from this year's examination:

- An ability to understand and answer questions on authentic written texts.
- An ability to comprehend spoken Spanish and answer factual questions from recorded material.
- An ability to converse and to undertake situational roleplay in the language.

Examiners would agree that some weaknesses were apparent in the following areas:

- Talking and writing about events in tenses other than the present.
- Lack of general vocabulary (including weather vocabulary).
- Unfamiliarity with numbers.

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8. Recommendations for Teachers and Students

8.1 The following recommendations are a summary of the recommendations already mentioned in this Report:

- The consistent use of Spanish as the language of the classroom is one of the most effective ways of improving both oral and written communication skills in the language.
- It is important that students have access to a variety of authentic reading material during their years of study of the language.
- Students should be helped to develop the skill of pinpointing key-phrases within texts to enable them to understand the gist of the text and to answer relevant questions.
- Students need practice in talking and writing in Spanish about events in the past.
- Much of the vocabulary relevant to the letter could be consolidated by oral practice within the classroom.
- As in the Higher Level Report, it is suggested that any link with Spain or a Spanish-speaking country has a very positive effect upon the motivation of students. Any contact with Spanish pupils (of their own age preferably) shows them very clearly that the language is a means of communicating with others and can broaden their knowledge of the

culture and life of Spain. While some students may find an exchange difficult, opportunities for the exchange of information via letters, faxes, audio tapes, videos and e-mail messages are numerous and of great benefit to the student.

APPENDIX A

1997-2000 LEAVING CERTIFICATE SPANISH STATISTICS

HIGHER LEVEL

Year	No. of candidates	Grades (%)													
		Higher Level													
		A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	N
1997	859	4.3	6.5	8.1	9.9	10.8	11.8	10.2	9.5	9.8	8.8	6.4	3.4	0.3	0.
1998	989	6.5	7.1	7.6	7.7	11.1	10.2	9.4	10.8	10.2	8.4	7.8	3.0	0.2	0.
1999	1007	5.5	7.3	9.4	9.4	10.7	10.2	10.6	11.4	9.6	7.1	6.3	2.3	0.1	0.
2000	820	5.4	7.8	8.3	7.8	8.3	11.0	9.8	9.1	11.7	8.0	6.0	5.9	0.6	0.

ORDINARY LEVEL

Year	No. of candidates	Grades (%)													
		Ordinary Level													
		A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	N
1997	558	3.0	1.8	4.8	8.2	10.8	12.2	12.4	11.3	9.0	9.5	7.7	8.1	1.3	0.
1998	685	0.7	1.3	3.5	6.0	11.1	14.2	15.3	13.4	10.2	9.6	6.9	6.3	1.3	0.
1999	552	0.9	2.7	4.7	7.6	8.2	13.4	17.0	11.2	10.7	8.3	8.5	5.8	0.9	0.
2000	603	0.8	1.0	3.5	7.3	9.6	12.9	11.3	13.8	10.6	8.5	7.5	10.0	3.2	0.

2000 LEAVING CERTIFICATE STATISTICS

BOTH SCHOOL AND E10 CANDIDATES

HIGHER LEVEL

Subjects	Grade									
	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2
Spannais	44	64	68	64	68	90	80	75	96	66
Spanish	5.4	7.8	8.3	7.8	8.3	11.0	9.8	9.1	11.7	8.0
Total Female	31	44	48	42	40	62	53	45	58	36
%Female	6.0	8.5	9.3	8.1	7.8	12.0	10.3	8.7	11.2	7.0
Total Male	13	20	20	22	28	28	27	30	38	30
% Male	4.3	6.6	6.6	7.2	9.2	9.2	8.9	9.9	12.5	9.9

ORDINARY LEVEL

Subjects	Grade									
	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2
Spannais	5	6	21	44	58	78	68	83	64	51
Spanish	0.8	1.0	3.5	7.3	9.6	12.9	11.3	13.8	10.6	8.5
Total Female	3	5	15	27	39	46	39	52	35	26
%Female	0.8	1.4	4.1	7.4	10.7	12.6	10.7	14.2	9.6	7.1
Total Male	2	1	6	17	19	32	29	31	29	25
% Male	0.8	0.4	2.5	7.1	8.0	13.4	12.2	13.0	12.2	10.5

APPENDIX B

Section B: Question 5 (Linked Question) TOTAL MARKS: 50

Guidelines for Marking

1. Content/Communication 25 Marks

TOP

High level of coherence

Clear argumentation

Communicative intention fulfilled

Little or no irrelevant material **18 – 25 marks**

MIDDLE

Reasonable level of coherence

Comprehensible to monoglot Spanish speaker

Communicative intention more or less respected

Some irrelevant material **9 – 17 marks**

BOTTOM

Lack of coherence

Monoglot Spanish speaker would have difficulty understanding

Communicative intention not fulfilled

A lot of irrelevant material **0 – 8 marks**

2. Language 25 Marks

TOP

Idiomatic Spanish

Good level of vocabulary

Few mistakes in verbs or spelling **18 – 25 marks**

MIDDLE

Vocabulary adequate

Verbs generally correct

Not too many spelling mistakes **9 – 17 marks**

BOTTOM

Problems with vocabulary

Most verbs incorrect

Many spelling mistakes **0 – 8 marks**

APPENDIX C

(Marking Guidelines for Section B: Ordinary level Leaving Certificate Paper)

(60 Marks)

Candidates must attempt 1. **LETTER** and **either** 2 (a) **MESSAGE** or 2 (b) **DIARY ENTRY**.

Q. 1 Letter: 40 Marks

There are **five** ‘messages’ to be communicated. Allow a maximum of **8** marks for each of these.

8 marks x 5 = 40

- Full message unequivocally conveyed: 8
- Communication satisfactory: 6
- Communication adequate: 5

