UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
SEC

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

May 2010

EXAMINERS’ REPORT
SEC ENGLISH LANGUAGE
MAY 2010 SESSION
EXAMINERS’ REPORT

GENERAL INFORMATION AND STATISTICS

A total of 5692 candidates sat for the May 2010 session. The cohort is only marginally bigger than in the previous sitting (5674). This year, there was almost an equal number of candidates for Paper A and Paper B, with 2896 (50.9%) candidates opting for the A Paper and 2796 (49.1%) candidates sitting for the B Paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>NUMBER OF CANDIDATES</th>
<th>% PAPER A</th>
<th>% PAPER B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5692</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>49.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>5674</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5933</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>6006</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 1 – PERCENTAGE OF CANDIDATES SITTING FOR PAPER A AND PAPER B

Absences

This year, a total of 175 (3.1%) out of the 5692 applicants were absent for all the components of the examination. Out of these, only 27 (0.48%) were registered for the A paper and 148 (2.6%) applicants, by far a larger number, were absent from the B Paper. The table below shows how this compares with previous years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YEAR</th>
<th>PAPER A</th>
<th>PAPER B</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 2 – NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF ABSENTEES IN PAPER A AND PAPER B

1.2 Grade distribution

The overall performance of the total cohort sitting for the May 2010 session is depicted in table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>U</th>
<th>ABS</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II A</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>595</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>2896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>23.8</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.9</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>II B</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>515</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>757</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>2796</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>25.1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>551</td>
<td>688</td>
<td>765</td>
<td>1060</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>703</td>
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<td>175</td>
<td>5692</td>
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<tr>
<td>%</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3 – GRADE DISTRIBUTION FOR SEC ENGLISH LANGUAGE 2010
**SEC English Language**

The May 2010 paper was made up of two main components – the oral component (picture interpretation; role play and listening comprehension) common to both Paper A and Paper B and the written component (reading, writing task and composition writing) specifically for Paper A and Paper B, as specified in the SEC syllabus for English Language 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>%Weighting of papers</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1a</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1b</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1c</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Paper 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 1</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part 2</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**TABLE 4 – SCHEME OF ASSESSMENT**

**THE ORAL COMPONENT**

The oral component in SEC English Language examination is common to both Paper A and Paper B and consists of three tasks: listening comprehension, a role play part and picture interpretation as a stimulus to conversation. Oral skills are weighted at 10%.

This part of the examination paper is conducted by a separate set of examiners. A training session was held prior to the actual examination, during which the procedure and rationale of the different oral components were made familiar to the examiners concerned. During the training session, the examiners were given instructions for reading pace and voice in preparation for the listening comprehension sessions as well as practice in the assessment of candidates for the picture interpretation and role plays. A recorded session using past paper material with participants whose profile is very similar to that of examination candidates and the rating scale intended for the examination were employed. This exercise ensured standardization among markers and a fair assessment of the candidates’ performance.

**Paper1 part 1a - Listening Comprehension**

This part of the examination entailed listening to two texts and answering questions based on the texts. The two texts in all sessions were of similar length and difficulty but tapped two different text types. In all sessions, the first text was the transcript of a news item of events that had very recently been in world news. These news stories were informative; the texts were well organised with certain grammatical features such as the use of the present perfect occurring more frequently. The second text in each
session, on the other hand, was more informal and was the transcript of individuals speaking about various aspects of their home town, containing fillers, abbreviations and some idiomatic expression.

Quality was ensured mainly as a result of the thematic continuity of both passages and also the number and types of questions asked. Two question types on the first text and three question tasks on the second text are manageable and the fact that most questions could not take far too many different alternatives as answers gives a very good indication of the candidates’ listening skills.

A total of 15% of the total marks was allotted to the testing of listening skills and the two texts were weighted equally. The format of the questions was varied and questions on Text A included matching and a series of statements to be marked as true or false together with a reason and questions on Text B included grid filling, multiple choice and reference questions. In this manner, understanding at word level, at paragraph level and whole text level was tested.

**Performance**

As usual, there was a very evident and expected difference between the performance of candidates sitting for Papers A and B. In Paper A, the majority of candidates scored above average and it was not uncommon to come across very high marks of 28 – 30. An encouraging number of candidates sitting for Paper B managed to score more than average but, unfortunately there were also instances of low scores (3-7). The task which proved to be the easiest was underlining the correct answer and the hardest task was the true/false exercise and to state the reason for the answer given.

Generally, marks were lost because the candidates were not very precise in their answers, as for example when providing the replacement words, as they either changed the tense of the verb (for instance, in text 1A ‘predicting’ rather than ‘predicted’, in text 4A ‘participating’ instead of ‘participate’) or added on other words which were unnecessary. Another case in point concerns the task where information was needed about the particular names/phrases found in the texts. Although candidates linked these phrases to the general idea of what they heard, yet they failed to be specific enough in their answers, so for example, to the question of ‘What North of England refers to, they wrote ‘rich ingredients’ instead of ‘the place where rich ingredients in food are found’. It is a pity really since with some extra effort, higher marks would have been gained.

**Paper1 part 1b - Role Play**

This component of the paper requires the candidates to take on a role where language is put into practice in a relatively realistic situation necessary for a brief exchange to take place between candidate and examiner. Two situations, taking into consideration the cohort’s ages and experience as well as the language areas dictated by the syllabus, were presented in every session, where the first situation always involved the candidate asking a friend for help, for example when exam notes/calculator go missing and the second situation always involved the candidate going to a neighbour to explain a mishap, like accidentally breaking a window pane. All the dialogues presented parallel contexts and contained 6 prompts which followed similar patterns, testing the competence of the candidates to continue and conclude a dialogue and to express some functions like to explain, to suggest and to express surprise.

**Performance**

It was noted that the task was completed to varying degrees. In the majority of cases, the candidates followed the cues given and delivered their responses quite smoothly. In other cases, performance suffered mostly because the candidates appeared to miss the prompts or even ignored them completely, thereby killing the conversation thread and not managing to complete the task set.
Paper1 part 1c - Picture Interpretation

This last task in the oral component normally consists of a visual prompt to generate a brief discussion about topics as dictated by the language area fo the syllabus. The May 2010 paper presented three pictures all related to a topic lifted from the syllabus, for example the environment, childhood, pollution etc to mentally prepare the candidate for the topic of discussion. This time, however, each candidate was given the chance to talk about a picture of his/her own choice from the set of three given. In this way, the candidate could talk about the picture he/she felt most familiar with. All the pictures were carefully selected to serve only as a springboard for ideas and certainly not to entail scrutiny for detail. The questions were also worded in such a way as to avoid any ambiguity. Five questions were set in each session and although relating to a different topic, it was ensured that the questions followed the same pattern of a warmer question, such as – what can you see in the picture?; a personal experience question; two questions and an opinion question.

Performance

Once again, a difference in task achievement was noted. A good number of candidates sitting for Paper A especially spoke quite fluently about topics such as pollution in the environment, learning etc. Paper B candidates, on the whole, coped with the task. Unfortunately, there was a small number of candidates who struggled in this task and faltered over vocabulary items like ‘drawbacks’ and ‘by heart’, sometimes even confusing ‘learner’ with ‘teacher’, and at times managing only monosyllabic responses.

General comments for the oral component in Paper A and Paper B

More training in the oral component is called for where students need to be trained to listen carefully and to analyse what they are hearing. Students need to be taught to pay more attention to the rubric and to what is required of them in a particular question, especially in the reference questions where marks were lost, very often, not because the candidates had not listened carefully enough but simply because they were not specific enough in their answers. Likewise in the roleplay dialogue where marks were lost because the prompts were ignored.

THE WRITTEN COMPONENT

The SEC English written component is made up of two papers. Paper 1 is a Language Use paper and is common to both Paper A and Paper B. Paper 2, although comprising a reading comprehension task and a brief writing task as well as composition writing for both options, present different material.

Paper1 part 2 - Language Use

This component of the paper tests candidates’ accurate use of language. This year, the one-and-a-half hour paper comprised nine tasks, ranging from ticking the right option to writing out statements that fit in a context as set in the syllabus, and covered knowledge of: spelling, morphology, vocabulary, collocations, syntax, structures, and sociolinguistic competence. This is an accuracy based paper and therefore candidates were penalized for spelling mistakes. Each of these nine tasks presented language in a mini-context thus creating an acceptable level of meaningful language. Overall, the paper tested a variety of abilities in language use, giving both an opportunity to the average student to come up with appropriate responses, but also challenging the higher achievers.
Performance

This component of the examination served to differentiate well among candidates. The average mark of candidates opting for Paper A is 25.5 out of 50 and the average mark of Paper B candidates for the same tasks is 15.5 out of 50.

Exercise 1 required candidates to choose the meaning of an expression, sentence or question taken from current language use. Generally candidates who attempted Paper A found hardly any difficulty in this exercise, unlike the candidates who opted for Paper B who at times, fared poorly, failing, for example to understand words like “declining” and therefore lost the mark. Such poor performance only serves to show a weak exposure to language use.

Exercise 2 was a word formation exercise. Therefore, many students laboured through this exercise especially because of the correct spelling. A considerable number of candidates misspelt correspondent, writing it as correspondent. The word millionth proved to be challenging for many candidates. Another obvious mistake was the formation of the wrong part of speech and therefore “traditional” was wrongly formed as “traditionally” or worse still “traditionally”. A number of candidates opted for technical rather than the correct technological and there were major problems with quantify, such as quantize, including mistaking the root word for another, thus coming up with qualify. A common error was inclusive rather than inclusion.

Exercise 3 was a cloze passage. Candidates had to fill in the missing words according to the context. The majority of candidates worked well. Only the best performing candidates managed to write the correct word enforce (in no.10) where a considerable number chose force, apply and impose amongst others. Others even formed compound words for ‘traffic’ and added jam or lights or police; enforce was not easy for many and others even wrote force or enforce.

Exercise 4 required candidates to rewrite sentences in a story context in such a way that the meaning remains the same. This exercise was not done well by the great majority of candidates in both papers. A common error was evident in the example which tested the conditional sentence, with candidates using the past simple rather than the past perfect. For the negative ‘No sooner’ very few candidates knew about the need for inverting the verb and subject and many of those who knew did not include ‘than’. For the reported speech many got the tense and pronouns correct yet many ignored the direct speech (no.4) and so did not change the tense or put inverted commas and so lost the mark.

Exercise 5 asked candidates to fill in one word which continued an idiomatic expression in context. The best performing students usually got nos.1, 2, 3, 4 right. No. 5 seemed to be the major obstacle, with many opting for a clean slate. Other common errors were found in no. 2 head in the air/sand; no.3 learning the basics; no.4 wrecking. Otherwise, this exercise proved to be a complete challenge and many left it blank or attempted to fill one or two gaps.

Exercise 6 required candidates to fill in the gaps with one linking word. Many got a lot of them correct yet others showed lack of knowledge of the linking words using instead nouns, verbs or the article. The linking words “and” and “but” were in many cases used throughout the whole exercise. Others even ignored the commas and therefore failed to use the correct linking words like “Besides” and “However.”
Exercise 7 tested question forms where candidates had to complete a dialogue by writing the appropriate question in the space provided. Many ignored the rubric or the answer underneath and gave a completely different and irrelevant question. Many lost marks because of the wrong question structure or Malteseism. The tag question in no.3 was a major obstacle for those not familiar with question tags, even though these have been tested in the same paper for the past two years. Such candidates resorted to all sorts of phrases instead. It is interesting to note that a number of candidates used: *How much times* in no.5. The most glaring mistakes were in no 2 where candidates used the past tense with the word *ever* thus showing that they don’t know the correct use of the present perfect tense.

Exercise 8 required candidates to put the verbs in brackets in the correct form. Paper A candidates did much better than those who sat for Paper B. The tenses which were filled most correctly were in nos. 2, 4 and 10. A substantial number of candidates found difficulties with the use of the present perfect in gaps nos. 1, 3, and 5. Another interesting observation is that some of the weaker candidates wrote: *had aids* in no. 9, seemingly confusing the verb with the name of the disease. The first tense ‘has been getting’ was the one that many got wrong. Then it was rather disappointing to see candidates still writing *taked, keeped or dead* instead of ‘died’.

Exercise 9 specifically asked candidates to use the correct form of a modal verb together with the verb given in brackets in order to complete sentences based on current language use. Many students did not know what modal verbs are and simply copied the ‘should’ in the example throughout. The most correct answer was sentence number 2 with the modal ‘can’ and the least known was the last modal verb ‘needn’t’. The major obstacle in this exercise was no.5 where only a few candidates opted for the correct answer: *I needn’t have studied*. Many used: *I could have not studied* which seems to be a direct translation from L1. An interesting observation is that a considerable number of students changed the meaning of *book (v)* to *book (n)*, thereby writing: *You should prepare early and take a book with you*. Other candidates even lost marks because of the wrong sentence structure or verb construction such as *could had forgot*.

Overall performance: There was a marked difference between candidates who opted for Paper IIA and those who chose Paper IIB. The latter had a lot of spelling errors and often wrote down words which do not even exist in the English Language. In extreme cases, whole exercises were completely left out or unfinished.

Once again, on top of insufficient knowledge of the English language, a general lack of attention was apparent as candidates capriciously lost marks for not reading the rubric carefully or were negligent of the punctuation. Attention to detail is even more significant in a paper which is accuracy based.

Paper 2 part 1 - Reading and Writing

This component of the paper requires the candidates to work on two reading comprehension passages and a short writing task. The reading skills tested in the IIA and IIB papers are largely similar as are the question formats. The difference lies in the difficulty level of the texts, the amount of reading required, and the level of reading skills required. The question formats included short answer questions, matching, reference questions, true and false together with a reason and explaining the meaning of a word or phrase. The reading skills assessed covered reading for gist, reading for detail, inferencing, working out the meaning from context, summarising part of the information and working out the author’s intention. The texts varied in topic and in type thus giving a more accurate representation of the candidates’ reading abilities.
Reading and Writing - Paper IIA

In Paper IIA, two passages of comparable difficulty but different text types were set. Passage A dealt with the hobby of birdwatching and Passage B with two young men who started a business. In both passages, candidates were tested on a variety of comprehension skills, ranging from understanding the context of the passage to explaining meanings, including: finding synonyms, finding words or expressions that refer to specific items in the text, locating antonyms, and explaining the meaning of expressions as used in the texts, to answering open-ended questions. Following the questions in the first passages, candidates had to write a summary of between 60-80 words. After completing the answers to the second text, candidates were asked to write a letter of between 70-90 words.

Performance

Passage A

Question 1a - most candidates were able to answer this question correctly.

Question 1b - this question was slightly more challenging, but most candidates were able to express a valid answer.

Question 2a - quite a good number of candidates managed to get this question right; however, quite a few misspelt it, thereby losing their mark.

Question 2b - this question posed hardly any problem for candidates, most students answered it correctly.

Question 2c - most answered this correctly; however, there was a problem with candidates repeating the answer in Question 2d.

Question 2d - this question was more demanding and exceeds was often given instead of upsurge or abound, even if exceeds was written for Question 2c.

Question 2e - this question was the most demanding of all in this vocabulary test, fewer candidates managed to get this right.

Question 2f - this was also a demanding question, which posed some difficulty for candidates. Unfortunately some students lost marks for misspelling, this needs to be addressed since they simply need to copy it out from the text.

Question 3 - here many students managed to explain the change but not the, prejudice, thereby losing half a mark.

Question 4 - this question was answered correctly by the majority of candidates; however, quite a number lost half a mark for failing to adhere to the instructions in the rubric, ‘Quote a part-sentence’.

Question 5 - most students managed to answer this correctly, but many either just explained the financial aspect or the authentic thereby losing a mark.

Question 6a - this was misspelt in quite a number of scripts. Also, many students added more text which cost them the mark.
Question 6b - once again, more text was added. *I was ripe for conversation* instead of *conversion*, was very common. In both, the spelling and added text the mark was deducted. Few candidates managed to get the half mark.

Question 6c - candidates fared very badly on this question, many answered with *intimated* or *feared*.

Question 6d - many students added *I was* to the answer which mirrors Question 6b above.

Question 7 - most candidates managed to answer this correctly.

Question 8 - very few candidates were able to answer this correctly because they used the word *worship* or *worshipping* from the stem to answer.

Question 9 - this task was mostly correct, however, in (d) many students lost marks because they failed to use the possessive, while in (e) quite a few put *bird* instead of *bittern*.

Question 10 - this question posed a great problem for candidates they failed to understand the word *conjured* in the text, only those students who did extremely well managed to get this right.

Question 11 – the majority of students got full marks for this question.

Question 12 - quite a number of candidates failed to use their own words in this task. Many exceeded the word count and in some cases wrote too little losing marks. *Destresses* was often written as *distressing*. Quite a few went totally out of point, only managing to mention one reason. The main problems in the summary were length and spelling.

On the whole, Passage A proved to be more challenging than Passage B. Candidates mostly struggled with questions 8 and 10, reflecting an inability to look for meaning above and beyond literal meaning. Most of the candidates did not answer questions 8 and 10 correctly or did not even attempt to answer them. The reference exercise (question 9) yielded positive results with the average mark being 2.5 (out of 3), whereas question 11 was the least problematic task (average mark was 2 out of 2), because even the ‘weaker’ candidates answered correctly.

**Passage B**

Question 1 - most candidates got this one right.

Question 2 - very few students managed to answer this question correctly. Many simply said that they *got* jobs.

Question 3 - most managed to do well on (a) and (c) although some lost marks for spelling mistakes. For (b) *delivered* was common, and many students lost marks.

Question 4 – the majority of candidates managed to get full marks here; it is worth noting that quite a number lost marks because they didn’t follow through and only explained that people wanted to get rid of stuff.

Question 5 - most candidates managed to get full marks, while others omitted words. This once again shows that they did not read the rubric properly i.e. ‘Quote a sentence’, losing marks.
Question 6 - candidates were able to answer these questions correctly, only a small minority did not. However, with (d) it is evident that some candidates were thrown by the word ‘Initially’, and answered incorrectly.

Question 7 - very few candidates managed to get marks for this question, most answered that they started.

Question 7b - most candidates managed to get full marks for this question.

Question 8 - most candidates did very well in this question too. The only set back was that they often put *minimised the cost of unloading* on one line, *donating to charities* on another line and *recycling* on another, thereby losing a mark.

Question 9 - the majority answered this question correctly.

Question 10 - while the majority answered this question correctly, quite a few said they need to *work on their own*, losing marks.

While most students fared better in this passage, Question 2 and 7 a were predominantly wrong. The main problem in question 8 was not due to a failure to give the correct answers or being unable to understand the question but simply because of giving similar answers on separate lines (e.g.: giving ‘donating to charities’ and ‘recycling material’ as two separate answers instead of realising that they follow the same concept).

**Writing Task**

The writing task in this paper is intended as a read-and-respond task in which candidates are asked to demonstrate their writing skills having had some input from the reading. This time, candidates were asked to write a letter to a friend suggesting a summer job.

The content presented in the letter was quite varied and this shows that candidates found the subject of the task familiar and accessible (writing to a friend suggesting a summer job). However, candidates then forfeited marks mostly due to formatting errors (lack of address, date or even using a very formal type of salutation, such as ‘yours faithfully’).

**Reading and Writing - Paper IIB**

In Paper IIB, two passages were set. Passage A was about the work involved in fireworks and Passage B talked about a woman sharing her experience of a safari holiday. In answering questions on both passages, candidates were tested on a variety of comprehension skills which included explaining the meaning of words and expressions as used in the texts, listing qualities, techniques and other features in the texts, completing a True/False exercise (and justifying their choice by giving a reason), completing a reference exercise, and answering questions in which candidates were asked to give reasons.
Performance

Passage A

Question 1 - the word *envious* seems to be beyond most of the candidates who sat for this paper. Many assumed that it meant something like *nervous*, answering that people are envious (read as nervous) because the job is dangerous/he could die, etc.

Question 2 - quite a few candidates managed this question, though unfortunately some gave answers which were identical to the qualities needed in question number 3.

Question 3 - most candidates got at least 2 of the 4 qualities, several got all 4 correct.

Question 4 - quite a few candidates gave the correct answer here, though several lost the mark since the answer required ‘using/used/putting’ as part of the answer. Otherwise, there were several who simply listed elements and the corresponding colour.

Question 5 - although some candidates did get full marks here, many only managed to get one mark, usually *simple patterns* or *more environmentally friendly*.

Question 6 - most candidates gave at least two out of four correct answers here, unfortunately several candidates lost marks for spelling incorrectly, even though they only needed to copy the words from the passage.

Question 7 - many candidates gave the correct answer here, though several seemed to think that Li Tian was crying for some reason.

Question 8 - (a) and (d) proved to be problematic, several candidates managed (c) correctly, while many managed (b) correctly.

Question 9 - most candidates managed to get at least 3 out of 6 correct.

Passage B

Question 1 - many candidates managed the correct answer, however not in their own words, therefore losing half a mark.

Question 2 - many candidates did give the correct answer to this question, however, there were several who thought that the author was referring to the annoying tourists as wild.

Question 3 - many candidates only managed one out of the two answers required here, often losing the mark for using ‘toting’ on its own.

Question 4 - the majority of candidates gave the correct answers to this question.

Question 5 - most candidates managed at least 5 out of the 10 words required here. Many, however, lost marks for writing more than one word.

Question 6 - this question confused a lot of candidates. Many seemed to think that someone, usually Tom, had got hurt, and needed an x-ray.
Question 7 - many candidates gave single word answers for this question, which was not accepted. Few managed to get full marks for this.

Question 8 - a large number of candidates did give the correct answer here, though some thought it was some sort of decoration.

Question 9 - several candidates lost marks here for using phrases instead of single words. However, many did get at least 2 or 3 out of 4.

Question 10 - most candidates managed at least 2 or 3 out of 5, though several did manage to get 5 correct answers.

Question 11 - the majority of candidates did not get the full 2 marks though most did get 1 mark for saying that she enjoyed the safari.

Writing Task

The writing task in this paper asked candidates to write a paragraph to persuade people to book a safari. Performance was generally poor. A number of candidates clearly did not read the instructions carefully as can be seen in cases where students wrote more than one paragraph or more than the specified number of words (60). Also, many candidates presented a kind of letter format which was not the stylistic aim of the exercise. Candidates at this level need to be made aware of the functional purposes of different types of writing. On the evidence of candidates' performances this seems to be lacking.

There were also frequent errors in use of language and expression; spelling mistakes; errors in punctuation (at times a complete absence of punctuation marks in a ten-/twelve-line text), fragmented and run-on sentence structures, incorrect choice of words and grammatical errors of a very basic nature (subject-verb agreement, tense usage, word order).

Paper 2 part 2 - Writing

The writing tasks assigned this year in both papers were in conformity with the current syllabus and were realistic in terms of skills and topics. Candidates were asked to write a short story, a biography and an article in Paper A and a short story, an article and a dialogue in Paper B, a wide enough range tapping on the candidates' ability to describe, narrate, argue, compare, persuade. In each of the titles set, the topics were also well within the candidates' knowledge and experience.

All writing tasks were attempted but to varying degrees. In Paper A, the most popular choice was the article (35%) followed closely by the short story (34.6%) and then the biography (30.4%). In Paper B, the majority of candidates wrote the event description (40.1%), followed by the dialogue and then the short story (35.9% and 24% respectively).
Performance

Writing Paper IIA

Task 1 – Candidates were asked to write a short story entitled ‘The Day Before’.
Some of the candidates who attempted this task scored the highest marks as they used their imagination to come up with original ideas and also had the linguistic competence to achieve the task very well. The candidates who chose this topic found one main difficulty – that of focusing on what happened on the day before. Others, on the other hand, tended to interpret the title ‘The Day Before’ in the widest sense possible, frequently including a reference to it almost as an afterthought.

Task 2 – Candidates were asked to write a biography of a singer/band.
Most of the candidates who chose this task did well. The biography about the singer/pop group appealed to the candidates and revealed a thorough knowledge, not only of the subject matter, but also of the style associated with this format. The candidates who fared poorly were those who fell into the trap of turning their writing into a narrative.

Task 3 – Candidates were asked to write an article on animals used in entertainment
There were a few who produced excellent pieces of writing. Most of the candidates seemed to be quite at ease in dealing with arguments both in favour and against the topic under discussion. What was lacking in the weaker essays was an awareness of a reading audience. Most of these essays could have been written to satisfy the requirements of an argumentative essay rather than an article. A few candidates opted to address the readers of the article in the form of a letter, signing off at the end. This is inappropriate for an article of this sort. Other candidates seemed to be unsure of the difference between a zoo and a circus. Claims that animals in zoos are starved if they misbehave or accounts of animals whose dreams and ambitions are destroyed in the circus do nothing for the credibility of their writing.

Writing Paper 2B

Task 1 – Candidates were asked to write a short story entitled ‘An Act of Kindness’.
On the whole, most candidates had no problems keeping to the set task, though the sequence of events frequently resulted in predictable narratives. ‘An Act of Kindness’ was a popular choice and the three elements (beach party, stranger, newspaper) were almost always included. On occasion, though, it was not always clear where the act of kindness lay.

Task 2 – Candidates were asked to write a description of a sports event for charity. The majority of the candidates attempted to write the relevant information about the event and some candidates described the feelings of the people who were present or involved in some way or another. Many candidates turned it into a personal narrative rather than a description. Others made a flying mention of the sports event and talked at length about other aspects of the charity event.

Task 3 – Candidates were asked to write a dialogue persuading a friend to cut down on junk food. The candidates who chose the dialogue kept very closely to the set task, with the exchanges leading to the friend being persuaded to give up junk food. The dialogue was satisfactorily written overall, and most candidates seemed to know what they were talking about. However, some wasted precious words on redundant information and utterances, especially at the end when the two participants of the dialogue were saluting each other. Candidates who chose this displayed a clear knowledge of the processes and vocabulary associated with nutrition. Words like cholesterol, overweight, heart disease etc were often and accurately used.
General Comments on Writing in Paper A and Paper B

Instances of good practice
A number of candidates showed that they were able to produce pieces of writing that were a joy to read. These pieces were relatively free of inaccuracies, achieved the task, were to the point, respected the required word limit and the conventions of punctuation and format – thus scoring more than 30 marks. The highest mark achieved in this year’s writing task is 37.5.

Other pieces of writing left much to be desired, mainly for the following reasons:

Accuracy
Some instances of incorrect writing were noted precisely in those areas of language (vocabulary, grammar, paragraphing, layout, spelling, and punctuation) indicated as significant in the paper itself. Some examples are: literal translation from the vernacular (took the attention; leave an eye on him; my heart took a break; rain began to drop; tell me in my face; everything went good; to attract the eye of the audience; by taking example; as are we; came with his hands open: came from the rocks); using vocabulary inaccurately (complete instead of continued; make a party instead of hold a party); connectives used wrongly (using though instead of however; unless meaning if not); mixing the use of ‘make and do (did improvements); language interference was rampant e.g. using nervous to mean short-tempered or complete for continue and the merging of words (alot, inspite of, infact); failing to put the correct punctuation (commas and full stops are in decline. Apostrophes were sporadic and some words were non-capitalised); sequence of tenses (shifting of tenses, from past to present; misuse of past participle and past perfect –she knew who did it; these last two years you are eating); wrong use of prepositions (after arrival; of taking this decision; in break) and muddled sentence structures.

Style and Relevance
It was noted that the highest incidence of limited task achievement was in the narrative, in both Paper A and Paper B. In the A narrative, as already indicated, many candidates did not focus on the day before. Some also misread ‘before’ for ‘after’ and the whole piece of writing turned out to be off point. In the B narrative, a good number of candidates did not take any notice of the title given – An Act of Kindness. There were also a very few exceptions who went out of subject in the biography by turning the essay into a narrative and focusing solely on an incident in the private life of the musician/singer. At times, ideas were not in sequence and unfolded haltingly from one paragraph to the next, without the use of connectives to make the writing more coherent.

Length
Once a word limit is set, marks are forfeited for over writing or for writing too briefly. Many a time, a lengthy preamble was noted.
3.0 CONCLUSION

Although a lot of time and effort is dedicated to the teaching of English, it is a pity that in most cases, accuracy and fluency in the four language skills are still not being achieved satisfactorily. It has become evident that more exposure to reading, speaking, listening and writing in English is necessary. Also, it is recommended that more training in the actual handling of the examination may be given. Students need to be prepared more in how to deal with the language tasks at hand. Candidates too need to understand the significance of working diligently and rigorously in every component of the paper.

Chairperson
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