



L-Università  
ta' Malta

MATSEC  
Examinations Board



# Consultation on the Review of the Matriculation Certificate Report

2019

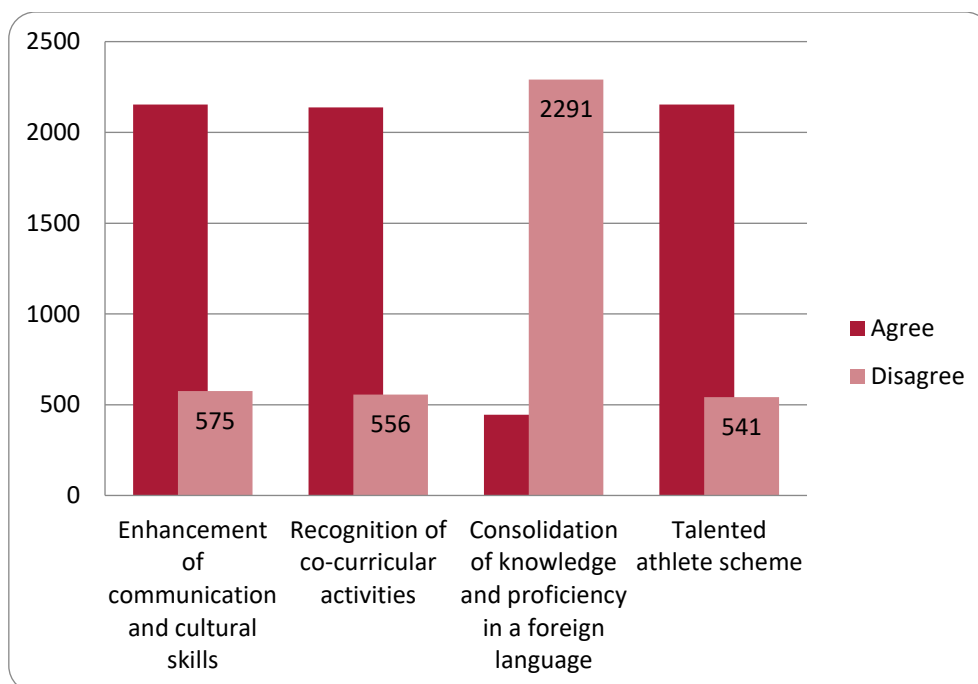
### A. Executive Summary

Feedback to the suggested reforms in the Matriculation Certificate was collected by means on an online form. The form was divided into six sections. Following the introduction, each of these four sections asked whether respondents agreed with each part of the proposed reform and sought comments from those who wished to explain their answer. The sixth section listed six statements related to assessment and asked respondents whether they agree with each item. There were 2769 participants in this survey.

Most respondents agreed with three of the four parts of the proposed reforms. Nearly 80% of respondents agreed with reforms aimed at remodelling Systems of Knowledge to enhance communication and cultural skills, recognising students’ co-curricular activities and recognising the work of talented athletes. On the other hand, 83.8% of participants opposed the part of the reform aimed at consolidating knowledge and proficiency in a foreign language. Feedback about the proposed changes in assessment is also mostly positive with approximately the same percentage (80%) agreeing with all items in the feedback survey.

*Table 1: Summary of responses to the four reform proposals (sections 2-5)*

	Responses	Agree	Disagree	Comments
<b>Enhancement of communication and cultural skills</b>	2729	2154	575	1711
<b>Recognition of co-curricular activities</b>	2693	2137	556	1530
<b>Consolidation of knowledge and proficiency in a foreign language</b>	2735	444	2291	2112
<b>Talented athlete scheme</b>	2694	2153	541	1484

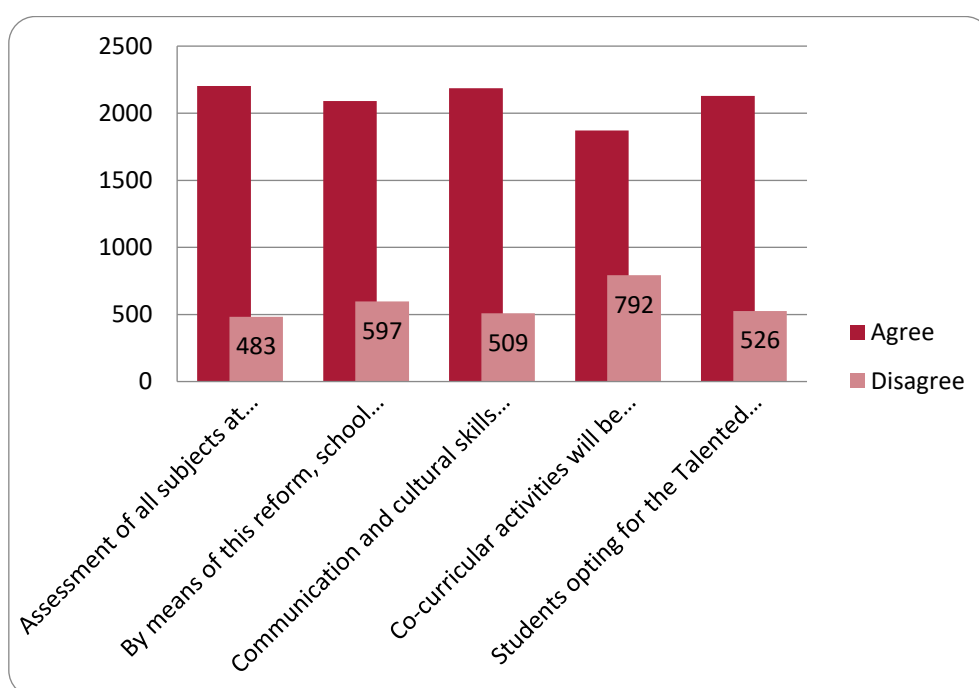


*Figure 1: Summary of responses to the four reform proposals (sections 2-5)*

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*Table 2: Summary of responses to statements about assessment (section 6)*

	Responses	Agree	Disagree
<b>Assessment of all subjects at Intermediate and Advanced Level will continue to feature an end-of-course examination, which is set and marked by MATSEC examiners.</b>	2686	2203	483
<b>By means of this reform, school assessment will be introduced in all subjects, and will contribute to at least 20% of the final grade. School assessment will be set and marked by the school and moderated by MATSEC.</b>	2688	2091	597
<b>Communication and cultural skills (restructured SoK) will be assessed through school assessment (no end-of-course examination).</b>	2695	2186	509
<b>Co-curricular activities will be assessed by the school through a reflective journal. This will be awarded either a pass or fail.</b>	2662	1870	792
<b>Students opting for the Talented Athlete Scheme will be required to submit reports to MATSEC. A selected panel appointed by MATSEC will assess whether a student satisfies the criteria for the award of the 10 grade points.]</b>	2656	2130	526



*Figure 2: Summary of responses to statements about assessment (section 6)*

Participants could indicate whether they were responding as educator; parent/guardian of a student; and/or secondary, post-secondary, or past post-secondary student. The table below collates the results presented and discussed in the different sections of this report. Results to the relevant item in Section 6 are placed near the relevant reform to ease comparison.

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*Table 3: Summary of the level of agreement to each survey item, by type of respondent*

		Percentage of respondents claiming to agree, by type						
		Total	Educator	Secondary student	Post-secondary student	Past post-secondary student	Parent/guardian	Other
<b>Communication and culture</b>	<b>Reform</b>	78.9	77.2	80.5	81.1	72.2	82.5	77.3
	<b>Assessment</b>	81.1	76.1	81.3	80.9	77.6	88.2	85.3
<b>Co-curricular activities</b>	<b>Reform</b>	79.4	85.0	73.1	70.4	79.0	81.3	85.7
	<b>Assessment</b>	70.2	73.8	63.6	62.8	63.7	75.5	77.8
<b>Foreign language</b>		16.2	21.3	7.2	8.2	16.0	15.0	28.8
<b>Talented athlete</b>	<b>Reform</b>	79.9	78.3	74.0	82.1	82.5	79.1	85.6
	<b>Assessment</b>	80.2	78.9	77.6	81.3	81.9	79.8	83.7
<b>End-of-course assessment</b>		82.0	83.8	84.5	80.3	86.5	78.2	87.0
<b>Coursework</b>		77.8	74.8	76.8	74.9	75.3	83.6	83.0

The current Systems of Knowledge is seen to have fallen short of its aims, although several respondents suggest this is due to pedagogy and resources (e.g. class sizes) rather than syllabus content. The need for well-trained educators to deliver the new subject is stressed in a number of comments. The proposed decreased emphasis on remembering content for an examination is applauded by most. This is seen as reducing stress, especially as the subject was seen as limiting entry to university. Although there were several complaints about the fairness of the current project, others noted how the skills that students used to learn through this task should be addressed in the new syllabus.

Moreover, the current project work made students participate in co-curricular activities which are seen as further developing the person. The proposal to give credit to co-curricular activities by means of 3 points in the Matriculation Certificate was complimented by many as it recognises the efforts of students already participating in these activities and encourages others to do so. However, this system should not be forced onto students by educational institutions and parents as its goals would be severely undermined. Comments recounting the negative effects on children in care by 'volunteers' who simply 'volunteer' to meet the demands of project-work are also relevant in this regard.

Recognition to talented athletes was similarly well-received. The most common criticism to the scheme was it ignoring talented performing artists. Additionally, some argued that the number of proposed hours might not be reflective of practices in some sports. The need for well-defined regulations was emphasised, with measures for students who suffer injuries. Moreover, students opting for the talented athlete scheme need to be informed at an early stage, ideally before commencing post-secondary education, whether they qualify for the scheme or not.

While many applauded the aims of the Matriculation Certificate becoming more holistic, others queried whether 'non-academic' skills and activities should be given credit in the form of points in the Matriculation Certificate. They argued that these points will advantage students for entry to University, an academic institution, on skills which are not related to their studies. Some suggested that students who participate in co-curricular activities or are talented athletes should be recognised without being awarded extra points. Others lambasted MATSEC for being elitist in deciding how students should best spend their free time with some noting negative effects on the time spent with families or participating in non-recognised activities. Moreover, social class differences might affect availability and type of activities one can participate in.

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Discrimination with some students based on their subject choices is also possible as some course entry requirements coupled with those of the Matriculation Certificate would not allow all students to benefit from the Talented Athlete Scheme. In addition, a number of respondents perceive the science subjects as being more demanding, hence putting these students at a disadvantage to participate in co-curricular activities.

The proposals do not list the activities accepted as co-curricular activities, what is understood by 21st century skills and the content of the remodelled SoK syllabus, or what defines a talented athlete. Some argued they are unable to agree or disagree with the proposals without this information. Others suggested what knowledge they deem important and what activities should be considered for each scheme. This knowledge varied greatly and was at times contradictory between participants, however 'life skills' was frequently suggested for Communication and Cultural Skills, as also reported in MATSEC's 2018 post-examination survey where items about SoK were present.

Only the proposal for consolidation of knowledge and proficiency in a foreign language received a vast majority of negative feedback. One should also note a higher response rate and a much larger number of respondents opting to give explanations for their choice when compared to the other sections. While students should be studying a foreign language in secondary schools, many noted how they are not doing so or not sitting for the SEC examination of the subject. This might be because it is not an entry requirement to further one's education or because foreign languages are unpopular choices. The reform is seen as trying to solve a problem once it is too late and many suggested addressing this in secondary schools. Others criticised the reform as a measure to increase student uptake of foreign languages at post-secondary level which might actually result in more students despising these subjects. In addition, this reform will affect students who have already made their subject choices and is deemed unfair. Such a reform should not affect students who have already started their secondary education.

The suggestion to create new syllabi for proficiency in foreign languages offered at the same level (IM) as the foreign languages invoked numerous questions about the level of these syllabi when compared to the other IM foreign language subjects and to SEC level. Some noted that existing syllabi should be changed such that there is a continuation from the new SEC (proficiency) syllabi to the IM, rather than create different syllabi for the same language at the same level. Others questioned the rationale of emphasising European identity without a study of its literature.

The reform concerning foreign languages would see Maltese and English removed from Group 1 and placed in another group of optional subjects. The two official languages of Malta will form part of a restructured SoK focusing on communication. This reform is perceived as an attack on the study of Maltese and English at post-secondary level by some. This attack is seen as more harsh in the case of Maltese. Proficiency in these languages cannot be assumed to be at the desired level, with some respondents agreeing they have a low level of one these languages, usually Maltese.

Further restricting the Matriculation Certificate to include a foreign language might make the University of Malta and post-secondary institutions preparing students for the Matriculation Certificate less appealing to candidates, especially as other educational institutions do not pose such handicaps on students. In line with this, others argued that reverting back to the three A level system or allowing candidates to make a free

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choice of subjects would make the Matriculation Certificate and the possibility to further one's education at the University of Malta more attractive to students.

Respondents queried about special arrangements in all suggested reforms. Some candidates with a disability, for instance, are expected to encounter difficulties in using both Maltese and English in the restructured SoK. Others noted that some candidates with a disability might not be able to benefit from the Talented Athlete Scheme while access to co-curricular activities might be limited, and these were considered as discriminatory in this regard. Again, most criticism in this regard was for consolidating knowledge and proficiency of a foreign language, which is beyond students with some disabilities. The proposed reform is seen pushing the Matriculation Certificate back in terms of accessibility as more access arrangements will be required. Reforms should aim to reduce access arrangements by providing a fair system which is accessible to all.

Most participants are in favour of coursework contributing to the students' final grade with 77.8% agreeing to this item. This improves the chances of able students who lack examination skills. However, such aim would only be achieved if coursework includes other modes of assessment, rather than replicating modes adopted in the summative assessment. Others argued that educators should not provide merely a mark or grade, but comments for candidates to improve.

Most (82.0%) respondents agree that end-of-course assessments be maintained, which is 4.2% higher than participants agreeing with the introduction of coursework. This might be due to fears of bias in teacher designed and assessed coursework as evidenced by the number of comments showing concerns about differences between teachers, nepotism, and competition between post-secondary schools. Some argued that MATSEC moderation as they experienced for the SoK project work is insufficient to ensure an equal level playing field for students.

The requirement to submit reflective journals to evidence participation in co-curricular activities and reports for students qualifying for the Talented Athlete Scheme received similar feedback. Comments rarely spoke positively of journals or reports. Although most respondents did in fact agree with the proposals, the percentage agreeing with the assessment model for co-curricular activities is 9.2% less than those agreeing with the reform. The survey lacks information about reflective journals and reports and does not clearly distinguish between the two. Comments perceived these tools as ineffective, bureaucratic tools. Suggestions were made to assess participation through attendance, reports from coaches/overseers, and participation in events. Others suggested less time-consuming and/or more relevant means, such as a presentation, photo journal, or blog.

The proposal suggests marking Communication and Cultural Skills, participation in co-curricular activities, and the talented athlete scheme with either a pass or a fail, whereby students get the indicated full points or none. A few comments applauded that this decreases the effects of subjectivity while others argued that it does not do justice to those students who do more work and/or achieve more. However, one comment noted that athlete's achievement in competitions should influence the amount of points they receive or whether they qualify for the scheme or not as this would only cause unneeded pressure on them.

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Some noted that the proposed reforms will not allow students to sit for Matriculation Certificate examinations before completing post-secondary education or being 18 years of age. Comments about this were negative as it is seen as stressful and disadvantaging bright students.