UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
THE MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
ADVANCED LEVEL

ITALIAN

MAY 2009

EXAMINERS’ REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD
The most significant figure in the above table is the number of candidates, 289, which means that 44 more students sat for the Advanced Level Certificate than last year. Moreover, a slight improvement was registered in both the passes with Grades A to E and with Grades A to C. Consequently the number of Failed students is lower by 4.3%. However, the Examiners still consider the number of Failures and Grades D and E to be too high, considering that the candidates have had the opportunity of studying Italian for two whole years. As the syllabus is not one of the toughest, the Examiners expect most students to have reached a stage in competence where the elementary errors in spelling and grammar should have been completely eliminated. This should not be too difficult to achieve since, in order to choose Italian at Advanced Level, a SEC certificate is required. If teachers insist on the elimination of elementary errors in the first two or three months of the two-year course, or through the first year if necessary, then they could build up the students’ active competence slowly and steadily, especially during the second year. The Examiners do not expect content quality which is beyond the capacity of adolescents below 20, but the basic rules of grammar should be well grasped.

Paper I. Oral and Listening Précis

In Paper I, as usual, candidates obtain a higher average in the Oral part than in the Listening Précis which had replaced the Listening Comprehension. The reason seems to be that writing a précis without having a printed copy of the text presents more strategic difficulties to the candidate than answering questions testing comprehension. Teachers may wish to submit their views about this matter to be considered by the Syllabus Board.
Paper II. Essay and Language Exercises

The average mark for the Essay falls just short of half the points available and it is therefore without any doubt the area where teachers should make the students work harder. Topics chosen in order of preference were: first (1. Solitudine) 98 candidates; second (4. Barbie) 88; third (3. Crisi economica) 51; fourth (2. Frattini) 29; fifth (5. Biblioteche) 6 candidates. The essays on the economic crisis and on libraries proved difficult from the content’s point of view. In the essays on loneliness and on the economic crisis several candidates did not stick closely to the topic as set. The most original, and also the most boring and most childish, essays were written about Barbie. Many candidates did not come up with interesting ideas; indeed most of them betrayed an alarming lack of information; and also of maturity. It is very clear that they watch little Italian TV and do absolutely no reading in Italian. Teachers must insist with students that a language is not simply a school subject; it should be “lived” through all available exposure, which includes TV, radio, magazines, books and the internet.

Out of 273 essays only 28 attempted an essay plan; and half of these were very sketchy and scrappy. This is a low percentage indeed, yet it is probably higher than in previous years. It is incredible that students aged 18, still believe that at this level they can write a decent piece of work without a plan. Not only do they not plan their work, apparently they do not even care to re-read it. The vast majority kept repeating the key words of the title: solitudine, l'uomo comune (some did not even copy these words correctly from the title, il uomo), Barbie, bambola (with slight variations like bombola and bombolla), bambine/i, etc, which shows lack of ideas and poor, simplistic vocabulary.

The examiners wish that teachers do their very best to eliminate as many of the following elementary errors as is possible in both levels (Advanced and Intermediate). We are confident that a drastic reduction is not impossible to achieve in two years of tuition. But teachers have to emphasise that “writing” needs more care than “speaking”, and should stress that when writing one must always obey spelling and grammar rules, knocking down the false notion that it’s not important in cases like exercises testing comprehension: one either knows how to write well or doesn’t, in all cases. After all, this is a mainly written exam. At Advanced and Intermediate levels the elementary mistakes are always penalized, and only the finer points of grammar and style may go uncensored. If the following errors are reduced, candidates will obtain more high grades.

**Spelling:** As usual, missing accents (perche, cosi) and inexistent accents (anchè, suì). Too many candidates confuse a and ha, ho and o; e and è, and write per qui tor per cui. Apostrophes, especially with the “preposizioni articolate”: dell uomo, del economia. Some tend to write pultrarro, tecnologia was spelt under the influence of English by 80% of the candidates who chose essay 1. Adjectives of nationality must not be written with a capital letter. Practically no one knew that oggigiorno is one word.

**Vocabulary:** Our students learn three languages and therefore teachers must be extra careful to control interference. Very frequent use was made of the verbs Es(x)perienzar and affettuare. Students must be told that these two Anglo-Maltese verbs (and many others coined in Malta) simply do not exist in Italian; and that while effettuare exists, it means ‘to carry out’. Some spoke of olio (or oglio) when they meant petrolio. Many write apparte, affianco, avvolte (for a volte) but, although this is a good sign (showing exposure to spoken Italian) the two components should be kept separate. Affacciare, notwithstanding our efforts, is still a great stumbling block. Bisognosi does not mean necessari. Media is a masculine and plural noun; hence not la or alla media (this means ‘at secondary school’). And, of course, problema, which to 90% of the candidates seems to be feminine (as in Maltese) is actually masculine in Italian. Use of famoso/i the Maltese way, i famosi sms, should be discouraged. Few candidates know the difference between Dall’altra parte and D’altra parte. Many of those who chose topic 3 did not know the word licenziati and wrote cacciati via. The phrase ha a che fare was often written without the ha or the a.

**Grammar:** Can an Advanced Level certificate be awarded to candidates who don’t use the articles correctly? First past the post is il uomo and i uomini; but articles like l’ tempo, l’anziani,
l’altri, l’cuore, etc. were not uncommon. Wrong agreement between the adjective and the noun: questi situazioni, varie motivi. The order of the adjective and the noun is often wrong. Negative transfer from Maltese or from English: parlare su, Tutto che vogliamo; Maggioranza and gente are singular nouns; use of the Gerund instead of the infinitive (fumando fa male).

Very, very few candidates use the infinitive, instead of a conjugated verb, to make the sentence lighter and smoother. The che polivalente is being widely abused, while dove is being promoted to the status of multi-function adverb of place, time, purpose, etc. Changing of subject in the same sentence without modifying the verb accordingly is rife. Many do not really pay enough attention to who or what is the subject of the verb; very many verbs are either ambiguous or have no subject.

**Sentence structure:** Some candidates still have to discover the pronouns; they keep repeating the same nouns, sentence after sentence, and have no idea of cohesive devices. Some attempt a longer sentence and lose track of the noun the verb is referring to. Many keep repeating the same conjunctions; if it is not e it is perché or quindi or allora or così five or six times in two pages.

**Some tips for obtaining better grades:** Though every candidate did write in paragraphs and attempted an introduction and a conclusion (the weak ones producing just a rehash of the essay title), in many cases the link between one paragraph and the next was not smooth. Phrases like Come ho già detto prima, and come ho spiegato di sopra / precedentemente can be inappropriate; the writing task is not an article or a report; nor a speech. Candidates should be aware that use of “cosa” generally betrays poor vocabulary. Similarly the overuse of the same conjunction: perché, siccome, quindi, allora, così, indicates limited resources.

The average mark for the **Language Exercises** is the highest for all the written parts of the examination and proves that when students concentrate their attention on the rules they show that they do have a grasp of grammar and idiom. Apparently some candidates tend to get distracted when they concentrate on subject matter.

**Paper III**
**Written Comprehension and Written Précis**

The averages for both these skills are just above the half-way mark, with the customary slightly better performance in the Comprehension than in the Précis. The above remarks concerning the essay should be kept in mind by candidates when answering comprehension questions, especially the recommendation to read more regularly, and when writing the summary of a passage. Of course different skills are involved, like carefully reading the questions and writing only what is required in the comprehension. The précis requires recognition of the main points and their careful integration into a personal composition. More details about these may be forthcoming next year.

**Paper IV Cultura, Antologia, Set Novels**

In Sezione A, Text 1, it was obvious that candidates did not take the **Cultura** section seriously enough. The average of 7.45 marks out of 20 is terribly low, actually the lowest of all the parts of the examination. There were instances of candidates who obtained 16 marks in the Antologia question and then only managed to get 2 or 5 marks in the Cultura question! Asked to name four Italian islands a candidate answered: “Russia, Francia, Austria and Slovenia”! Another one said the first King of Italy was Carlo Magno, and yet another “il re dei Barboni”! The reason why students seem to be looking down upon the set book must be examined by the Syllabus Board, and teachers are invited to submit their explanations and suggestions.

The majority answered Question 1 (the series of short questions), but the few who chose Question 2, the essay on transportation, showed that they were well prepared and provided solid information. Unfortunately, most of those who answered question 1 showed a serious lack of preparation, as if they had simply memorized a set of foreseeable questions without bothering to adapt the notions to the way the questions were formulated. Candidates should be able to analyze and coordinate their cultural knowledge and present them in a coherent manner but many failed to attempt this. When faced with questions they could not foresee they simply
invented names and facts, which is a very immature attitude towards an examination which purported to be “advanced”. For example in answering question (ii) they overlooked the advice “A parte la Sicilia e la Sardegna”. In question (iii) a load of ridiculous theories were put forward, but answers to question (iv) were generally correct, as for question (vii). In question (v) very few were aware that Italy was politically divided but culturally united, and in question (vi) few candidates knew the meaning of the word Risorgimento. Questions (viii), (ix), (xi) and (xii) showed up how poor the knowledge of history is in our schools. Very few candidates named all the five regions “a statuto speciale”. As to the essay-type answer the only negative point is that students seem to have a distorted image of Italy. This may be due to the slant given in the Italian news broadcasts, but it could also be influenced by the fact that teachers often choose articles about accidents or malavita for comprehension and précis exercises. Instead, keeping in mind that students are usually in the upper teenage bracket, preference should be given to healthy, positive and cultural topics.

In the Antologia section (B) the candidates’ preference was overwhelmingly in favour of Boccaccio 207 against 65 on Foscolo. The average mark was 11.69 points on 20 and 206 candidates (75.74%) obtained more than 10 points and only 66 (24.26%) obtained less than 10 points. 62 candidates obtained 15 or more marks on 20. Though this is a good result, one has to point out that some candidates who had a good knowledge of the text studied lost marks due to their shaky language.

The candidates preference for literature is corroborated by Section C, where answers to the questions about the novels showed that the candidates were well prepared and knew the set texts in detail. In fact the average mark here was 12 out of 20, and no less than 76 candidates obtained 15 marks and over. Unfortunately a significant number of candidates did not match their knowledge of the set texts with the expected linguistic competence, thus losing marks which they could have obtained with a bit more attention.

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Chairman
Board of Examiners,
August 2009