

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

ENGLISH LITERATURE

MAY 2014

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD

**SEC ENGLISH LITERATURE
MAY 2014 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

STATISTICAL DATA

The table below summarises the distribution of Grades for Papers A and B:

Distribution of Grades

Grade	2A	2B	Total	%
1	144		144	5.1
2	207		207	7.3
3	526		526	18.7
4	473	119	592	21.0
5	275	212	487	17.3
6		170	170	6.0
7		150	150	5.3
U	235	249	484	17.2
Absent	17	42	59	2.1
Total	1877	942	2819	100

General Comment

There was an improvement in the quality of essays presented in this year's exam, especially in the poetry section. In this component, markers positively commented about a good number of essays being more focused in their content and better structured in their approach. Hopefully, in future examinations, this improvement will be extended to essays written in the other sections of the paper.

PAPER 1

Section A Poetry

General Comments

This year's unseen poem deals with the persona, as an adult, looking back on how she had felt when she had turned sixteen and her mother had insisted that because she was a girl, she should not waste her time on writing poetry but rather should concentrate on acquiring the right domestic skills to become a good wife to please her future husband. The persona had pretended to listen to her mother's instructions while she secretly pursued her writing dreams. The content of the poem was undoubtedly accessible to both Paper A and Paper B candidates as was evident in the number of correct answers and the paucity of questions left unanswered.

Specific Comments

1. Only a small number of candidates failed to answer Question 1 correctly – a basic comprehension question which required candidates to identify the text's subject matter from a selection of possible options. Those candidates who answered incorrectly mostly chose answer A.
2. The candidates did not seem aware of how to answer this type of question, and in fact, this question was answered incorrectly by a good number of candidates, including those who

otherwise performed very well in the rest of this section. This was a technical question focusing on the labelling of the rhyme scheme in only one stanza. It is surprising that many candidates answered incorrectly by repeating the same rhyme scheme labels of stanza 1, ABCB, given in the question to aid the candidates in their answer.

- 3a. Most candidates provided the correct answer ('as lightly as a bird'). However 'as if I had not heard' featured prominently, an obvious indication that those candidates who chose this phrase mistook the 'as' for the comparing preposition in a simile.
- 3b. Most incorrect answers alluded to the girl being physically light and to being unobtrusive. Such answers showed that candidates at times are not able to make the leap to a metaphorical meaning, which in this case indicated that the girl was unaffected by the mother's words or at least tried to ignore them. Still, the majority answered correctly or gave good enough answers.
- 4a. Many candidates gave vague answers because they were unsure of the effect of the sparsely used direct speech in this poem. The contrast between the apparent silence of the girl and the mother's certain voice was lost on many candidates. Those who answered correctly referred to the sense of realism created by the use of direct speech; it is as if the reader is hearing the mother speak those words vividly and directly. Those who felt this tension expressed an awareness of the difficulties the girl laboured under in following her vocation to write poetry.
- 4b. When a question encourages candidates to write about content rather than technique, the tendency is that candidates fare better in their answers. In fact, when comparing the number of correct answers to this question to the number of correct answers given to the previous question, many more students were able to answer this question correctly and achieve almost full marks in it.
5. This question proved to be quite challenging as many referred to the fact that the girl was only sixteen and therefore had limited literary flair. Others wrote that the poetess' aim in using this style was to make the poem easier to understand. A few candidates hinted that this manner of writing was meant to reflect the sense of boredom that dominated the house rather than fully indicating that the lifestyle the mother was offering was boring when the girl compared it to the exciting creative process of poetry writing. A handful of other candidates stated that the writing is simple because the poetess wanted to present the readers with a picture of life in the old days, which was simpler than life today. Very few candidates were awarded full marks in this question, mainly because complete answers were scarce.
6. In answer to this question, most candidates not only provided the right answer but, surprisingly, gave both terms ('run-on lines' and 'enjambment' – the latter term, admittedly, was often misspelt). Maybe this year's increase in candidates answering this type of question correctly could be a clear reaction to previous examiners' reports indicating that candidates were unable to identify and label poetic devices.
7. Most candidates answered this question correctly and achieved full or almost full marks, according to their level of expression. Wrong answers included references to the girl writing on the duster indicating that candidates were unable to read between the lines and instead went for a distorted literal interpretation of these lines.
8. Most candidates gave acceptable answers. Many lost marks because they inferred that the mother had been badly treated by her husband or that she was separated/divorced/a battered wife. Some claimed that the mother's silence showed her awareness of how men see women merely as sexual objects and cleaners (a fact that she is unwilling to share with her daughter) or that the girl's father gets his sexual pleasure elsewhere. Several candidates assumed that the mother and daughter lived in a society where women had no choice but to be economically

dependent on men. Some candidates also stated that the mother had been physically/sexually abused by men, or that she was actually dead.

9. In the majority of cases, this question was answered vaguely. In this poem, the persona, now an adult, is looking back on her teenage years, reflecting on her own and her mother's contrasting aspirations for her (the persona's) future. Candidates generally failed to point out that the time expressions encountered in the poem are meant to draw attention to the fact that the poem is simultaneously a description of what happened on one particular day in the past – the day on which the mother decided to begin training her daughter to be a competent housewife ('One day my mother came and flicked / A duster round my ears') – and a series of events which punctuated the girl's teenage years – her mother's sermons and her boring lessons in housewifery ('She often scolded'; 'But I wrote secretly...', etc.). It also, of course, looks forward to the girl's future. Several candidates did not take into consideration this element of hindsight with which the adult persona now perceives her experiences that took place when she was sixteen years old and older. Many answers showed that the candidates had no real awareness of the importance of the time expressions in the text.

Section B Prose

General Comments

This year's unseen prose passage has a dream-like, brooding atmosphere that creates a sense of uncertainty in the reader as to whether there is something sinister with regard to the Jack-in-the-Box. The reader is left unsure whether there is something truly human about this toy or if this was all in the children's imagination. What is certain is that the children, unlike the adults, do not prefer the toy; they would rather keep it hidden under the mound of toys within the bigger toy-box. The sense of doubt remains till the very end when the toy seems to intentionally wait for a fresh group of children to come along as the present ones have grown up.

This passage was accessible to both Paper A and Paper B candidates as was evident from the good number of correct answers in this section.

Specific Comments

1. The majority of the candidates answered the question correctly, although there were quite a few who opted for the option 'a comic tale'.
- 2a. The majority of the candidates identified the figure of speech correctly.
- 2b. On the other hand, when candidates were asked to explain this simile's effect, quite a few answers were vague as these ranged from a paraphrase of the quote to a definition of the term 'simile'. Very few focused on the word 'treasure' and a good number of candidates stated that this word was meant 'to show that it was old and made of wood'. Still, some candidates did make reference to the importance/value of the things in the box for the children – the notion of treasure. There were also a number of candidates that did not understand that the toy box and the jack-in-the-box were not the 'same box'. Questions asking candidates to explain further the 'effect' of a word or phrase seem to always pose a problem for a number of candidates. It seems that more focus is needed on unpacking the use of devices beyond simply paraphrasing the word or phrase as used by an author.
3. Candidates taking Paper A mostly answered this question correctly. A good number of these candidates noticed that the keyword in the question is 'effectiveness' and gave a thorough analysis of sentence structure linking it to the 'evil' toy lurking/hiding under the rubble of toys. Others, particularly candidates opting for Paper B, were either simply concerned with the volume of toys in the box or that there were so many toys, even newer toys, that the children ignored the jack. Few foregrounded this as a strategy to avoid the jack because the children

were not comfortable with/were afraid of it. One must say that there are candidates who still treat this part of the examination as another comprehension test; they only read the text presented for superficial meaning, giving little importance to analysis of the language, diction or style.

4. Most of the candidates evidenced an understanding of the sound symbolism and the nature of the storm. Many described in detail the effectiveness of the onomatopoeia used in the text. Full marks were awarded to those who referred to the use of these sounds to bring out the violence of the storm. Some candidates even went on to explain that the weather mirrors what is happening inside the house.
5. The majority of the answers to this question were correct. Given the wording of the question it was fair to accept either two quotations showing the adults' attitude or one quotation showing the adults' attitude and another showing that of the children.
6. A good number of candidates mentioned the tension build up, suspense and horror created by the author in these lines. However, the word 'smile' was interpreted by a good number of candidates to indicate that Jack was trying to be friendly. This impression seems to have been underscored by the fact that the Jack came out of the box slowly, as if not to startle the children.
7. Quite a good number of candidates were spot on, commenting on the detailed description of the ruined state of the attic nursery and the passage of time.
- 8a. The majority answered this question correctly.
- 8b. Why the Jack keeps waiting/can afford to keep waiting presented a bigger challenge, and quite a number of candidates presented Jack as a victim who simply wished to be played with. The hint of malice and fear were not clearly foregrounded. There were also too many candidates who failed to focus on the repetition of 'waiting'.
9. Answers here varied from mediocre (a summary of the text) to excellent (a detailed analysis of content, style and diction). There were many good answers given by Paper A candidates. Most did not venture beyond age, attitudes and atmosphere, and some only dealt with age and attitudes expressing the same ideas in different language. A good number of Paper B candidates seemed to have no notion of contrast. What is disappointing is the rather 'simplistic', 'impassionate' nature of the answers. Furthermore, too many answers lacked proper support from the text.

PAPER II A

Section A Drama

Specific Comments

1. A good number of candidates opted to answer this question.
 - a. The majority of candidates responded adequately to this question.
 - b. Once again candidates were able to answer this question well, with many candidates giving detailed answers and indicating appropriate episodes to show how Sebastian demonstrates the qualities of 'courage' and 'hope'.

- c. This proved to be a difficult question for candidates to answer; many understood things happening by 'chance' to only mean characters 'taking a chance', leading candidates to leave out many salient comments and episodes in their answers.
2. Not many candidates chose to focus on this question. Those who answered this question tended to narrate how minor characters copied the upper class, which partially answered the question. Answers did not focus on which class was being ridiculed and the intentions behind this kind of behaviour.
3. This was a popular question among candidates. It was evident that the important theme of love, as explored in the play, was well understood. Candidates were able to answer fully, and adequately chose episodes from the play to back up their arguments.
- 4a. Candidates were able to identify the circumstances that led Shylock to say these words to Antonio.
- 4b. Here again candidates were able to adequately explain Shylock's feelings in this speech.
- 4c. Answers to this question were also good with most of them able to expand on the theme of conflict in the play. Still, many candidates tended to limit their answers to the element of racism, although they should also have focused on religious, gender and social conflicts among others.
5. This was the least chosen question dealing with this play. Candidates were able to give good individual character descriptions/portrayals but they were unable to generalise observations about the portrayal of women in the play as the essay question demanded. In this way, many of the essays became fragmented into three separate paragraphs rather than creating one essay with general comments on how women come across in this play, for example, how women are shown as seeking to break down societal limits and having to disguise themselves as men to achieve this.
6. This was another question which a good number of candidates opted to answer. Themes addressed in the play which are still considered to be valid today include racism, friendship, love and religion. Some candidates failed to connect the play's themes with modern times but other candidates were able to give very good examples from the present to prove that this play is still relevant to today's audiences.
7. This was a popular question with candidates who opted to write about this play.
 - a. Many candidates were able to pinpoint the exact circumstances in which these lines were spoken.
 - b. There were candidates who, rather than discussing the implications of the 'supernatural' and how this affected Macbeth's character in the course of the play, chose to simply give a summary of the whole play. Candidates need to be aware that there is a difference between a poor answer that simply summarises an episode or even a series of episodes, and leaving the answer at that, and a valid answer that gives a very brief account of what happened followed by a relevant argument tied to the essay title. The important elements in the answer are the candidate's observations backed up by the text, and not the text or observations on their own.
8. A good number of candidates chose this question. Examiners noted that overall there were many valid answers although some completely ignored the episodes involving Malcolm and Macduff. Other candidates tackled the issue of 'trust' in the play but then did not address the lack of trust, which is directly related to such an important theme in this drama. Unfortunately, only a few quoted the relevant lines from the play to substantiate their arguments in their essays.

9. This was another question that a substantial number of candidates answered in the exam. Those who wrote very good essays realised that the verb used in the question was 'kill' and not 'murder' with the latter having more negative and limited connotations. The verb 'kill' opened the implications of the question further and increased the choice of episodes involved, which included killing out of loyalty, for example. Strong candidates gave various reasons for the killings found in the play and went beyond Macbeth's murders, a point which restricted other candidates' essays.
10. Only a few candidates chose this question. There were some valid answers but, mostly, essays focused on narrating events rather than on analysing the role of Alfieri in the play.
11. Candidates were expected to analyse the tragic elements in the play. Only a few understood the question and wrote about the literary implications of the tragic characteristics. One essay was particular good in that it referred to the role of the chorus, the external and internal conflicts related to Eddie and the nature of the ending of the play.
12. The few candidates that answered this question all wrote good essays about the relationship between Eddie and Catherine. This is one of the central relationships in the play and it seems candidates are well aware of the implications of the connection between these two characters.

Examiners noted that, generally, the answers to questions related to the plays 'Dear Nobody' and 'The Play of Kes' were very well argued and adequately backed up by references to the texts. It seems that these texts are very accessible to candidates and there is a tendency to relate to them more than other plays.

13. Quite a good number of candidates attempted this question. Essays were valid and clearly indicated that Helen is presented as a child at the beginning of the play to clearly contrast with her growing independence and strength in the rest of the play. Candidates were able to give valid arguments and referenced their essay well with valid episodes from the text.
14. This was the least popular question related to this text. Some candidates did not understand the question; they did not refer to Billy's pride and independence and kept referring to the kestrel. There were only some good answers that focused on both Billy's pride and his independence.
15. This was the most popular question related to this text and a number of valid answers were given. Less valid answers were those that paraphrased the plays and/or gave superficial lists of those who accepted and rejected the protagonists. Some candidates did not refer to the internal rejection within the protagonists themselves.

Section C Prose

General Comment

While the understanding is that some language shortcomings do not immediately undermine the assessment of a response, there are poor levels of expression that verge on the incomprehensible that simply cannot be tolerated.

There were some clear efforts by candidates to write meaningful introductions to their essays. In contrast, it is particularly worrying that too many candidates are writing single paragraph responses evidencing limited control/discipline in text organisation.

Specific Comments

1. Very few candidates attempted this question. Most of the answers tended to be close to general summaries rather than focusing on different forms of isolation.
2. Not attempted.
3. Only one candidate attempted this question.
4. Quite a good number of candidates attempted to write about the 'exaggeration' of the good and bad qualities of characters in the stories. Unfortunately, most of the candidates did not really answer the question correctly as their responses suggested a concern with the exaggeration of the main event itself rather than the qualities of the characters. Another flaw was the organisation of the response. A number of candidates tended to write without any distinct pause or topic sentence and hence the result was often unfocused and disconnected.
5. This was the least popular of the three questions on Roald Dahl's stories; however, quite a good number of candidates who answered this question (particularly those answering on The Landlady) wrote satisfactorily by avoiding narration and showing a concern with setting, events, character/s and mood. A small number of candidates analysed two stories instead of one to the detriment of overall essay quality.
6. Most of the candidates answering this question seemed primarily concerned with showing that they knew what the old man's trick was. Generally, the write-up on the second story was even more inferior than that on The Umbrella Man. Very few answers were actually grounded in devices (including quotations) employed by the writer to create humour. For example, rarely did candidates focus on the self-righteousness of the mother as contributing to the humour in The Umbrella Man. The majority of the candidates managed a basic response which lacked sound analysis of the key points.
7. The essays on the importance of education in Animal Farm were generally very valid. Most of the answers were not sketchy but explored various aspects of the theme of education in the novel. Not only was the content generally valid, but the essays were also organised in properly focused paragraphs.
8. A very popular essay. Again, most of the answers on Squealer were valid, mentioning various reasons why Squealer could turn black into white. Very few answers failed to mention Squealer's oratory skills, his quick thinking, the lack of education/intelligence of other characters and his subtle and not so subtle forms of intimidation. A few essays started with a noble introduction that replicated itself almost identically across a number of valid entries.
9. This was the least popular of the questions on Animal Farm. It was also the question that most candidates did not answer correctly mainly because a good number of those who attempted it wrote about 'the humans in the novel' rather than behaviours Orwell warns against.
10. This was the second most popular question on The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas. Similar to question 9, most of the candidates attempting this question failed to write clearly about the universal 'aspects of human nature' explored in the novel.
11. This was the least popular of the questions on The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas, but a good number of the essays were very valid efforts focusing on the importance of 'limitations' in the novel.
12. This was the most popular question. A good number of answers were very valid because not only did they mention the evidence of innocence in the novel but showed an effort to

foreground the possible role of innocence as a means of criticism of those who could not see/did not want to see what was happening. The essays also exhibited a very good knowledge of plot and characters which was essential to the discussion raised in the question.

13. Very few candidates attempted this question. The few answers produced were not particularly good, generally evidencing a weakness in writing about Tommo and Charlie being at war even in England. The question 'invited' candidates to write about the different forms of struggles these characters face in the narrative. Few candidates profited from the possibilities of this question.
14. The majority of candidates answering on Private Peaceful attempted this question. Generally speaking, the answers were 'acceptable' but also rather limited to the more obvious levels – the mother's responsibility for the children, Charlie's responsibility for Tommo and the soldiers' responsibility towards England.
15. Not attempted.
16. Most of the answers to this question were rather disappointing, being not much better than 'flat', impassionate, general summaries. For most candidates, the phrase 'totally gripping' did not seem to be included in the question. This question was not the most popular either.
17. Question 17 was the most popular question on *The Other Side of Truth*. The majority of the answers were satisfactory, not failing to mention issues such as bullying, dictatorship, the power of the media, corruption, fostering and immigration. The answers also evidenced proper organisation, with paragraphs focusing on one theme.
18. Unfortunately, the majority of answers to this question were limited to a summary, with an emphasis on crossing political/state borders. Very few candidates understood that the theme of crossing borders in the novel goes beyond moving from Africa to England.

PAPER IIB

Section A Drama

Specific Comments

1. Answers were generally valid, though there were no outstanding answers. Some candidates simply gave individual character descriptions but did not focus on the contrast between the two characters.
2. Very few answered this question but the answers were acceptably valid.
3. This question was answered by very few candidates. The essays were mainly character descriptions focusing on the character's weakness without really mentioning the consequences of the flaw.
4. There were very few answers on this text and this was the least popular question. Most candidates concentrated on Shylock while the stronger students referred to various scenes and characters.
5. There were few acceptable essays in answer to this question. Answers mainly concentrated on the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio and the lack of it with Shylock. The better answers also included the love between father and child; there were also some references to the romantic love between Portia and Bassanio, and between Jessica and Lorenzo.

6. The comparison between Antonio and Bassanio was not effectively brought out and many simply paraphrased these characters' actions in the play. Essays showed that candidates do not know how to answer this type of question.
7. A popular choice, however, most candidates were unfocused, and paraphrased the play giving unrelated quotes and episodes.
8. Good answers included ones which discussed the theme of good and evil with reference to different characters and episodes in the play.
9. This was the least popular question related to this play. Most candidates opted to answer about Macduff and Duncan. The pitfalls of these essays were once again the tendency to paraphrase and the lack of character analysis. Furthermore, most candidates did not indicate the importance of the characters in the play.
10. The most popular choice for this play. Answers given were quite insightful and erudite. Candidates seemed to be well prepared, with adequate information and insights about these two couples and the differences that existed in their relationships.
11. Again, those who chose this question showed insight and a good knowledge of the play. Probably the fact that this question asked candidates to narrate the story and give its importance contributed to the good quality of the answers.
12. The least popular question as regards this play and with mostly unspectacular essays.
13. A popular choice and evidence of good knowledge and understanding of the play. Most of the essays concentrated on the characters of Alice and Chris, with the best answers being those that referred to other characters in addition to these two.
14. A popular choice, with Jud being the main focus of most essays and Sudgen being only briefly mentioned. Obviously, the best answers were those that gave equal importance to both characters.
15. This was a popular choice and most wrote valid essays. The answers that were less valid were limited to paraphrasing and lacked analysis of a basic literary nature.

Section C Prose

General Comment

The titles of novels/short stories and characters are continuously written incorrectly even when given in the examination paper. These mistakes and others hint at a level of indifference that should not be. It is also not acceptable that responses (even if limited to narration) are not better than limited (literally not more than a few lines), sketchy, very vague accounts.

Specific Comments

1. Only a couple of candidates attempted this question. The answers were below the desired level.
2. Very few candidates attempted this question. The answers were average, at best limited to narration and not really exploring notions of horror, such as the creation of life in secret, the obsession and the suffering, and how things eventually turn horrifically wrong.
3. Few candidates attempted this question. The answers suggested the need to empathise with the creature, his appearance and the fact that he is essentially transformed into a monster by

circumstances. The candidates attempting this question did write about two episodes that show these ideas to some degree.

4. This was the most popular of the questions on Roald Dahl's stories. The answers were essentially narrative but, at least, suggested a good knowledge of the stories. It seems that the ending of Neck is less understood than the end twist in Mrs Bixby and the Colonel's Coat (even though the latter involves the idea of pawning objects which most candidates are not immediately familiar with). A number of candidates failed to read the question properly and analysed only one story.
5. Most of those who answered this question failed to actually write about the similarities between the two female characters in the stories. In essence, most answers were simply two separate summaries of the stories, and it was left to the reader to possibly link one with the other. On a more positive note, a handful of candidates suggested that the two women were mentally challenged, and provided a relatively comprehensive analysis.
6. Most of the candidates attempting this question did not answer it correctly. It seems that the phrase 'characters learn something and act upon' was not really understood. A good number of the candidates were actually concerned with writing about 'the moral of the story' and what the reader should elicit from the narrative.
7. Only a few candidates attempted this question. The answers were generally valid and acceptable.
8. This was the second most popular question on Animal Farm. The answers evidenced a good understanding of the 'roles' of the human characters in the novel. The essays included reference to specific characters as well as to 'humans' in general. Most of the content in the answers to this question was correct and valid. The objectionable essays included exclusive focus on the historical characters rather than the humans in the novel.
9. Question 9 was the most popular question on Animal Farm. The answers showed a good understanding of the characters the candidates wrote about, but crisp foregrounding of the reasons why the reader should sympathise with or dislike certain animals was generally lacking. More than anything, this was the result of poor writing skills rather than lack of knowledge of content. A few candidates moved astray from the focus when they exerted all their energy into discussing the human characters instead of the animals.
10. Most of the candidates answering on The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas opted for this question. The answers included an acceptable number of similarities (usually three or four similarities) between the two boys, Bruno and Shmuel. Generally speaking, these answers were 'neatly' organised, with paragraphs focusing on a similarity and including support/evidence of the point being made.
11. Very few candidates opted for this question. It is possible that the limitation to Bruno's immediate family in the question deterred candidates from attempting this essay. Most of the answers were, however, valid, suggesting contrasts such as those between Bruno and his sister and the attitudes of his father/mother and grandmother.
12. Very few candidates opted for this question. The answers rarely went beyond a limited narration of an incident or two.
13. A very small number of candidates attempted this question. Generally speaking those attempting this question evidenced no major difficulty in writing (albeit rather too briefly) about two episodes in which characters overcome difficulty.

14. Only a couple of candidates attempted this question. The answers were generally very limited, and failed to actually refer to any reason why these episodes enthused or impressed them.
15. This was the most popular question on *Private Peaceful*. Most of the answers opted to summarise two (sometimes three) random episodes when Charlie and Tommo support each other. However, there was not a single answer that evidenced a specific effort to explore different levels or expressions of brotherly love.
16. Only a few candidates opted for this question. Rather surprisingly (because write-ups on characters usually tend not to be problematic), the answers were too limited and sketchy. In a case or two, the characters were given a new dimension wholly unrelated to the original.
17. This was clearly the most popular question on the novel. The majority of the answers were acceptable, underscoring both the political situation and injustice in Africa as well as the unfairness and bullying in England. Most answers were clearly divided into one paragraph focusing on Africa and another focusing on England.
18. This was the second most popular question on *The Other Side of Truth*. A few of the candidates opting for this question ignored the idea of racism and wrote about various 'wrongs' in the novel. Most, however, did limit their answer to racism and supported their response with incidents from the novel. A few seemed to have interpreted the question more as a general essay on racism, and while one can appreciate the candidates' link between events in the novel and current world events, these answers lacked the degree of grounding in the novel that a literature answer is expected to have.

PAPERS II A & B

Section B Poetry

General Comments

In both Papers 2A and 2B, Section B, this year's candidates were asked to choose from three titles based on the selection of poems from the poetry anthology *The New Dragon Book of Verse*.

In Paper A, candidates showed a preference for question 3 that required them to write about two poems in which the poets expressed 'strong fear'. In Paper B, the majority of candidates also chose question 3 and had to write about the two poems that had struck them the most.

As expected, there was a range in the quality of the candidates' answers. It must be stated, however, that the majority of the candidates showed a good level of familiarity with the set texts, a clear indication that the texts had been read and explained with some care in class. Moreover, it was heartening for markers to notice that some Paper B essays were of a very high standard, demonstrating not only a good knowledge of the poems analysed but also an ability to structure the essay itself.

It must also be observed, however, that there were a number of essays, both in Paper A and Paper B, which gave witness to a marked deficiency in the candidates' English language skills to the extent that some essays were incomprehensible. In these papers, poor expression, literal translation from Maltese and grammatical errors were widespread. The grammatical errors which were most prevalent included: poor verb use, especially a difficulty to conjugate verbs properly and to distinguish between one tense and another, a frequent omission of articles and poor sentence construction.

Another deficiency was the presentation of essays, probably learnt by heart prior to the examination, which failed to 'fit' the title chosen. It was quite common, hence, for the markers to find themselves faced with essays which were basically good but which, as answers to the questions chosen, were

out of point. For example, there were several essays incorrectly describing 'The Discovery' or 'The Soldier' as poems about 'taking the environment for granted'. A common error was that of choosing a poem and writing about it in some detail without, however, making the least effort to relate that information to the title. This often left the examiners confused as to why a particular poem had been chosen in relation to a particular title.

Among this year's best written essays were those that showed considerable engagement with the title, gave evidence of substantial knowledge of the analysed texts, contained a number of relevant and properly-introduced quotations, were well-structured and were written in acceptable English. Essays which did not fare so well were often less detailed and lacked relevant quotations. They also tended to incorporate one or more of the following shortcomings: weak expression, inaccurate statements, and poor sentence and essay structuring, among others. Candidates whose answers were considered below average wrote essays that included poor knowledge of the texts, were extremely succinct and the use of expression was so weak as to seriously hinder comprehension.

*Chairperson
2014 Examination Panel*