

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

ARABIC
MAY 2014

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS' BOARD

**SEC ARABIC
MAY 2014 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

GENERAL INFORMATION AND STATISTICS

The examination consisted of Paper 1, the core paper, and Paper IIA and IIB. This year, there was a good number of candidates who sat for Paper A and a small number of candidates who sat for Paper B, with 24 (86%) candidates opting for the A Paper and 4 (14%) candidates sitting for the B Paper, thus 28 candidates in all sitting for the examination.

ABSENCES

This year three candidates were absent for all the components of Paper A, and one candidate was absent for all the components of Paper B.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

The overall performance of the total cohort sitting for the May 2014 session is depicted in the table below:

Table 1										
Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	Abs	Total
I & IIA	0	3	1	2	3	-	-	12	3	24
I & IIB	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	2	1	4
Total	0	3	1	3	3	0	0	14	4	28
% of Total	0	10.7	3.6	10.7	10.7	0	0	50	14.3	100

SEC Arabic Language Paper

The May 2014 paper was made up of two main components – the aural/oral component (Listening Comprehension, Dictation, Topic Conversation and Reading Comprehension) common to both Paper A and Paper B and the written component. The written component of Paper A comprises a translation from Arabic into English, another translation from English into Arabic, essay writing, grammar drills and cultural knowledge, whereas the written component of Paper B consists of a translation from Arabic into English, essay writing, grammar drills and cultural knowledge. The SEC Arabic examination was set according to the SEC syllabus for Arabic Language 2014.

Performance

In Paper A, six out of twenty four candidates scored an average grade, three obtained a grade 2, and twelve attained an unclassified grade. The performance of the candidates sitting for Paper B was very poor. Only one managed to obtain a satisfactory grade, with the others obtaining unclassified.

Paper 1**The Oral Component**

The oral component in the SEC Arabic Language examination is common to both Paper A and Paper B.

Listening Comprehension

This part of the examination entailed listening to one text and answering questions based on the text. The listening comprehension text was descriptive; it had four questions which required eliciting brief information from the text read out by the examiner. 8% of the total marks were allotted to the testing of listening skills. Very few obtained full marks in this part. Some candidates managed to obtain an

average score in this section. In addition to some candidates not giving correct answers to some of the questions, their answers were full of spelling mistakes and grammatical errors.

Dictation

A medium length descriptive text taken from a contemporary elementary Arabic textbook was used to test the candidates' phonetic and spelling skills in Arabic; it carried a 7% weighting of the total marks. The candidates who sat for Paper A on average scored good marks in this section but unfortunately those who sat for Paper B scored very low marks. Among the common spelling mistakes, most of the candidates failed to distinguish between أ \ ع \ ء \ اء and also between ح \ خ \ ه. Other spelling mistakes involved the mix up between ذاداض ، صراس. Some other candidates did not manage to write the whole dictation text while others left out either words or whole phrases from the dictation. Despite the simple text for the dictation, several marks were lost in this exercise.

Reading Comprehension

The reading comprehension was based on a fictitious character taken from a story book. The five questions carried a 20% weighting of the total marks and needed to be answered orally by the candidates. The questions were set in such a way as to avoid any ambiguity. Some candidates struggled in this task while others were unable to provide a correct answer for some of the questions related to the reading comprehension text and admitted that they did not understand the given text fully. Candidates who opted for Paper B scored poorly even in this exercise.

Conversation

This component of the paper requires candidates to take on a role in a relatively realistic situation necessary for a brief exchange to take place between the candidate and the examiner.

Three different topics were offered; in setting these topics, the cohort's ages and experiences as well as the language areas dictated by the syllabus were taken into consideration. The candidates had to choose a title/topic and engage in a 10 minute conversation with the examiner about the topic. This exercise is allotted 15% of the total marks.

The first part of the conversation led by the examiner is usually a warm up session and in the second part, the candidate indicates to the examiner the chosen topic for conversation. During the conversation the examiner leads the candidate with prompts and cues to test his/her competence to continue and conclude a dialogue and to express some functions like providing explanations, descriptions, suggestions and expressing surprise.

The task was completed to varying degrees. Some candidates followed the cues given and delivered their responses quite smoothly and fluently. 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 conversation topic.

It was noted that Arabic speaking candidates showed difficulty in refraining from switching to dialectal Arabic while some Maltese speaking candidates were at times completely tongue tied or else used Maltese words to compensate for their lack of vocabulary with regard to their conversation topic. Unfortunately, the majority of the non-Arab candidates showed poor pronunciation, diction and intonation in Arabic. Overall, candidates coped well with the given conversation topics.

Paper 2 A

The Written Component

Paper 2A carries a weighting of 50%.

Question 1: Translation from Arabic into English – 10 marks

Unfortunately, although the text was a simple, descriptive and informative one, some of the candidates showed that they have a poor level of basic vocabulary. Some candidates did not even translate this task and left it out completely while a few others left out quite a lot of vocabulary and whole phrases when translating. In general, those who translated the passage into English had several errors related to syntax, structure and grammar and gave a basic gist of the text.

Question 2: Translation from English into Arabic – 10 marks

In this exercise most of the candidates coped well with the simple narrative type of translation; a few others struggled with it. There was a range of responses, and credit was given when candidates demonstrated comprehension of the text. Several phrases and sentences were omitted, while many spelling and grammatical mistakes were committed. The examiners noted that some of the candidates severely lack idiomatic expression, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge to handle translations.

Question 3: Essay – 20 marks

A few of the 24 candidates sitting for Paper 2A managed to cope quite well with essay writing while many others found this a challenging part of the paper. Only some of the candidates managed to write at least 100 words for their essay despite a varied easy choice of titles. There were serious spelling and grammatical mistakes and some had very poor orthography. With the exception of a couple of essays, the rest lacked ideas, imagination and originality. Some candidates showed problems of coherence and of sequencing of ideas. The candidates who scored badly could not express themselves in Arabic and included some Maltese phrases or sentences using the Arabic alphabet. A number of candidates found difficulty with important vocabulary and verb conjugations. Two candidates went out of point. The poor performance in this section indicates that the candidates have difficulty in expressing themselves in correct Arabic and examiners noted a regression in this section from previous examinations.

Question 4: Vocalization – 5 marks

The aim of this exercise is to examine the candidates' grammatical skills through full vocalization of five sentences provided. The grammar posed problems for several candidates who seemed unable to vocalize the five separate sentences correctly. More than half the candidates either did not do the vocalization or else scored badly. The examiners regretfully noted the poor performance of most of the candidates in this section which indicates that they have not yet grasped the basic grammar rules or else have an inadequate knowledge on how to apply the grammatical rules correctly.

Question 5: Culture – 5 marks

In this simple exercise, the candidates had to fill in the blanks in the given five separate sentences dealing with Arab culture with one suitable word of information. The topics or personalities dealt with were set according to the SEC Arabic syllabus. The performance of the candidates in this section varied widely with some doing well and others scoring badly. Some failed to write the correct answer or else did not write anything at all. Most of the candidates were not well prepared for this section as it proved to be quite challenging. However, the examiners noted a slight improvement from last year's examination in this particular section.

Paper 2 B

The Written Component

Paper 2B carries a total of 50%.

Question 1: Translation from Arabic into English – 20 marks

Most of the candidates found this section very challenging. With regard to some, it appears that they did not fully understand the simple Arabic text and committed a lot of grammatical and spelling mistakes despite the fact that the text was a narrative and descriptive one with everyday vocabulary. In this translation exercise, many sentences from the text were left incomplete or omitted. Some candidates did not even convey the gist of the text.

Question 2: Essay – 20 marks

The candidates were given a choice of three different narrative or descriptive essay titles to choose from. Regretfully, the candidates did not do well in this exercise. Most of the candidates either did not write anything at all or did not write more than a few sentences. Even those who struggled to come up with a sort of essay, had a paragraph replete with grammatical and spelling mistakes, void of original ideas, sequencing and basic punctuation marks. The candidates did not even manage to write 100 words.

Question 3: Grammar – 5 marks

The Grammar section in Paper 2B required candidates to choose and underline the correct word from the brackets. Those who attempted this simple exercise did not cope well with the task. Examiners noted that candidates are not well prepared in basic grammar rules.

Question 4: Culture – 5 marks

This exercise was the same as that in Paper 2A. The candidates did not perform well in this section; most left answers blank. Evidently the candidates lack cultural knowledge and need to be more committed when preparing for this section.

General Overall Performance

With regard to overall performance, the comments stated in last year's report still stand. However, despite certain shortcomings, the examiners gladly noted that this year, the general performance has improved slightly in certain sections.

*Chairperson
2014 Examination Panel*