

L-Università
ta' Malta

MATSEC
Examinations Board



Candidate's Feedback

MATSEC First/Main Examination Session

2019

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A. Executive Summary

MATSEC's post-examination survey was sent to all 2019 Main/First Session candidates before this session's results were published. A total of 1,671 participated in the survey, 18.5% of the total number of candidates. This value suggests increasing participation in MATSEC's post-examination survey. Of the respondents, 66.9% are female and 67.5% sat for SEC examinations. The largest two age groups are 16 (53.7%) and 18 (21.2%), the ages at which candidates usually sit for SEC and MC level examinations at the end of secondary and post-secondary education respectively. However, this year's percentage of 18-year-olds was the smallest in several years as more and more candidates of different age groups sit for MC examinations, usually before completing post-secondary education.

This is the first year where candidates' registration fees were completely subsidised by the Maltese government. The number of subject examination registrations, especially at SEC level, and, more so, percentage of absent candidates, have increased considerably in 2019 compared to previous sessions. Most respondents (91.4%) agree with the government's decision of subsidising registration fees. However, they also imagine that many people would register for examinations they are either unprepared for (56.9%) or do not intend to sit for (60.5%) if examinations are 'free'. Registrations from people who never intended to actually sit for the examination unnecessarily stretch the resources of the awarding body (printing cost and time both increase, more markers are engaged, etc). Most participants agree that registration fees should only be subsidised to those who are actually present for the examination (66.4%) but disagree if these are only subsidised to those who obtain a passing grade (10.5%).

Respondents' opinion of examination centres is similar to that expressed in past Candidate Feedback reports, if not better. Participants agree that examination centres were clean, well-maintained and fit for purpose. Noise was the most voiced complaint, with particular reference to a party reported in the media. Many respondents cited this party even though they stated they were not present in the examination centre next to it. Other reports included students making excessive noise both within the examination hall and outside the centre and, worryingly, invigilators talking between themselves. Some qualitative complaints about venues for practical examinations were also received, citing either small laboratories, insufficient washing-up area, or faulty equipment.

Respondents' views about invigilators' professionalism remain the worst expressed in this feedback tool. Although, compared to 2018, a higher percentage of respondents agreed that most invigilation staff acted in a professional manner, deterioration in positive responses is seen in all other items related to invigilation staff. For instance, while it has been emphasised that invigilation staff read a set of rules to candidates before every session, feedback suggests less and less invigilation staff are doing so year after year. A large number of respondents suggested invigilation staff are ignorant of examination regulations, especially subject-specific regulations which are noted in the guidebook produced for invigilation staff. In this regard, Art at different levels was repeatedly mentioned by different respondents.

The number of respondents noting that invigilation staff were insufficiently willing or prepared to carry out their duties was alarming, citing invigilators who: chatted amongst themselves; read books to pass the time; texted, played or called on their mobile phones; and even slept during the exam. Then, there are the more bizarre stories: one where an invigilator complained that their remuneration does not cover the reading and noting time, and another where an invigilator instigated a male candidate to complain that a Muslim female candidate was allowed to stay in her hijab while he had to remove his cap.

A total of 76.5% of respondents did not seek help from MATSEC. Although this percentage is larger than that reported in previous reports, the question posed to respondents was different as in past reports it was evident some people were considering help sought from counsellors and student organisations as MATSEC official help. Similarly, the percentage of respondents claiming to be satisfied with help from MATSEC, 78.9%, is also different than previous years for the same reason. Candidates were most satisfied with assistance given via telephone (89.9%) and the MATSEC

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website's FAQs (86%), and were least satisfied with assistance given via e-mail (69.7%), Facebook page (66.7%) and the Official Handbook (66.7%).

Comparable to 2017 and 2018, respondents claim to prefer live speakers (42.6%) rather than recorded speakers (17.5%) for aural examinations. Regarding oral examiners, feedback is mostly positive. The majority of responses state that examiners were professional (92.8%) and did not ask personal questions which were unrelated to the examination (88.9%); the place for examination was fit for purpose (92.3%); the structure of the examination was as per syllabus (93.7%); and waiting times were adequate (83.2%). This compares well with the data collected last year with small improvements being noticed in most questions. However, the percentage of respondents stating that waiting times were excessive stands 5.7% higher than 2018. Respondents grumbled, however, about the attitude of invigilation staff during oral examinations.

The University of Malta's proposed changes for the Matriculation Certificate have informed some of the questions in this survey. Similar to previous years, respondents agree with the compulsory nature of each of Groups 1, 2 and 3, with the highest level of agreement being with the compulsory nature of Group 1 subjects (89.9%). As is in past reports, most respondents (62.7%) disagree that IM Systems of Knowledge is required for one to be awarded the MC. This is not because candidates despise the subject per se: 55% claim to have had a positive experience of Systems of Knowledge. Respondents argue that it is the high stakes nature of the subject, rather than its content, which make it stressful and daunting.

The number of candidates registering for SEC vocational subjects has continued to increase, with 279 of the respondents (24.7% of SEC respondents, compared to 19.1% in 2018) claiming to study at least one vocational subject. Questions about SEC vocational subjects could also be answered by SEC students who do not study any vocational subject. Most respondents (90.6%) believe that SEC vocational subjects offer a more applied route to learning and are a good addition to MATSEC's range of subjects at SEC level (91.5%). Then again, the majority also think that SEC vocational subjects are easier to pass than other SEC subjects (68.0%) and should have a final, summative examination like other SEC subjects (71.7%), although those who studied vocational subjects are less likely to agree with this statement.

The year 2020-21 should have seen the introduction of new SEC learning outcome framework (LOF) based syllabi in secondary schools. Most respondents (77.3%) would like to have coursework contribute to the final mark in all SEC subjects, as most respondents believe that coursework makes it easier to pass examinations (79.4%) and reduces stress and anxiety (56.6%). However, most respondents (72.3%) believe that coursework at present is highly dependent on different schools and teachers, which might be subjective. Rather than end-of-course controlled assessment, end-of-year assessments such as those used in vocational subjects should be used in the other SEC subjects as well, together with coursework, most respondents agree (79.5%). Respondents who study a vocational subject are 10% more likely to agree with this.

Candidate feedback about examination access arrangements (EAAs) offered by MATSEC and the Access Disability Support Committee (ADSC) was also collected and evaluated. Respondents' perceptions toward EAAs remains positive, with all arrangements deemed to be either helpful or very helpful (85.1%)., with the participants noting that EAAs are tailor-made for each individual candidate. However, respondents were more critical of the professionalism of invigilation staff assigned to EAA candidates. Although coloured paper is used in MATSEC examinations to aid readability, some respondents complained about these arguing they have the opposite effect on them.

B. Introduction

This report presents the views of a sample of MATSEC 2019 candidates in a bid to stimulate the continuous process of development within MATSEC. This is the fifth year that a post-examination survey has been sent to all MATSEC candidates. This year's post-examination survey has parts which are in common with past surveys allowing for comparison when analysing responses to some items. Other items are new and relevant to proposed or ongoing changes.

MATSEC develops its practices on a yearly basis. In the past few years, culminating in 2018, MATSEC made developments to three areas of controlled examinations:

- Paper accessibility – All SEC examination papers are now printed on coloured paper and follow the same paper layout. The font has been selected based on research on readability carried out by the MATSEC Support Unit.
- Running of examination centres – MATSEC updated invigilation staff contracted by the Ministry of Education and Employment (MEDE) Examinations Department with guidelines, and forms to report irregularities and the state of centres. In 2018, MATSEC also provided training, a practice which could not be repeated by MATSEC in 2019 and was re-taken by the Examinations Department.
- Standardisation of SEC aural examinations – All candidates sitting for such an examination will sit for the same paper and at the same time. This is only possible as live speakers have been replaced with recorded audio.

With the development of new syllabi for the implementation of the Learning Outcomes Framework project by the MEDE, 2019 has proved to be a hectic year at MATSEC. Thus, 2019 saw no considerable changes to the organisation of MATSEC examinations, or these differences were too small to be noted by the general public. For instance, following complaints from candidates in previous years, MATSEC analysed means of accommodating candidates for the oral examinations in 2019, a task that is usually done by the Examinations Department. In 2019, fewer complaints of clashes between oral examinations or between oral examinations and practical examinations were received and the procedure adopted by MATSEC has been communicated to the Examinations Department so that this may be adopted when accommodating candidates for oral and practical examinations. In 2020, the exercise was started by MATSEC staff to be continued by Examinations Department staff. This will ensure fewer instances of clashes in the future.

There are no new subjects which are being assessed in the 2019 session. Nevertheless, the 2019 session is particular as it is the first session in which candidates' registration fees were completely subsidised by the Maltese government. This resulted in a spike in registrations and absenteeism for most examinations, especially those at SEC level.

Registrations for SEC Vocational subjects also continued to increase sharply. This year, there were a total of 895 results for SEC vocational subjects, as compared to 543 in 2018 and 92 in 2017. This increase in candidates was predicted as these subjects are still in their infancy.

The reform happening at SEC level and the University of Malta's proposed reform for the Matriculation Certificate have influenced the questions in this survey. Questions on coursework and the composition of the Matriculation Certificate are included in this survey.

Candidate feedback about examination access arrangements offered by MATSEC and the Access Disability Support Committee (ADSC) was collected and evaluated through a 2016 study by MATSEC. Questions from this study have become a part of MATSEC's post-examination survey as from 2017 and feature in this year's survey. Most of these items are unchanged.

C. Methodology

The data presented in this report was collected through an online survey which was distributed to all candidates via e-mail on the 18th June. A total of 8,789 e-mails were sent. Candidates had up to noon 12th July to answer the survey. Thus, all feedback was collected from respondents before the results of the Main/First sessions were published on the 15th July. This practice is identical to that of 2017 and 2018. All responses were anonymous and treated with confidentiality; however, participants had the option to provide their phone number in case some of their responses prompted further questioning.

D. Results

Descriptive Information

There were 9,040 individual registrations for SEC and/or MC examinations in 2019 providing 8,789 non-duplicate¹ e-mail addresses to which an invitation to participate in this survey was sent. There were 1,671 responses. Thus, the number of responses is equal to 19.0% of the number of e-mails sent (including those which were not delivered) and 18.5% of the total number of candidates. These values suggest increasing participation in MATSEC's post-examination survey.

Similar to previous post-examination surveys, the majority of respondents were female (66.9%) and sitting for SEC level examinations (67.5%). Also similar to last year's cohort of respondents, a larger percentage of the male respondents sat for SEC examinations (70.5% of males as compared to 65.7% of females).

More respondents claim to have registered for enough subjects to be awarded the Matriculation Certificate (MC) than for single AM/IM examinations. This is interesting given that statistics published by MATSEC show an ever-decreasing number of candidates who apply for the six subjects required to obtain the MC in these examinations. This suggests that candidates sitting for examinations to obtain the MC are overrepresented in the survey. Otherwise, some respondents might have classified themselves in this category because they sat for examinations in past sessions, intend to sit for more examinations in coming sessions, or misunderstood the question.

The largest two age groups are 16 (53.7%) and 18 (21.2%) years old, which are the ages at which candidates usually sit for SEC and MC level examinations respectively. However, the percentage of 18-year-olds is the smallest in several years. This corroborates MATSEC's observations that the number of 18-year-olds sitting for MC examinations has decreased.

¹ Some candidates might register for both SEC and MC examinations. These are considered as two separate registrations. The candidate will likely provide the same e-mail address for both registrations. In addition, some guardians who register their dependents for examinations might also provide the same e-mail address for the registrations of different candidates.

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Table 1: Information on participants

		2016		2017		2018		2019	
		N	% (from total)	N	% (from total)	N	% (from total)	N	% (from total)
Total		1367		1549		1594		1671	
Gender	Response Rate	97.6		99.4		99.0		99.4	
	Male	447	32.7	544	35.1	548	34.7	549	33.1
	Female	887	64.9	996	64.3	1030	65.3	1112	66.9
Age	Response Rate	94.4		91.8		92.5		89.1	
	15	10	0.7	12	0.8	19	1.3	19	1.3
	16	381	27.9	670	43.3	737	50.0	799	53.7
	17	123	9.0	119	7.7	105	7.1	110	7.4
	18	463	33.9	364	23.5	386	26.2	315	21.2
	19	172	12.6	86	5.6	56	3.8	65	4.4
	20	33	2.4	31	2.0	23	1.6	24	1.6
	20+	109	8.0	140	9.0	148	10.0	157	10.5
Examinations Applied for in 2019	Response Rate	99.4		100		100		100	
	At least 6 subjects at SEC level (O' levels)	355	26.0	622	40.2	728	45.7	820	49.1
	Individual AM (A' level) examinations	215	15.7	174	11.2	379	23.8	265	15.9
	Individual IM (Intermediate) examinations	80	5.9	70	4.5				
	Individual SEC (O' level) examinations	113	8.3	291	18.8	238	14.9	308	18.4
	Matriculation Certificate	596	43.6	392	25.3	249	15.6	278	16.6

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Examination Centres

The first part of the survey sought to gather general impressions about examination centres. Respondents were asked to mark their level of agreement with nine statements concerning examination centres, invigilation, and paper layout. Table 2 shows three of these statements along with the number of respondents selecting each option. The response rate for each item is also shown. The information is represented graphically in Figure 1. Table 3 then compares this year's response with those of previous Candidate Feedback reports. This table only shows the percentage of respondents in each year who agreed with the statement. Information about the other items will be presented in the same manner in the respective sections.

Table 2: Response to questions about examination centres

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
The examination centres were clean and well maintained	N	649	934	70	9	1662
	%	39.0	56.2	4.2	0.5	99.5
The noise levels in examination centres were adequate.	N	253	900	394	117	1664
	%	15.2	54.1	23.7	7.0	99.6
The examination centres were fit for purpose.	N	538	943	153	19	1653
	%	32.5	57.0	9.3	1.1	98.9

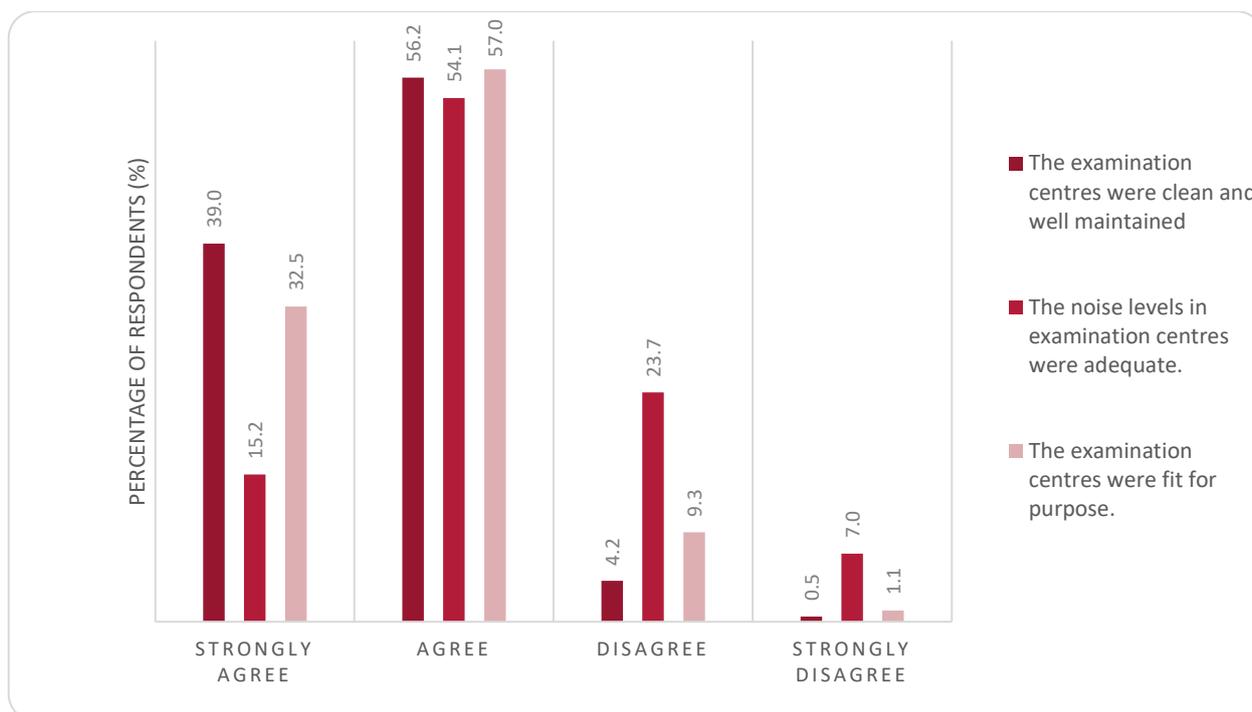


Figure 1: Response to questions about examination centres

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Table 3: Response to questions about examination centres, by Year of Survey

Year	2019		2018		2017		2016	
Response	Strongly Agree	Agree						
The examination centres were well maintained.	39.0	56.2	33.8	58.5	20.0	67.1	17.5	68.1
	95.2		92.3		87.1		85.6	
The noise levels in examination centres were adequate.	15.2	54.1	20.4	56.9	14.9	55.6	20.9	56.3
	69.3		77.3		70.5		77.1	
The examination centres were fit for purpose.	32.5	57.0	28.2	60.6	23.0	60.5	21.2	64.1
	89.6		88.8		83.5		85.3	

Candidates, in general, agree with all the presented statements. They agree mostly with the statement regarding examination centres being clean and well-maintained (95.2%) and fit for purpose (89.6%).

Respondents were least likely to agree (69.3%) with the statement that noise levels were adequate for examinations. This is likely to be affected by media reports of noise during some examinations. In fact, the party next to a particular examination centre – an incident reported on the media – was mentioned numerous times including by respondents who, they themselves claimed, did not experience it. Other respondents noticed that it was candidates who finished the exam early who formed noisy packs in front of centres. Sometimes, students who were uninterested in the examination or had finished earlier made noise in the examination hall itself with little to no repercussions. Respondents noting the latter added that invigilators themselves made noise by chatting and did not care about these candidates doing the same.

To avoid other incidences of excessive noise in this centre, some Art examinations were moved to another wing of the block which had smaller rooms. As a result, or not, this year there was a noticeable number of respondents complaining about the suitability of centres for Art examinations, especially when it comes to the size of tables. Other respondents complained about:

- still life objects being placed on a table with a glossy surface;
- no easels being provided by MATSEC;
- no close-by sinks;
- lighting in the selected room.

The quality of models was described as low by a number of respondents who claimed that the model had to wake up too many times during the exam. One of these respondents also claimed the model wanted to see the drawings of herself.

Similar to 2018, practical sessions for AM Chemistry and Biology were mentioned by a few respondents. A respondent claimed that in a particular laboratory for AM Biology, a sink had to be shared by the whole class. One candidate complained they had to restart examination due to one faulty piece of equipment, resulting in them not managing the content in the particular examination. Several respondents lambasted a particular school as a centre for AM Chemistry practical sessions, suggesting lack of working space, over-crowdedness, and too little sinks. More generally, respondents complained about waiting times for candidates accommodated in the second session. One respondent questioned the safety of instructing certain students to handle certain chemicals under examination conditions, when they might be nervous, stressed and anxious.

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A number of respondents complained of small tables in a particular centre, and this is not the first year that this particular centre was mentioned for its tables. Distance to centres was also mentioned by many respondents. A complaint which used to feature prominently in previous reports but was not mentioned by any respondent this year is the availability of clocks which show the correct time in the examination rooms. This suggests there has been a noticeable improvement on this issue.

Invigilation, Examination Regulations and Cheating

Results showing respondents' views about invigilation during examinations are shown below.

Table 4: Response to questions about invigilation

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
The examination invigilators were professional.	N	377	918	313	57	1665
	%	22.6	55.1	18.8	3.4	99.6
It is difficult to cheat during MATSEC examinations.	N	628	621	302	111	1662
	%	37.8	37.4	18.2	6.7	99.5
Instructions were read to candidates before the start of every examination.	N	675	559	313	109	1656
	%	40.8	33.8	18.9	6.6	99.1
Invigilators were on task to ensure no copying or collusion took place.	N	574	832	222	34	1662
	%	34.5	50.1	13.4	2.0	99.5

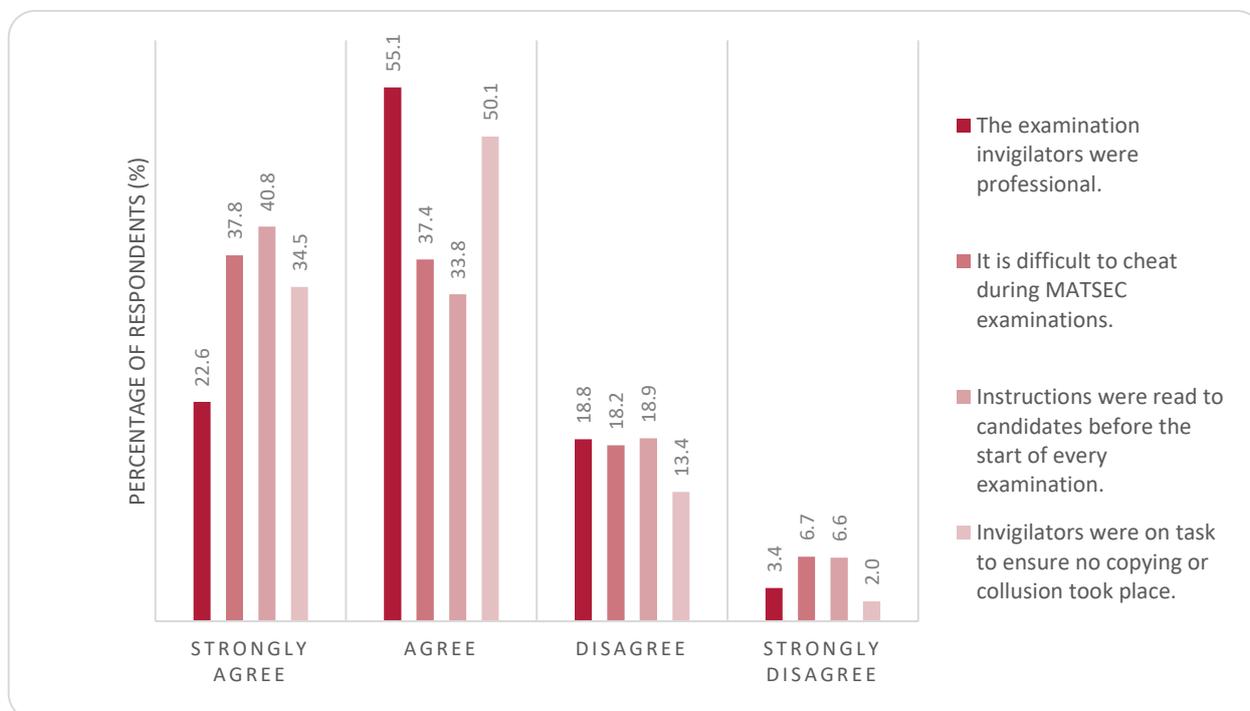


Figure 2: Response to questions about invigilation

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Table 5: Response to questions about examination invigilation and centres, by Year of Survey

Year	2019		2018		2017		2016	
Response	Strongly Agree	Agree						
The examination invigilators were professional.	22.6	55.1	18.6	51.2	16.0	51.5	16.0	53.6
	77.8		69.8		67.5		69.5	
It is difficult to cheat during MATSEC examinations.	37.8	37.4	38.6	39.4	35.1	42.1	32.9	41.2
	75.2		77.9		77.2		74.1	
Instructions were read to candidates before the start of every examination.	40.8	33.8	41.6	36.7	49.4	33.5		
	74.5		78.3		82.9			
Invigilators were on task to ensure no copying or collusion took place.	34.5	50.1	37.4	49.1	36.0	48.9		
	84.6		86.5		84.9			

Although a much higher percentage of respondents agreed that most invigilation staff acted in a professional manner, deterioration in positive responses is seen in all other items which are related to invigilation duties when compared to previous reports. Also, the number of respondents who noted that invigilation staff was keener on chatting rather than performing their duties is alarming. Other respondents noted how invigilation staff:

- hurried up candidates at the end of the examination,
- used or even answered mobile phones,
- had lunch,
- read books,
- slept, or
- wore high heels.

Although invigilation staff is given instructions to read to candidates before each and every examination, the percentage of candidates who agree that this is done stands at 74.5%, a steady decline from when this practice was first enforced by MATSEC three years ago. To add insult to injury, an alarming number of respondents suggested that invigilation staff is ignorant of examination regulations, especially subject specific regulations which are specifically noted in the guidebook produced for invigilation staff. Art and music were particularly mentioned. Given the small size of these subjects, it is alarming to find a disproportionate number of comments mentioning these subjects. The following instances of invigilator ignorance were mentioned by respondents:

- no knowledge of using a computer for an aural examination;
- giving papers for aural examinations 10 minutes before the start of the examination effectively providing reading time which was not to be provided;
- not allowing art candidates to use their own paper;
- confiscating tracing paper during SEC Mathematics, only to return it later after being informed by another invigilator that this is allowed;
- disallowing transparent pencil cases;

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- unawareness of provision of examination access arrangements.

Other particularly alarming situations which have been reported by single respondents are invigilation staff grumbling about their remuneration with candidates and passing a xenophobic comment.

The percentage of respondents agreeing that it is hard to cheat during MATSEC examinations and the percentage of respondents agreeing that invigilation staff was on task to ensure no copying or collusion are both lower than in previous years. Many respondents suggested that other candidates were cheating as indicated by their long/frequent bathroom breaks, sometimes wearing bulky jackets². Other respondents claimed to have seen a candidate copying using their phone, to have found notes in the bathroom, or other candidates talking or “whispering answers” as invigilation staff was inattentive. A number of respondents complained that examination tables are too close. Many of those commenting grumbled that invigilation staff were either uninterested or not trained about cheating.

Invigilators need to be more interested in what is going on around them. I saw it myself numerous times and was also told of people with similar instances in which people had their phones in their pockets during exams, went to the bathroom many times in one sitting and also spoke to each other during exams. Whilst fully understanding that it is hard to find people willing to invigilate, I feel that it isn't too much to ask for people who are capable of actually carrying out this task properly. It would also be helpful if invigilators paid attention to what is going on as many a time, they would chat between them or to those in other rooms. Having said this, I must admit that there were invigilators who did take it seriously and ensured good exam conditions, however the level of bad from the others outweighs the good here!

Printing and Font Clarity

Following research published in 2017 on font clarity, MATSEC changed the font in all examinations to Verdana. Candidate feedback on font clarity is reassuring for MATSEC as 96.7% of respondents agree that the font used was clearly readable. As regard to printing quality, 87.2% agree that this was clear. Both percentages are similar to those of last year. These items were not present in surveys preceding 2018 and, therefore, no table for comparison across years is presented.

Respondents' qualitative comments protested about printing quality of graph papers on write on scripts and some diagrams in the SEC Mathematics and SEC Italian Aural examination papers. In addition, a number of respondents claimed incorrect use of language in some non-language examinations.

² The use of bulky outdoor jackets is prohibited during MATSEC examinations.

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Table 6: Response to questions about examination paper printing and font clarity

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
Printing of examination papers was clear.	N	731	716	188	25	1660
	%	44.0	43.1	11.3	1.5	99.3
The font used was clearly readable.	N	935	666	43	12	1656
	%	56.5	40.2	2.6	0.7	99.1

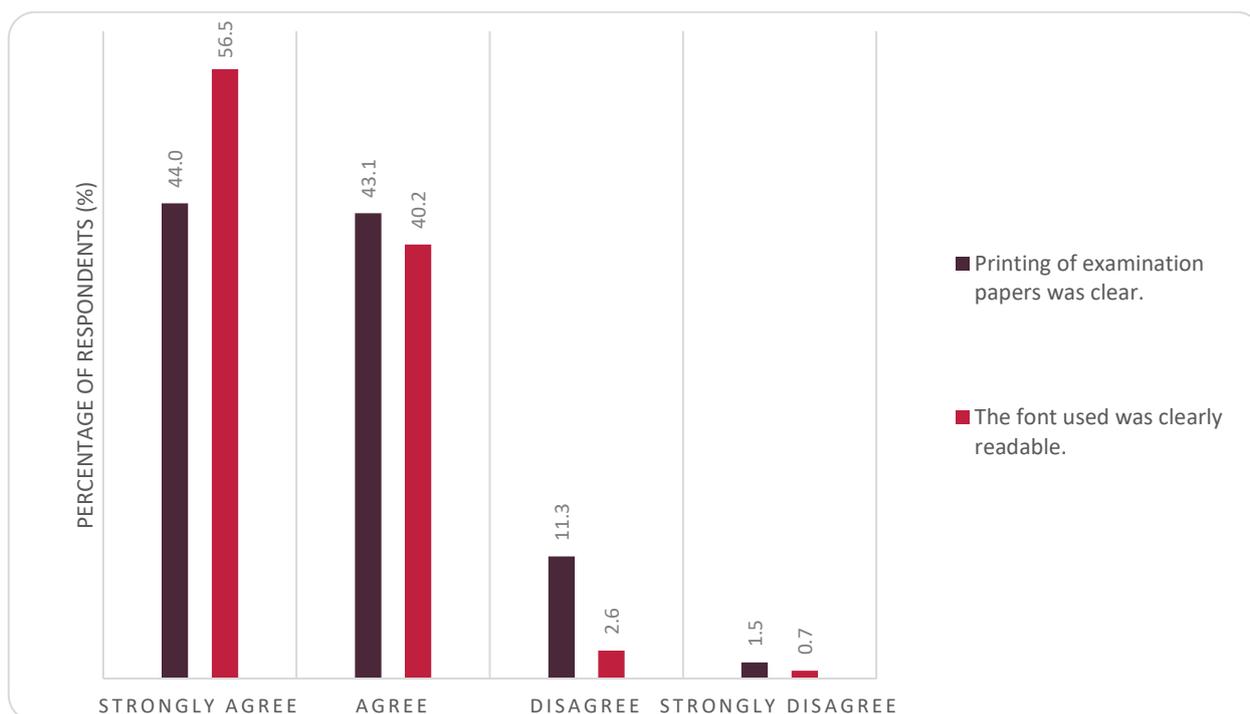


Figure 3: Response to questions about paper printing and font clarity

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Help from MATSEC

Respondents were asked whether they sought help from MATSEC and, if they did, to rate the assistance received. Unlike previous surveys, the 'Other' option was not provided. This is because past respondents have used this to include irrelevant options like school counsellors, teachers, and student political organisations. This makes comparison of this year's results with former surveys problematic.

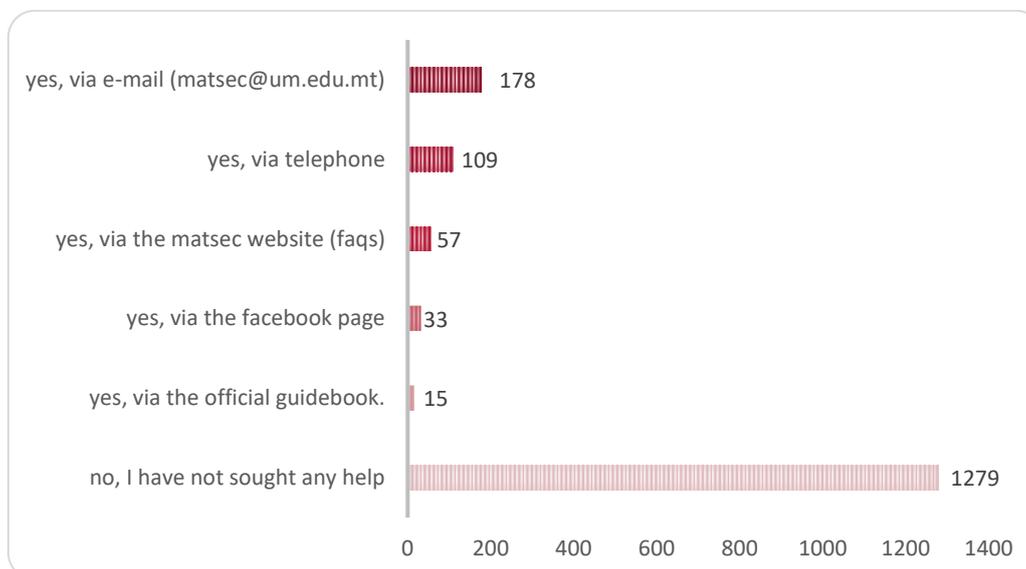


Figure 4: Response to questions about help sought from MATSEC

This year, 76.5% of respondents did not seek help from MATSEC. This is larger than the percentage quoted in previous reports, which stood at 72.2% (2018), 73.8% (2017) and 69.3% (2016). The use of e-mail and telephone remain the two most used means of contacting MATSEC. However, the difference between the two is increasing along the years with more respondents claiming to use e-mail. The vast majority (78.9%) of respondents who sought help from MATSEC are satisfied with the assistance. Data in Table 7 shows that respondents are satisfied with the help received from MATSEC irrespective of the channel used, although those who used telephone or looked for information on the website were most satisfied. These differences are more pronounced than in previous years.

Table 7: Response to questions whether help provided by MATSEC was helpful

Channel		2019			2018			2017		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
e-Mail	N	124	40	178	135	17	157	126	33	159
	%	69.7	22.5		86.0	10.8		79.2	20.8	
Telephone	N	98	8	109	129	11	148	120	20	140
	%	89.9	7.3		87.2	7.4		85.7	14.3	
Facebook Page	N	22	9	33	23	2	28	31	5	36
	%	66.7	27.3		82.1	7.1		86.1	13.9	
MATSEC Website (FAQs)	N	49	3	57	73	3	82	35	5	40
	%	86.0	5.3		89.0	3.7		87.5	12.5	
Official Guidebook	N	10	3	15	16	2	18	7	0	7
	%	66.7	20.0		88.9	11.1		100	0	

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From qualitative survey responses, it seems that many respondents e-mailed MATSEC about noise problems during an examination. Many complained that MATSEC did not return with an indication of how they would be compensated. Others sent e-mails arguing that a particular question was out of syllabus and deemed MATSEC to be unhelpful because the reply they got was not in their favour. Respondents claiming the MATSEC Facebook page was unhelpful grumbled about 'no reply', even though the page clearly states that messages and posts will not be replied to and any messages receive an auto-reply information them about this and to use telephone or e-mail. Others claimed that the Facebook page was helpful because they received an immediate reply or notes to study a subject. Clearly, these respondents did not understand the question and are referring to other, unofficial MATSEC pages.

Asked what other services could be offered by MATSEC, 46 respondents made their suggestions. Some relevant suggestions include:

- more marking schemes on the MATSEC website;
- online student profiles, providing access to personal time tables and results;
- reminder e-mails for submission of projects or other important key dates;
- online chat with MATSEC staff;
- more detailed revision of paper reports;
- service for candidates to see their marked papers.

Some other suggestions which are not part of MATSEC's remit but shed light on some of the issues which may frustrate candidates are:

- officials to check for noise around centres (these suggestions refer to noise coming outside of examination centres);
- free transport to examination centres;
- invigilation staff should not allow candidates who finish an examination to group in front of centres, make noise and disturb other candidates;
- examinations should be in centres closest to candidates.

Subsidised Registration Fees

The year 2019 is the first year in which all examination registration fees were subsidised by the Maltese Government. This means that candidates who registered for examinations in the normal registration period (not late or very late registration periods) did so for free. In 2018, the Government had covered half the registration costs for students. Prior to 2018, only students with recognised financial difficulties did not incur registration costs.

Respondents were asked for their level of agreement with 10 statements concerning subsidised registration fees. Results are summarised in the table below and represented graphically in the two images that follow, one graphical representation for each five items in this part. As this part of the survey was marked as required (compulsory), response rate for each item stands at 100%.

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Table 8: Response to questions about subsidised registration fees

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
MATSEC exams should be free only for individuals with financial difficulties (as in pre-2018).	N	150	126	680	715	1671
	%	9.0	7.5	40.7	42.8	100
MATSEC exams should be free only for individuals who attend the exams they register for (not absent).	N	590	520	340	221	1671
	%	35.3	31.1	20.3	13.2	100
MATSEC exams should be free only for individuals who obtain a passing grade.	N	68	107	690	806	1671
	%	4.1	6.4	41.3	48.2	100
MATSEC exams should be free for everyone (fees covered by government).	N	1167	360	107	37	1671
	%	69.8	21.5	6.4	2.2	100
With no registration fees, it will be easier for disadvantaged individuals to register for exams.	N	969	546	128	28	1671
	%	58.0	32.7	7.7	1.7	100
With MATSEC free exams, people will register for examinations they do not intend to sit for.	N	369	642	542	118	1671
	%	22.1	38.4	32.4	7.1	100
MATSEC free exams bring about a culture of entitlement (the world 'owes' you).	N	188	635	677	171	1671
	%	11.3	38.0	40.5	10.2	100
With MATSEC free exams, people will register for examinations they are unprepared for.	N	299	652	582	138	1671
	%	17.9	39.0	34.8	8.3	100
Free MATSEC exams are unfair because the whole population is made to pay for the exam registrations of a few.	N	76	185	851	559	1671
	%	4.5	11.1	50.9	33.5	100
This year, I would have applied for fewer examinations if these were at a cost.	N	292	253	560	566	1671
	%	17.5	15.1	33.5	33.9	100

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

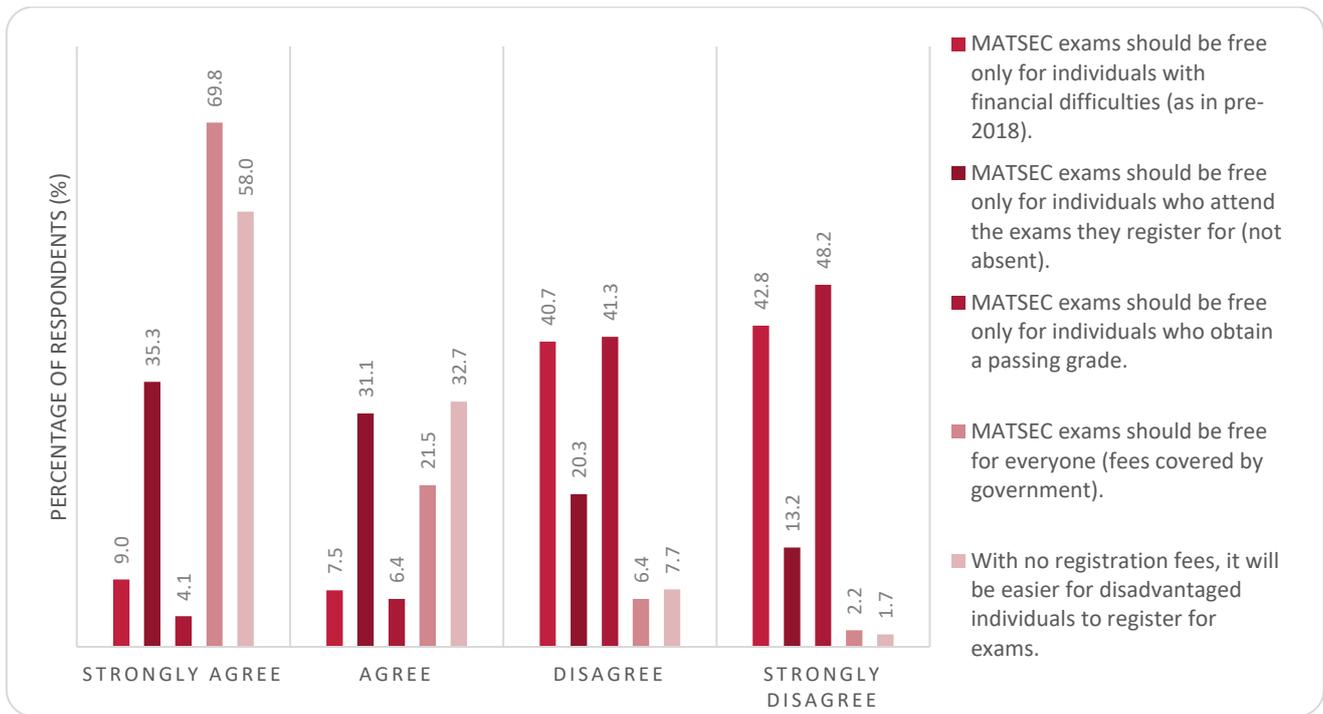


Figure 5: Response to questions about subsidised registration fees (Part 1)

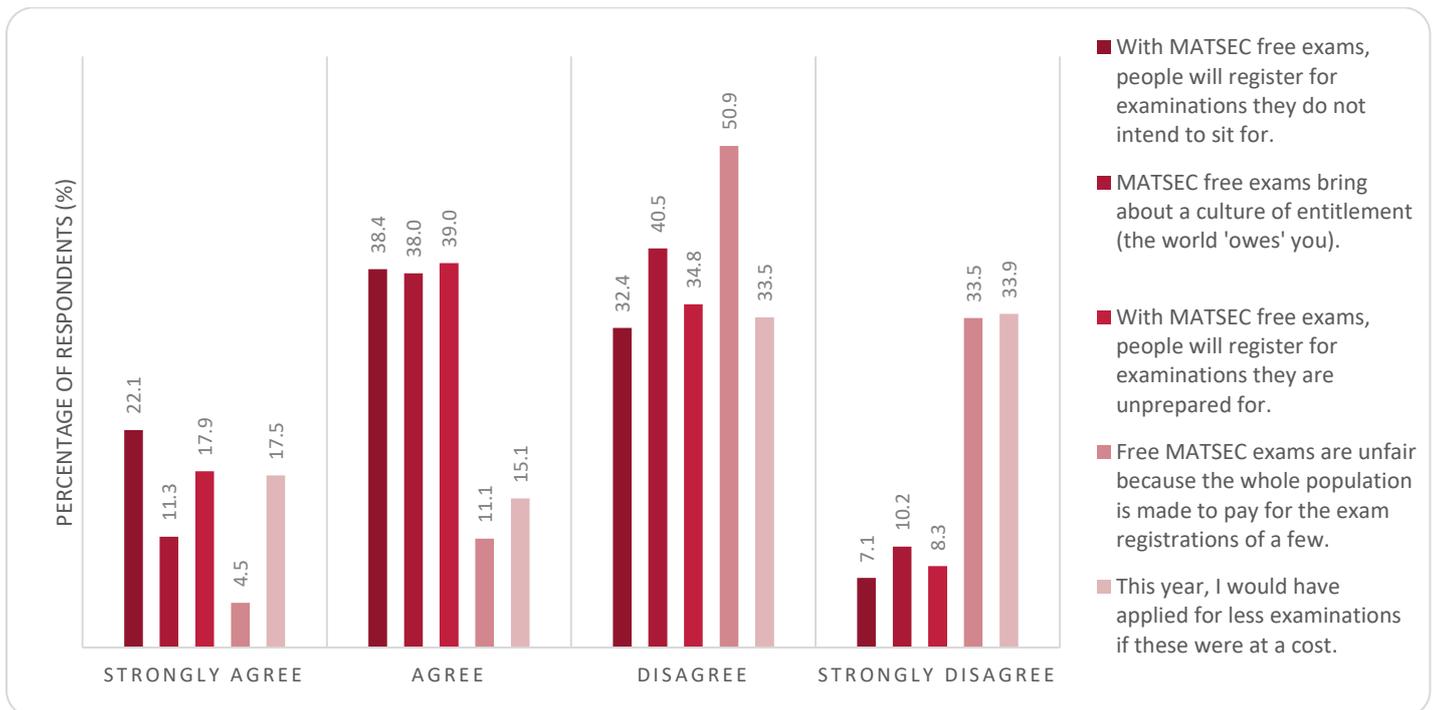


Figure 6: Response to questions about subsidised registration fees (Part 2)

It is clear that most respondents agree with the government's decision of subsidising registration fees, with 91.4% agreeing that examinations fees should be subsidised for all. Only 15.6% of respondents think that subsidising examination fees is unfair. However, most participants also recognise that, as examinations are 'free', many people will register for examinations they are either unprepared for (56.9%) or do not intend to sit for (60.5%).

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

It should be noted that the number of candidates registering for examinations and number of candidates being absent for examinations have both increased in 2019. Registrations from people who do not intend to sit for an examination stretch the resources of the awarding body (printing cost and time increase, more markers are engaged) without any real need. Most respondents agree that examinations should only be subsidised to those who are actually present for the examination (66.4%) but do not agree that examinations should only be subsidised to those who obtain a passing grade (10.5%). That examination costs be subsidised only for those candidates who are actually present or who achieve a passing grade are proposals of individuals opposing the government's decision so subsidize all registration costs for all.

Differences between respondents who registered for SEC examinations and those who registered for MC examinations are minimal in all questions. Differences between male and female respondents are more pronounced, although it is never the case that different groups of respondents have opposing general opinions. Generally speaking, male and SEC respondents seem to be more cautious or sceptical about the newly introduced subsidy. The table below shows the percentage of each of these groups which at least agree with each statement.

Table 9: Percentage candidates who agree with items about subsidised registration fees, by level of examinations registered for and by gender

	Percentage of agreeing respondents				
	All Respondents	By exam level		By gender	
		SEC	MC	Male	Female
MATSEC exams should be free only for individuals with financial difficulties (as in pre-2018).	16.5	17.8	13.8	20.4	14.5
The font used was clearly MATSEC exams should be free only for individuals who attend the exams they register for (not absent).	66.4	69.2	60.6	72.5	63.4
MATSEC exams should be free only for individuals who obtain a passing grade.	10.5	11.8	7.7	13.5	9.0
MATSEC exams should be free for everyone (fees covered by government).	91.4	91.0	92.3	89.6	92.4
With no registration fees, it will be easier for disadvantaged individuals to register for exams.	90.7	89.8	92.4	91.3	90.4
With MATSEC free exams, people will register for examinations they do not intend to sit for.	60.5	64.5	52.1	64.5	58.6
MATSEC free exams bring about a culture of entitlement (the world 'owes' you).	49.3	53.8	39.8	51.7	48.0
With MATSEC free exams, people will register for examinations they are unprepared for.	56.9	61.3	47.9	59.9	55.2
Free MATSEC exams are unfair because the whole population is made to pay for the exam registrations of a few.	15.6	17.4	12.0	16.9	14.9
This year, I would have applied for fewer examinations if these were at a cost.	32.6	38.1	21.2	31.5	33.0

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Oral and Aural Examinations

Oral and aural examinations are usually carried out as part of language subjects, although some other subjects, such as music, might also feature an oral and/or aural component. In language subjects, oral examinations assess candidates' ability to use spoken language while aural examinations assess candidates' ability to make sense of spoken interaction.

All MATSEC aural examinations are carried out using live speakers except for aural examinations for SEC foreign languages, which are carried out using recorded audio. For the subjects at AM and IM level, the number of candidates is small enough to make it easier to use live speaker than recorded audio. For SEC English Language, the number of candidates is too large to accommodate all candidates in multimedia rooms at any one time and a number of aural examination sessions, with a different paper, are held to accommodate candidates. The shift from live speakers to recorded audio for SEC foreign languages was implemented gradually as shown below:

- 2016: Use of recorded audio in small subjects (Arabic, German, Spanish)
- 2017: Use of recorded audio for larger subjects. Multiple recordings and sessions for each of these subjects as candidates could not be accommodated at one time. (Italian, French)
- 2018: Accommodation of all candidates for any one subject at one time
- 2019: Recorded audio is used in SEC English Language in the Supplementary session, where number of candidates is much smaller than the Main session.

A total of 1,399 (83.7%) respondents claimed to have sat for an aural and/or oral examination in 2019. These respondents were directed to mark their level of agreement with two statements concerning aural examinations and another five statements concerning oral examinations. Results are summarised in the table below.

Table 10: Response to items about the use of recorded audio or live speakers for aural examinations

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
Listening comprehension examinations should, as much as possible, be carried out using recordings.	N	233	373	459	265	1330
	%	17.5	28.0	34.5	19.9	79.6
Listening comprehension examinations should, as much as possible, be carried out using live speakers (persons).	N	565	369	291	101	1326
	%	42.6	27.8	21.9	7.6	79.4

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Table 11: Response to items about oral examinations

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
Examiners were professional.	N	596	696	80	20	1392
	%	42.8	50.0	5.7	1.4	83.3
I was asked personal questions which were unrelated to the subject.	N	34	120	706	533	1393
	%	2.4	8.6	50.7	38.3	83.4
Interviews are a good way of assessing the veracity of a project.	N	530	756	92	15	1393
	%	38.0	54.3	6.6	1.1	83.4
The questions asked were relevant to the submitted coursework.	N	574	729	73	14	1390
	%	41.3	52.4	5.3	1.0	83.2
Waiting times were adequate.	N	504	653	154	80	1391
	%	36.2	46.9	11.1	5.8	83.2

Respondents were asked a set of questions about oral examinations. The majority of responses state that examiners were professional (92.8%) and did not ask questions which were unrelated to the examination (88.9%); the place for examination was fit for purpose (92.3%); the structure of the examination was as per syllabus (93.7%); and waiting times were adequate (83.2%). This compares well with the data collected last year with small improvements being noticed in all questions. However, 5.7% more respondents than last year feel that waiting times were not adequate.

Qualitative comments did, in fact, suggest long waiting times in some instances. SEC French was repeatedly mentioned in this case while others referred to SEC English Language and SEC Maltese. Respondents suggested different causes for this problem, with some saying that there were missing examiners and others that some examiners were taking much more time than expected to carry out oral examinations. In both cases, candidates were then placed with other examiners. Other respondents claiming to have had excessively long waiting times for oral examinations were those who arrived at the venue early and were 'skipped' by candidates who, though arriving after them, were scheduled to have their examination before.

A common critique was the lack of separate waiting, preparation and examination rooms for some oral examinations.

Most examiners were said to be "friendly", "neutral" and "not intimidating". Complaints about professionalism of examiners were minor but some respondents did protest about examiners tapping on the table or avoiding eye contact. Five such complaints were made and directed to examiners of one subject. Invigilation staff was way more criticised than examiners. Respondents argued invigilation staff was a source of distraction as they talked among themselves or with candidates who were waiting for their oral examination. It appears some invigilation staff was "discussing the oral exam and complaining about how long it was taking in front of the students who were waiting to go in". As for aural examinations, some respondents noted, as noted in feedback to the previous year's examination session, that "the invigilators (should) know how to use the speakers."

As for the format of oral examinations, some respondents questioned the structure of the Maltese listening examination as this is structured differently than those for other languages at SEC level. Some questioned whether the listening should be part of the aural while others expressed anger for being read questions only once after the

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

examiner reads the text. One respondent argued that instructions in all foreign language examinations should also be read in Maltese or English.

Although it is difficult to ensure the anonymity of candidates during oral examinations, some respondents questioned why are their personal details, such as name and surname, disclosed to examiners. They argued these should only have access to their index numbers. Other candidates claimed to be uncomfortable doing their oral examination with teachers from their own school while others claimed their examiner had to be changed as they were placed with their own teacher.

Other suggestions include the use of coloured pictures as prompts for oral examinations and to schedule examinations close to candidates' locality.

Matriculation Certificate

As in previous years, respondents were asked whether they agree with the compulsory nature of each group in the Matriculation Certificate. Currently, subjects are divided into four groups of which students have to sit for subjects from the first three groups if they wish to be awarded the MC. Systems of Knowledge is also a compulsory component of the MC. Results to these items are summarised in the tables below, with the second table allowing for comparison with previous candidate feedback reports.

Table 12: Response to items about groups and subjects making up the Matriculation Certificate

The Matriculation Certificate should require a pass in:		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
a Group 1 subject.	N	253	221	32	21	527
	%	48.0	41.9	6.1	4.0	
a Group 2 subject.	N	192	232	71	31	526
	%	36.5	44.1	13.5	5.9	
a Group 3 subject.	N	213	204	58	49	524
	%	40.6	38.9	11.1	9.4	
Systems of Knowledge.	N	64	132	134	196	526
	%	12.2	25.1	25.5	37.3	

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Table 13: Response to items about groups and subjects making up the Matriculation Certificate, by year

The Matriculation Certificate should require a pass in:	2019		2018		2017		2016	
	Strongly Agree	Agree						
a Group 1 subject.	48.0	41.9	53.7	38.7	49.2	39.8	48.3	43.0
	89.9		92.4		89.0		91.3	
a Group 2 subject.	36.5	44.1	45.9	39.7	36.0	43.8	28.3	49.0
	80.6		85.6		79.8		77.3	
a Group 3 subject.	40.6	38.9	49.0	32.8	41.7	34.4	37.8	40.4
	79.6		81.8		76.1		78.2	
Systems of Knowledge.	12.2	25.1	17.2	26.0	13.7	23.1	11.6	26.5
	37.3		43.2		36.8		38.1	

Similar to previous years, respondents agree with the compulsory nature of each of Groups 1, 2 and 3, with the highest level of agreement being with the compulsory nature of Group 1 subjects. Also similar to previous years, respondents disagree that IM Systems of Knowledge is required for one to be awarded the MC.

Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with ten statements about Systems of Knowledge. Results showed no remarkable differences between respondents who claimed to have studied Systems of Knowledge and those who did not.

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Table 14: Response to items about own experience of IM Systems of Knowledge

Mark statements according to how much they reflect your experience of Systems of Knowledge		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
The subject content is interesting.	N	58	253	111	91	513
	%	11.3	49.3	21.6	17.7	
The content is linked to local scenario (Maltese art, history, politics and culture).	N	50	229	163	68	510
	%	9.8	44.9	32.0	13.3	
Teachers make links between different areas of SoK.	N	66	223	144	77	510
	%	12.9	43.7	28.2	15.1	
Tutors provide adequate guidance and feedback with the project.	N	62	228	127	90	507
	%	12.2	45.0	25.0	17.8	
The project was an educational experience.	N	62	215	123	109	509
	%	12.2	42.2	24.2	21.4	
We were assigned a number of exam-type essay during the whole course.	N	62	231	130	84	507
	%	12.2	45.6	25.6	16.6	
Teachers returned assigned work with comments and feedback.	N	66	248	121	71	506
	%	13.0	49.0	23.9	14.0	
Teachers guided students to properly answer exam-type SoK questions.	N	61	197	174	73	505
	%	12.1	39.0	34.5	14.5	
The project is fairly marked (different teachers/schools give similar marks to similar projects).	N	45	232	132	90	499
	%	9.0	46.5	26.5	18.0	
Project entries – journals, science and long essays – are copied/plagiarised by many students.	N	47	136	234	82	499
	%	9.4	27.3	46.9	16.4	

For no item was the level of agreement or disagreement higher than 65%. Results suggest that about 55% of candidates have had a positive experience of Systems of Knowledge (SoK), claiming the content is interesting and contextualised, with teachers linking knowledge between different areas of SoK and/or planning formative assessment for students. Although this may seem contradicting the previous observation that 62.7% of respondents disagree with SoK being required for award of the MC, respondents in this and past surveys have argued that it is the high stakes nature of the subject, rather than its content, which make it appalling.

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Table 15: Response to items concerning change in IM Systems of Knowledge

How would you like SoK to change?		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
Contextualise content (link content to Maltese art, culture, history and politics)	N	141	243	78	40	502
	%	28.1	48.4	15.5	8.0	
Prioritise academic communication (giving presentations, writing essays, etc)	N	88	221	132	62	503
	%	17.5	43.9	26.2	12.3	
Increase/add coursework during the course which is corrected by teachers and returned with feedback.	N	80	174	156	93	503
	%	15.9	34.6	31.0	18.5	
Lessons explicitly linking the different SoK areas.	N	140	272	60	29	501
	%	27.9	54.3	12.0	5.8	
Increase the weighting of the project for the final Grade.	N	118	146	127	110	501
	%	23.6	29.1	25.3	22.0	

SEC as a preparation for MC

As in all past surveys, respondents were asked whether SEC subjects are a good preparation for one to study the subject at a higher level. Of the 513 respondents to this question, 225 (43.9%) respondents believe that SEC subjects offered a good foundation for subjects studied at IM or AM level while 65 (12.7%) believe they did not. As in results of previous surveys, a large percentage of respondents (223, 43.5%) chose to remain impartial. These are illustrated in the figure that follows.

Comments provided by respondents are also similar to those of previous years and two arguments featured prominently:

- SEC examinations offer an adequate preparation for MC because candidates are introduced to MATSEC and high-stakes examinations. The structure of examinations adopted by MATSEC at the two levels is very similar, and thus SEC examinations offer a good preparation in this regard.
- Some SEC subjects were of a good preparation for further studies in the subject, however, the differences experienced in other subjects were, arguably, too large. The difference between SEC mathematics and IM/AM pure mathematics is frequently mentioned, with others referring to the science subjects, mostly chemistry.

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

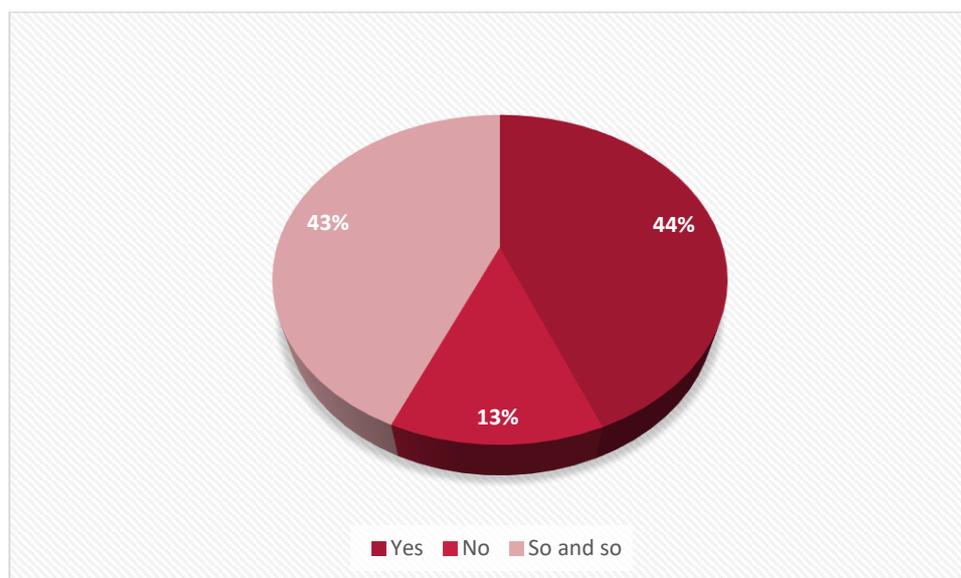


Figure 7: Where SEC subjects a good foundation for the Matriculation Certificate

SEC Examinations

Coursework in SEC Examinations

All respondents were given a number of statements about coursework in SEC assessments and asked for their level of agreement with each statement. The results are summarised in Table 16.

Table 16: Participants' agreement with statements about coursework in SEC examinations

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
Coursework should contribute to one's final mark in all SEC subjects	N	526	681	261	94	1562
	%	33.7	43.6	16.7	6.0	93.5
Coursework should not contribute to the final SEC Grade	N	136	247	743	425	1551
	%	8.8	15.9	47.9	27.4	92.8
Coursework makes it easier to pass from an exam	N	372	865	289	31	1557
	%	23.9	55.6	18.6	2.0	93.2
Coursework makes it harder to pass from an exam	N	57	230	961	305	1553
	%	3.7	14.8	61.9	19.6	92.9
Coursework is unfair because different schools/teachers mark work differently	N	417	708	362	70	1557
	%	26.8	45.5	23.2	4.5	93.2
Coursework reduces stress	N	314	564	469	205	1552
	%	20.2	36.3	30.2	13.2	92.9
Coursework increases stress	N	241	444	640	226	1551
	%	15.5	28.6	41.3	14.6	92.8

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Most respondents (77.3%) would like to have coursework contribute to the final mark in all SEC subjects while 24.7% believe coursework should not contribute to the final grade. Most respondents believe that coursework makes it easier to pass examinations (79.4%) and reduces stress and anxiety (56.6%). However, most respondents (72.3%) believe that coursework is unfair because different schools/teachers mark the work unreliably, as argued independently by some replies to the earlier section.

Identical survey items on coursework featured in last year's survey and the feedback obtained from respondents was very similar to that gathered this year, although this year's replies are less positive of the provided statements about coursework. It is interesting to note that in 2016 an item questioned about the introduction of coursework but did not mention its contribution to the Grade. Most respondents (68%) had disagreed with this item, suggesting that respondents are in favour of coursework's contribution to the final grade, and not of coursework per se.

SEC Vocational Subjects

The year 2019 is the third year in which certificates for SEC vocational subjects were awarded. The number of candidates registering for SEC vocational subjects has continued to steadily increase, which increase is reflected in the data collected for this report. A total of 279 respondents claimed to have studied a SEC vocational subject, making up 24.7% of the SEC respondents. Last year, this amounted to 185 respondents (19.1% of SEC respondents). Vocational subjects registered for by participants are shown in the table below:

Table 17: SEC vocational subjects studied by respondents

Subject	Number of respondents
Agribusiness	8
Engineering Technology	29
Information Technology	117
Health and Social Care	75
Hospitality	59
Total (without duplicates)	279
No vocational subject	1294

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Table 18 shows respondents' level of agreement with eight statements about SEC vocational subjects, six of which were used in last year's candidate feedback tool.

Table 18: Participants' agreement with statements about SEC vocational subjects

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
SEC vocational subjects offer more applied and hands-on learning than other SEC subjects	N	400	627	93	13	1133
	%	35.3	55.3	8.2	1.1	67.8
It is easier to pass a SEC vocational subject rather than other SEC subjects	N	266	485	324	30	1105
	%	24.1	43.9	29.3	2.7	66.1
It is harder to pass a SEC vocational subject rather than other SEC subjects	N	43	174	692	191	1100
	%	3.9	15.8	62.9	17.4	65.8
SEC vocational subjects are a good addition to MATSEC's range of subjects	N	430	578	76	18	1102
	%	39.0	52.5	6.9	1.6	65.9
SEC vocational subjects should have a final examination covering most of the syllabus, like other SEC subjects.	N	260	521	212	97	1090
	%	23.9	47.8	19.4	8.9	65.2
All SEC subjects should be assessed by coursework and an examination at the end of each year (Form 3, 4 and 5) like vocational subjects, rather than one examination at the end of Form 5.	N	378	466	192	76	1112
	%	34.0	41.9	17.3	6.8	66.5
Some SEC vocational subjects are very similar to other SEC subjects.	N	86	563	390	43	1082
	%	7.9	52.0	36.0	4.0	64.8
Vocational subjects should be offered at Advanced and/or Intermediate Matriculation level.	N	393	546	115	53	1107
	%	35.5	49.3	10.4	4.8	66.2

Results to items used in 2019 and 2018 are very similar. Most respondents believe that SEC vocational subjects offer a more applied route to learning (90.6% in 2019, 90.5% in 2018) and are a good addition to MATSEC's range of subjects at SEC level (91.5% in 2019, 90.4% in 2018), even though some subjects are similar to existing SEC subjects (60% in 2019, 59.1% in 2018). Moreover, most participants believe that SEC vocational subjects are easier to pass than other SEC subjects (68.0% in 2019, 67.7% in 2018) and should have a final, summative examination like other SEC subjects (71.7% in 2019, 75.3% in 2018).

Responses, however, varied considerably between participants depending whether they had studied SEC vocational subjects or not, as shown in the table that follows. Respondents with a first-hand experience of SEC vocational subjects are more likely to agree that the subjects offer a hands-on route to learning (+3.1%) and are a positive addition to the existing range of SEC subjects (+4.3%). Respondents who have not studied any vocational subject are more likely to agree with the introduction of a summative examination for vocational subjects (+30.8%) even though candidates who have studied vocational subjects are more likely to agree that SEC vocational subjects are easier to pass (+14.8%). These differences are also of similar magnitude to those reported in 2018.

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

In addition to these items, respondents were questioned whether other SEC subjects should be assessed “by coursework and an examination at the end of each year (Form 3, 4 and 5) like vocational subjects” and whether there should be vocational subjects offered at IM and/or AM level. Respondents agreed to both items (79.5% and 84.8% respectively) with respondents who have studied vocational subjects doing more so (+10.1% and +2.5% respectively).

Examination Access Arrangements

A total of 232 survey respondents claim to have qualified for Examination Access Arrangements (EAAs). This amounts to 13.9% of participants. Although more than half of the replies do not specify on which condition EAAs were granted (117, 50.4%), the most stated conditions are SpLD / Dyslexia (12.9%) and ADD / ADHD (9.9%). These are the most stated conditions in SEC registrations as shown in MATSEC SEC Statistical Reports for different years (about 8% and 7% respectively in 2019). Respondents could select more than one condition and many respondents did so. Of the 115 participants to this item, 79 claim one condition while others stated multiple ones. Data on the conditions stated by candidates is shown in the table below.

Table 19: Conditions on which Respondents were Granted Examination Access Arrangements

Condition	Respondents	
	N	%
ADD / ADHD	23	9.9
Autism Spectrum Disorder (Including Asperger's Syndrome)	14	6.0
Hearing Impairment	10	4.3
Last Minute Injuries	13	5.6
Medical Conditions (Including Diabetes, IBS, ME, Fibromyalgia, Systemic/Discoïd Lupus Erythematosus)	5	2.2
Mental Health (Including Anxiety, OCD, Bipolar Disorder, Depression)	22	9.5
Mobility Problems (Including Cerebral Palsy)	2	0.9
SpLD / Dyslexia	30	12.9
Stammer	3	1.3
Visual Impairment	7	3.0
DCD / Dyspraxia	7	3.0
No Reply	117	50.4

Table 20 shows the EAAs which respondents qualified for. Other specific arrangements were quoted by participants, including enlarged script, use of word processor, use of lift, close parking to centre, special seating for certain examinations, and special considerations for certain examinations. There were 128 responses for this item, of which 45 selected one EAA.

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Table 20: Conditions on which Respondents were Granted Examination Access Arrangements

Condition	Respondents		
	As the only EAA	Total	%
Prompter	1	37	15.9
Reader	3	24	10.3
Room with few Candidates	10	76	32.8
Extra Time	27	92	39.7
Supervised Rest Breaks	4	31	13.4
Scribe	2	5	2.2

Respondents were then asked about the level of usefulness of the EAA/s they qualified for. The option 'Not Used' should have been reserved for respondents who qualified for the arrangement but did not use it. However, replies in this section show that respondents may have misunderstood this instruction as several replies to this question did not match the offered access arrangement as reported in Table 20 and Figure 8. For example, while only five respondents claimed to have been eligible for a Scribe (Table 20), 64 respondents later stated they were eligible for this arrangement but did not use it, while twenty candidates claimed to have used this arrangement to varying degree of satisfaction. Furthermore, thirty candidates claimed not to have made use of the EAA Room with few Candidates. Candidates who qualify for this EAA are accommodated in rooms with fewer candidates and, therefore, they would have automatically used this arrangement if qualified for it.

Table 21: Usefulness of Examination Access Arrangements (raw)

		Not used	Used but not helpful	Used and helpful	Used and very helpful	Replies
Prompter	N	62	12	19	9	102
	%	60.8	11.8	18.6	8.8	
Reader	N	59	9	17	11	96
	%	61.5	9.4	17.7	11.5	
Room with few Candidates	N	31	15	33	46	125
	%	24.8	12.0	26.4	36.8	
Extra Time	N	37	7	37	48	129
	%	28.7	5.4	28.7	37.2	
Supervised Rest Breaks	N	56	9	18	19	102
	%	54.9	8.8	17.6	18.6	
Scribe	N	64.0	8.0	7.0	5.0	84.0
	%	76.2	9.5	8.3	6.0	

The validity of this particular survey item is jeopardised. As the results of this question cannot be considered trustworthy, responses of individuals who previously claimed not to have qualified for the EAA in question were manually removed. These new results are shown in the table below and summarised in the figure that follows.

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Table 22: Usefulness of Examination Access Arrangements (modified)

		Not used	Used but not helpful	Used and helpful	Used and very helpful	Replies
Prompter	N	12	5	13	7	37
	%	32.4	13.5	35.1	18.9	
Reader	N	4	1	9	10	24
	%	16.7	4.2	37.5	41.7	
Room with few Candidates	N	3	7	25	38	73
	%	4.1	9.6	34.2	52.1	
Extra Time	N	12	2	31	41	86
	%	14.0	2.3	36.0	47.7	
Supervised Rest Breaks	N	6	1	11	12	30
	%	20.0	3.3	36.7	40.0	
Scribe	N	2	1	0	1	4
	%	50.0	25.0	0.0	25.0	

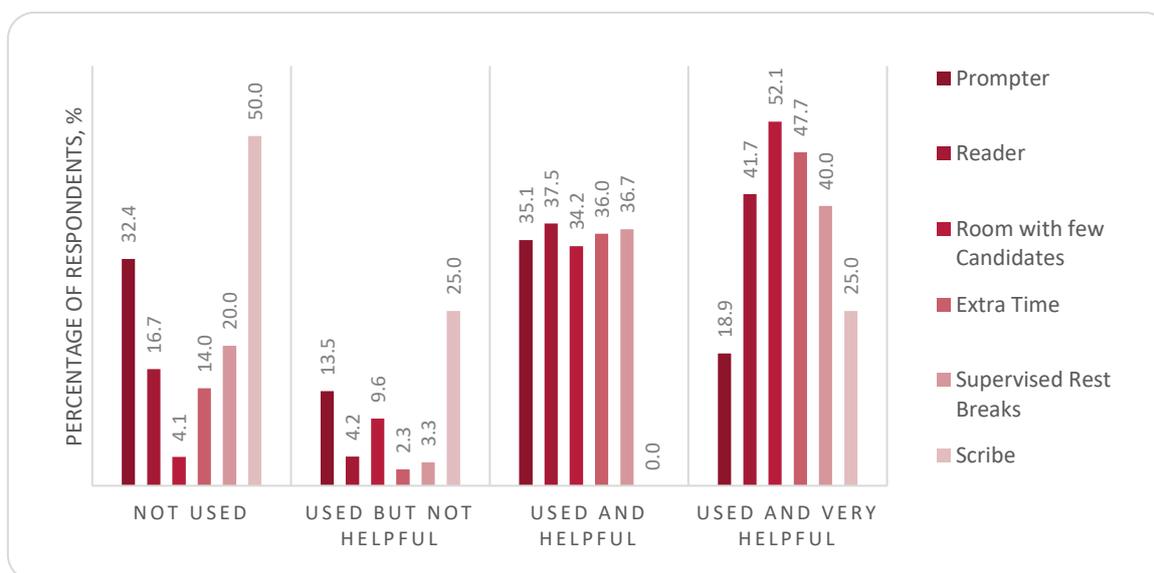


Figure 8: Usefulness of Examination Access Arrangements (modified)

Figure 8 suggests that, from provided EAAs, the prompter is deemed less helpful by qualifying respondents, with 32.4% stating they did not use the EAA and 13.5% stating it was not helpful. Reader, extra time and room with a few candidates are the EAAs deemed most helpful, with 80% or more of respondents saying the arrangement was either helpful or very helpful. In an earlier question, five respondents claimed to have qualified for the EAA scribe. Of these, four answered this part and two of these stated they did not use the EAA.

Respondents were asked which one of three statements best describes the equality of EAAs when these were offered by different persons. A total of 17 from the 110 responses to this survey item (15.5%) claimed that different personnel provided them with different levels of access, 58.2% said they received the same level of access throughout all examinations, while 26.8% stated that they received a similar level of access for the examinations. Although feedback suggests similar EAAs were provided by most EAA support staff, this feedback is less positive than that of 2019. This feedback can be deemed comparable to that of past reports. This is because the percentage of respondents claiming different levels of access was offered (15.5%) lies between that reported in 2018 (9.7%) and in 2017 (22%).

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

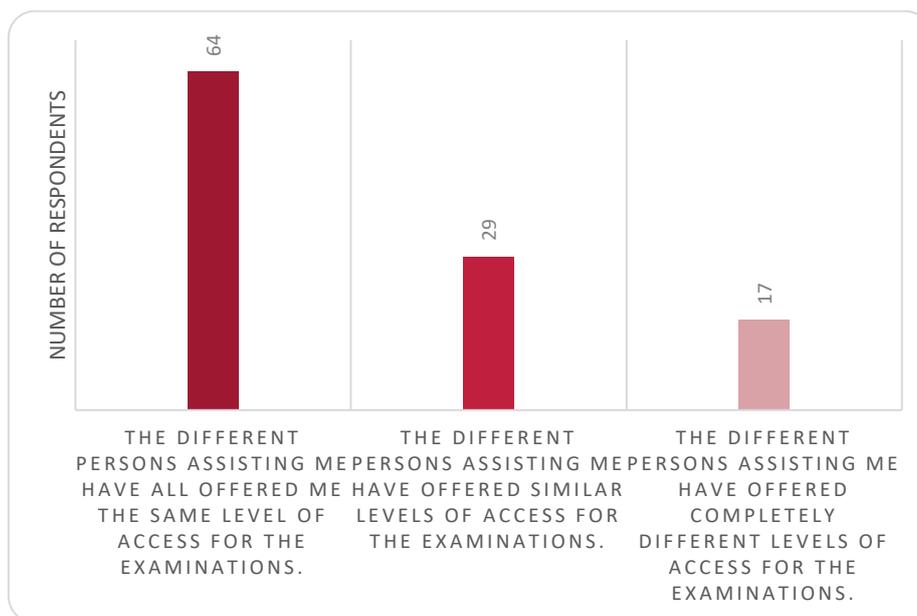


Figure 9: Equality of Access Offered by Different Access Personnel

When asked whether EAAs were fair, most participants (85.1% of the 141 responses to this item) responded positively. The reason cited mostly by respondents who complained was not being given the EAA/s that they thought they should have qualified for, with some citing different access arrangements when sitting examinations offered by foreign awarding boards in Malta.

The majority of participants noted how EAAs are tailor-made for each individual candidate and were very appreciative for the support and assistance they received from MATSEC and the ADSU. Others also noted how EAAs allow candidates with specific conditions to express their skills without being given an unfair advantage over other candidates.

Respondents who had qualified for EAAs were asked to give suggestions as to how EAAs can be improved. A total of 34 respondents gave their opinions which were analysed individually. The most cited suggestion was to increase the professionalism of invigilation staff assigned to EAA candidates, with complaints ranging from invigilators complaining about allocated extra time in front of the candidates being awarded such arrangement, to talking between themselves and interrupting the candidates' concentration during examination. The second most cited suggestion was to increase the intra-communication and preparedness within the examination centres, with candidates citing invigilators not having lists beforehand and not being immediately given the EAAs they were entitled to, with one participant citing a tardiness of twenty minutes. There was also a mention of changing the way Prompters prompt candidates' attention and the pace at which Readers speak. One particular comment cited being ashamed of going into a class reserved for EAA candidates as this singled the candidate out in front of other candidates assigned to this particular examination centre. Wherever possible, candidates with EAAs are assigned to the same, specifically assigned centre.

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

General Comments

A variety of comments were collected from respondents and these were included in the relevant sections of this report. This section collates other comments not directly linked to one of the sections in this report. Most of these comments were provided in the additional feedback section, which concludes the survey and to which 179 participants responded.

Many participants gave favourable reviews of the improvements being carried out, with particular praise from mature students who commented positively on the increased professionalism of the examinations when compared to past sessions they sat for. Nevertheless, some mature candidates wished being placed in separate classes with other people of similar age. This is because some sensed that they were being made fun of by the younger candidates or simply felt uncomfortable with the noticeable age gap. Furthermore, they felt that the themes covered during the examinations often catered to the younger audience, making them feel even more awkward.

The most cited suggestion was that examinations take place in centres closer to candidates' own homes (although the Examinations Department should already be taking measures to ensure this), especially for short duration examinations which would be components of a particular paper. Additionally, several suggested using the same schools which candidates attend, as this would minimize confusion to locate the schools prior to the examinations, particularly during peak traffic hours. Others suggested organising official transport to take candidates to their respective examination centres.

Some participants argued that examinations depend mainly on recall and that more emphasis should be placed on application of knowledge and higher order skills. Others argued for increased measures to ensure fair marking across different teachers/schools when it comes to coursework, especially if MATSEC is considering increasing the weighting allocated to these components. Unfair distribution of work in group work and teacher preferences were mentioned as problems. Others mentioned the extensive effort demanded to complete certain coursework components, with some reference to SEC Art, with these ultimately contributing only a small percentage of the final Grade awarded.

A number of comments reflected inconsistency between MATSEC documents and teaching and learning in the respondents' schools. A number of respondents cited multiple times that the questions did not cover topics learned in schools, with particular emphasis on Computer SEC Level, and requested more liaison between MATSEC and the schools to ensure that the candidates are adequately prepared. A further note adding to this were respondents complaining that during Form 3 and Form 4 their respective schools did not inform them that the practical sessions held during these years would count towards the final coursework component, and that they would have taken more care if this fact was made known earlier. Further comments cited that several practical sessions had been missed or lost due to the lack of a subject teacher for several terms. Several respondents mentioned that the time provided was insufficient to cover all the material in class, and that this increased anxiety and, in turn, affected performance during the examinations.

To improve accessibility, MATSEC examinations are now printed on faintly coloured paper. However, a few respondents have grumbled about this, arguing the coloured papers made them dizzy or feel nausea, with one respondent stating having to leave examinations early whenever yellow was used, and asking for the white paper used previously to be reintroduced.

Marking schemes are used by candidates in preparation for their examinations, most probably as an 'answer sheet'. Thus, some respondents complained about the lack of available marking schemes of past sessions on the MATSEC website. Some candidates also expressed the desire to be able to be given their examination papers back so that they can understand where they did wrong and be able to better prepare themselves for future sessions.

CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2019): MATSEC MAIN/FIRST EXAMINATION SESSION

Other suggestions included spacing out examinations so as not to overwhelm candidates during examination period. However, the effect this would have on result publication dates and the timeframes for the Supplementary/Second session, are not mentioned in such comments. Others suggested that the post-examination feedback be made available in Maltese, in addition to the English version.

E. Conclusion

MATSEC always considers informed criticism as part of its continuous improvement process. This is the fifth report to gather and analyse feedback from candidates on the MATSEC Examinations they have just sat for. Candidate perceptions of current operational practices are a valuable contribution to identifying areas to be proactively tackled to be able to deliver an enhanced service.