

**UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE**

SEC

ARABIC

May 2012

EXAMINERS' REPORT

**MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD**

**SEC ARABIC
MAY 2012 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

GENERAL INFORMATION AND STATISTICS

The examination consisted of Paper I, the core paper, and Paper IIA or IIB. This year, there were 22 candidates who sat for Paper A and 8 candidates who sat for Paper B, thus 30 candidates in all sitting for the examination. There was an increase in the number of students who sat for the SEC exam this year.

ABSENCES

This year one Paper B candidate was absent for all the components of the examination.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

The overall performance of the total cohort sitting for the May 2012 session is depicted in the Table below:

Table 1										
Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	Abs	Total
I & IIA	1	8	6	2	1	-	-	4	0	22
I & IIB	-	-	-	1	-	1	4	1	1	8
Total	1	8	6	3	1	1	4	5	1	30
% of Total	3.3	26.7	20.0	10.0	3.3	3.3	13.3	16.7	3.3	100.0

SEC Arabic Language Paper

The May 2012 paper was made up of two main components – the oral component (Listening Comprehension, Dictation, Topic Conversation and Reading Comprehension) common to both Paper A and Paper B and the written component (translation from Arabic into English, another translation from English into Arabic, essay writing, grammar drills and cultural knowledge) specifically for Paper A. Paper B is made up of a translation from Arabic into English, essay writing, grammar drills and cultural knowledge. The Arabic SEC examination is set according to the SEC syllabus for Arabic Language 2010.

Performance

As usual, there was an evident and expected difference between the performance of candidates sitting for Papers A and B. In Paper A, one candidate succeeded to obtain the highest grade 1 and eight candidates scored a very good grade; the rest performed fairly well but unfortunately there were also unclassified grades in Paper A. The majority of the Paper B candidates obtained low scores (6 to 7); one Paper B candidate obtained a grade 4 and another obtained an unclassified grade.

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 a descriptive and informative text with only four questions of varied format mostly requiring eliciting brief information from the story being read out. The text was read out by the examiner and rendered to the students in digitally recorded format. Eight per cent of the total marks were allotted to the testing of listening skills. None of the candidates obtained full marks for this part of the examination. The highest score obtained for this skill was 7 while the lowest was 0. Unfortunately the candidates did not give correct answers to some of the questions and as usual their answers were full of spelling mistakes and grammatical errors.

Dictation

This section was a medium length descriptive text taken from a contemporary Arabic school textbook and carried a 7% weighting of the total marks intended to test the candidates' phonetic and spelling skills in Arabic. On average, the students who sat for Paper A scored very good marks in this section, some of whom even obtained full marks, but unfortunately the students who sat for Paper B scored very low marks or none at all. The highest score obtained here was 7 and the lowest 0. Among the common spelling mistakes, most of the candidates failed to distinguish between أ\ع\اء and also ended plural masculine verbs in the past tense with the suffix وا with a و only. Other spelling mistakes involved the mix up between ك\ق ، ناداضا صاسا حاخ.

Reading Comprehension

The reading comprehension was a long passage spread on one and a half A4 pages with historical details, dates and events. The five questions carried a 15% weighting of the total marks which the candidates had to answer orally to test their comprehension skills. The questions were set in such a way as to avoid any ambiguity. Most of the questions involved the ability to reason as well as to elicit details; questions which required a personal opinion were not set in this section. Most of the candidates who sat for this examination were of Arab origin and spoke fluent Arabic. Therefore these candidates scored higher marks than the other non-Arab candidates. Some students 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. However, the majority of the candidates answered the questions without difficulty. Only the students who opted for Paper B scored poorly in this exercise.

Conversation

In this component, relatively realistic situations were presented for a brief exchange to take place between the candidate and the examiner. A choice of three different topics was given, taking into consideration the cohort's ages and experiences as well as the language areas dictated by the syllabus. The candidates had to select a title/topic and engage in a 10 minute conversation with the examiner. This exercise is weighted 10% 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 topic chosen for conversation. During the conversation,

the examiner leads the candidate with prompts and cues to test his/her ability to continue and conclude a dialogue, and to express functions like drawing up explanations, giving descriptions, making suggestions and showing surprise.

The task was completed to varying degrees. In the majority of cases, the candidates of Arab origin 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 otherwise used Maltese words to substitute their lack of Arabic vocabulary with respect to the conversation topic. Unfortunately, the majority of the non-Arab candidates demonstrated poor pronunciation, diction and intonation in Arabic and thus scored low marks even in this section of the examination. Some other candidates simply uttered words and not fully phrased sentences.

Paper 2 A

The Written Component

Paper 2A consists of a translation from Arabic into English, another translation from English into Arabic, essay writing, grammar drills and culture knowledge, which together carry 50% of the global mark.

Question 1: Translation from Arabic into English – 10 marks

Despite the simple narrative text with a strong familiar context, none of the candidates managed to obtain full marks in this translation. The majority of the candidates managed to translate the gist of the passage but the remaining candidates struggled with this text and scored an average low mark of 1. Unfortunately, although the text was a simple and descriptive narrative, the candidates showed that they have a very poor level of vocabulary. Others showed that they even have a misconception of certain vocabulary.

Question 2: Translation from English into Arabic – 10 marks

In this exercise, most of the candidates struggled with the translation. There were a range of responses, and credit was given wherever students demonstrated comprehension of the text. None of the candidates obtained full marks for this translation. The highest mark obtained was 7 and the lowest was 1. Several phrases and sentences were omitted, and many spelling and grammatical mistakes were committed. The examiners noted a severe lack of idiomatic expressions, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge to handle translations from English into Arabic.

Question 3: Essay – 20 marks

Some of the candidates sitting for Paper 2A found this part of the paper challenging while others performed quite well in essay writing. Many of the candidates managed to write an essay of at least 200 words and most chose to write on the topic of electronic mails. The highest mark obtained was 17 and the lowest mark was 2. There were ample spelling and grammatical mistakes and some had very poor handwriting. With the exception of a couple of essays, the rest lacked ideas, imagination and originality. Some candidates showed problems of coherence and sequencing ideas. The candidates who scored badly could not express themselves in Arabic and included several Maltese phrases or sentences in Arabic script. Important vocabulary and verb conjugations posed a problem for most of the candidates to be able to produce a good essay.

Question 4: Grammar – 5 marks

The aim of this exercise is to examine the candidates' grammatical skills through full vocalization of the five sentences provided. The grammar posed problems for several candidates who seemed unable to vocalize the five separate sentences correctly. More than half of the candidates either did not do the vocalization or else scored badly. The average mark obtained for this exercise was 2. The examiners are sorry to note that the poor performance of most of the candidates in this section indicates that they have not yet grasped the basic grammatical rules or else have 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 with one suitable word of information in the given five separate sentences dealing with Arabic culture on topics or personalities according to the SEC Arabic syllabus. With the exception of one student who obtained full marks, the candidates seem to have found this exercise quite challenging. Many failed to identify the correct answer or else left the answers blank. Whereas the highest score was 5, the lowest was 0. It is quite evident that most of the candidates were not well prepared for this section, and there seems to be a habit of this section being ignored.

Paper 2B

The Written Component

Paper 2B consists of a translation from Arabic into English, essay writing, grammar drills and cultural knowledge which together carry 50% of the global mark.

Question 1: Translation from Arabic into English – 20 marks

Of the eight candidates who sat for Paper 2B, five attempted to tackle this section. Some candidates found this section very challenging despite the fact that the passage was a familiar and descriptive narrative commonly found in their textbooks. None of them obtained full marks. The highest score was 18 and the lowest was 2. The examiners noted that many candidates managed to convey the gist of the translation and the overall performance was good.

Question 2: Essay – 20 marks

The candidates were given an option of three different narrative or descriptive essay titles to choose from. Regretfully, the highest mark obtained in essay writing was 10 and the lowest was 2. Most of the students either did not write anything or did not write more than a few sentences. Even those who struggled to come up with a sort of essay produced work replete with grammar and spelling mistakes, void of original ideas, sequencing and basic punctuation marks.

Question 3: Grammar – 5 marks

The Grammar part in Paper 2B required candidates to choose and underline the correct word from the brackets. The majority of the candidates coped well with this question and the average score was 3. Two candidates did not do this exercise and thus did not obtain any mark. The examiners noted that although the assigned grammar task of the five given sentences was a simple and basic one, the candidates did not manage to obtain full marks showing that they lacked the basic required grammatical skills as specified in the SEC Syllabus.

Question 4: Culture – 5 marks

In this simple exercise, the candidates had to fill in the blanks with one suitable word of information in the given five separate sentences dealing with Arabic culture on topics or personalities according to the SEC Arabic syllabus. This exercise is the same as for Paper 2A. The candidates did not perform well at all in this section with many of them leaving out this exercise. The highest mark obtained in this exercise was 4 and the lowest was 0. It is evident that candidates lack cultural knowledge and are not preparing themselves well for this section.

Overall Performance

The examiners noted that there were hardly any instances of good practices in the SEC Arabic examination this year, with the exception of Paper I that entailed oral skills. This year there were several native Arabic speaking candidates and their performance was noted to be competent while, on the whole, the majority of the candidates somehow managed to succeed in communicating the basic language skills in the examination. Nonetheless, poor performance was noted in grammar, spelling, knowledge of vocabulary and essay production. Although a lot of time and effort is dedicated to the teaching of Arabic, it is a pity that in most cases, accuracy and fluency in the four language skills are still not being achieved satisfactorily. It has become evident that more exposure to reading, speaking, listening and writing in Arabic is necessary. It is also recommended that more preparation is carried out with regard to the actual handling of the examination. Candidates need to be more prepared to deal with the language tasks at hand. They also need to understand the significance of working diligently and rigorously in every component of the paper. It is imperative that candidates realise that their commitment to study Arabic should be kept throughout their scholastic years since Arabic is a very demanding language for non-native speakers and thus requires much more preparation for one to succeed.

Chairperson
Board of Examiners

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