

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

FRENCH
MAY 2014

EXAMINERS' REPORT

**MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS' BOARD**

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

1. General**1.1 Registration for Examination**

935 candidates registered for Paper A and 390 candidates registered for Paper B.

1.2 Attendance for Examination

5 candidates who enrolled for Paper A and 14 candidates who enrolled for Paper B did not attend the examination.

1.3 Overall Performance**1.3.1 Grades awarded were distributed as indicated in the Table below:**

SEC FRENCH 2014 - Paper A										
Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	ABS	Total
Candidates	108	220	296	153	91	-	-	62	5	935
% of 935	11.5	23.53	31.66	16.47	9.62	-	-	6.63	0.53	
SEC FRENCH 2014 - Paper B										
Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	ABS	Total
Candidates	-	-	-	69	92	90	58	67	14	390
% of 390	-	-	-	17.7	23.59	23.08	14.88	17.18	3.59	
Totals	108	220	296	223	182	90	58	129	19	1325
% of 1325	8.15	16.60	22.34	16.83	13.74	6.8	4.38	9.74	1.43	

For the purposes of comparison, the figures for May 2013 are reproduced below:

SEC FRENCH 2013 - Paper A										
Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	ABS	Total
Candidates	100	235	315	164	99	-	-	82	2	997
% of 997	10.03	23.57	31.59	16.44	9.92	-	-	8.22	0.2	99.98
SEC FRENCH 2013 - Paper B										
Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	ABS	Total
Candidates	-	-	-	65	97	89	65	79	10	405
% of 405	-	-	-	16.04	23.95	21.97	16.04	19.5	2.46	99.96
Totals	100	235	315	229	196	89	65	161	12	1402
% of 1402	7.13	16.76	22.47	16.33	13.98	6.35	4.64	11.48	0.86	100

2. Analysis of tasks set

Interprétation de l'Image

As in previous years, a variety of photographs was selected. Candidates were asked to choose one at random and given time to examine the picture chosen.

For the purposes of reliability, the questioning techniques were kept uniform throughout the exercise. Examiners were instructed to begin with objective questioning about the content of the picture, and to move gradually towards a more subjective analysis. Candidates were, for example, asked to describe persons physically and to describe the setting, before being asked to comment on the mood of the picture or to try and find a commercial use for the image. In this way, the same component examined different levels of ability.

Comments presented in previous years on the performance of candidates in this exercise still stand. Candidates must prepare themselves to be able to communicate with another speaker about a picture. It is not an issue of knowing "all the words" ... indeed it may be more valid for candidates to learn how to deal with the pragmatic issues which arise during such a conversation.

The speech acts expected during this exercise (describing a person, speaking about moods, imagining colours, talking about everyday actions) have not been mastered yet.

2.1 Dictation

Different texts originating from the same source were proposed for the dictation. Markers were then instructed to only take into account specific pre-selected items. Basically the criteria for this choice were that the selection should reflect the parts of speech which the candidates met with during their progress in the subject (verbs in different tenses, articles, pronouns, and so on). There are a number of critical spelling mistakes which are basic yet very frequent (à, a, j'ai, je) and which, unfortunately, a number of candidates still deal with lightly and suffer the consequences for. One is referred to previous reports listing very common errors which repeat themselves from year to year.

2.2 Listening Comprehension

A gradation of difficulty was envisaged, progressing from the questions of Section A to those of Section C. Markers commented that "a large number of candidates failed to express themselves clearly" in this third section.

2.3 Message à rédiger

Compared to last year, the candidates' performance in this exercise generally declined.

Markers commented that many candidates are still struggling with this exercise. The remark that "*Many students simply copied out words from the title*", was made by several markers. The messages "*were not always coherent, many were raw in form*", with some students even finding it difficult to meet the word limit.

A particular cause for concern is the remark made by markers that a good number of these messages showed "*lack of planning and were quite carelessly written, with bits and pieces of information scattered all over the page*". One cannot but suspect that because the word limit is less than it is in traditional composition writing, this task is not being taken seriously by candidates.

Candidates were to write an email to an aunt or uncle; however, the "*à, de, cher oncle, chère tante,*" as well as the "*formule de congé*", were often omitted.

"Lack of neatness and crossing out of words hindered the visual neatness of the work".

And yet it would not be fair to paint an entirely black picture of this year's performance. One marker wrote: *"Obviously there were candidates who dealt really well with the title, presenting their likes and dislikes for subjects, their wishes for their future career and asking for their aunt/uncle's opinion."*

Another marker wrote: *"I was pleased to note that some made an effort and used the Passé Récent: 'Je viens de recevoir les résultats du SEC' ... and some varied vocabulary as in 'Je demande ton conseil parce que tu es mon oncle préféré et en plus tu es prof ...'"*

One should remind candidates that answers in examinations should not give any indication of their identity and that they should not write their own email addresses at the bottom of the page.

2.4 Culture et Civilisation

All markers were generally satisfied with the candidates' performance in this exercise.

Markers generally commented that candidates scored relatively well in Exercises 2 and 3, and less well in Exercise 4.

2.5 Compréhension de l'écrit

There was a significant increase in the overall average mark for this exercise.

Markers commented that *"candidates seemed to understand the text globally, particularly because it was related to their everyday life". "The topic appeared to be suited to candidate's knowledge".* However, examiners were somewhat disappointed. *"The questions lent themselves to common, everyday answers, but also gave scope for a deeper analysis of the positive and negative effects of this modern-day phenomenon". "It is evident that students have not yet grasped how to rephrase, to avoid copying chunks from the texts when writing in French." "Some did not even attempt to answer the questions" (referring to Questions E and F). "[...] Others simply copied whole irrelevant sentences from the text."*

None of the markers commented about the performance of candidates in the initial questions, implying that candidates are handling the surface meaning of the text (they are understanding the words and the sentences). However, the scenario changes when the question demands higher-order skills from the candidates.

Comments related to specific questions:

- Question E: *"This question was not answered well, as the majority of candidates invented the answers instead of carefully analysing the recommendations that were stated in the text. Many simply wrote down the questions present in paragraph 4, like 'En quoi consiste le jeu? Many failed to understand the question completely."* And yet this was a three-line paragraph starting with *"il est utile de ..."* and two options were presented in the very first line.
- Question F: Answers show that students struggle with inference questions where they need to draw a logical conclusion from the passage and rephrase.

While Paper A asked, in the final question, for a slogan, Paper B asked students to provide a title.

This report will reproduce one very valid comment about the formulation of a slogan: *"It is evident that our students still find inventing a slogan very difficult indeed... Many have not yet grasped the concept of what a slogan is, let alone come up with an original one. Many gave a simple title instead 'Les avantages et les désavantages des jeux-vidéo'. Further practice is definitely needed in this domain."*

On the other hand, good titles included: *'Les enfants sont accros[s] aux jeux video'; 'Les jeux-vidéo, une benediction ou un malheur?'; 'Les jeux-vidéo, sont-ils à bannir pour les enfants?'* (Marker

commented : *taken from text but cleverly picked up !*)

Some “did not read the word « seulement » in brackets, so they avoided using jeux-vidéo in their title, thus making their life more difficult!”

2.6 Language exercises

In both Paper 2A and 2B, candidates were again given two exercises which focussed on no specific area but which required knowledge of many different points.

Exercise 3 was an exercise of association. In both Papers A and B, the average mark can be considered to be “fair”.

As regards the next exercise, in Paper A, the candidates were asked to provide the correct conjugation of the Tense indicated, and in Paper B, they were asked to choose the correct version of the word/s in the particular context.

Once again, perhaps one should clarify that the paper setters are not out to seek the candidate on rare exceptions or intricate grammatical issues. In spite of this, however, and although the most basic tenses were given precedence, the average score for both Paper A and Paper B candidates in this exercise was low.

Candidates need to work harder in this area. One possible solution is to learn grammar in a meaningful context rather than in isolation.

2.7 Tâche à accomplir

As in past years, identical titles were offered in both Paper 2A and 2B. Candidates sitting for Paper 2B were given support in the form of ideas to plan their task.

Marking was carried out at two different levels: the communicative aspect was marked out of 7 and the linguistic aspect was marked out of 8. The two marks were given by separate markers.

The markers' common feeling is that performance in this exercise was “*disappointing*”, demonstrating “*very weak writing skills*”. As in the case of the Message, some candidates showed that they did not understand what was required of them so they copied out parts of the title, while others went out of point. Still others completely abandoned this exercise.

Candidates need to be familiar with the formats being requested, in this case an article for a magazine and an e-mail. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the case. For example, candidates are not demonstrating knowledge of how to start and/or end an article or e-mail. “*Very few students remembered they were writing an article for a school magazine*”.

One marker noted that “*very few did any planning on the page provided*” but then another said that when this planning was present, the tâche was more or less intelligible and coherent. Several markers are concerned about the fact that candidates are not splitting their text into paragraphs, another possible indication of lack of planning.

The linguistic quality of the work presented varies widely. One marker sums it up by saying that “*In certain tâches, students showed good use of tenses (the present, the passé composé, the imparfait and even the conditionnel), as well as other basic grammatical rules. However, one also finds the other extreme where many candidates still have no idea of the need to make adjectives agree in gender and number with the nouns, how to conjugate verbs even in the present, how to use the infinitive. These are basic issues...*”

3. General Comment

The performance of candidates sitting for SEC French in 2014 was not radically different from that in previous years: candidates are showing that they have at least partial mastery over receptive skills, but are still a long shot from reaching the same level in productive skills.

Candidates are now ready to talk about a picture. They listen to a text and understand it. Upon being presented with a text extracted directly from the French media, the candidates have shown that they understood what they read.

There has been improvement, and this fact is supported by numbers, but when looking at performance over the years, what is evident is that more work needs to be done in terms of written production because the objectives are not yet being reached.

*Chairperson
2014 Examination Panel*