EXAMINERS' REPORT

AM ITALIAN

FIRST SESSION 2018

General Performance

The table shows the number of candidates who sat for the Italian examination at Advanced Level in the first session 2018, together with the tallies of grades obtained and figures reported for the examinations held in 2016 and 2017.

Table: Grades obtained by candidates in 2016, 2017 and 2018.

	May 2016	%	May 2017	%	May 2018	%
Candidates	152	100	108	100	102	100
Grades A-E	113	74.3	82	75.9	78	76.5
Grades A-C	77	50.7	54	50.0	48	47.1
Failed	31	20.4	17	15.7	19	18.6
Grade A	11	7.2	12	11.1	8	7.8
Grade B	19	12.5	15	13.9	10	9.8
Grade C	47	30.9	27	25.0	30	29.4
Grade D	19	12.5	16	14.8	18	17.7
Grade E	17	11.2	12	11.1	12	11.8
Absent	8	5.3	9	8.3	5	4.9

The number of candidates sitting for the exam of Italian has practically remained unchanged from last year, if the absentees are taken into consideration (99 in 2017 and 97 in this session). In the global percentages of Grades A-E and Grades A-C, the changes are minimal but when examined on individual grades, the results are undoubtedly different from those of 2017: there has been a drop in the number of examinees obtaining Grade A or B and an increase in Grades C and D. One should note also that the percentage of failures has gone up by approximately 3%.

Paper I: Oral Component; Dictation and Listening comprehension

For the oral component, 7 were absent. In the dictation, the candidates did not do very well. There were some who even lost all the 5 marks. The passage was not difficult although some unfamiliar words were included to test spelling.

Candidates scored better in the listening comprehension.

In the overall performance, 8 candidates scored 8/10 or higher, 22 scored between 6.5 and 7.5, another 22 between 5 and 6, 20 between 3.5 and 4.5 and 23 candidates scored 3 or less.

Paper II: Essay and Language Exercises

Essay

The composition titles which proved to be most popular amongst candidates were 1 and 4. Writing skills need to improve on different levels. Many students sit for the A Level exam with basic knowledge of the Italian context missing. Students still confuse "a" with "ha" and "e" with "è", and such mistakes are unacceptable at this level.

Out of 97 essays, only 12 were rated between 17 and 20 marks: these were fresh, well organised and great examples of argumentative writing. On the other hand, there were some compositions which were extremely brief, lacked planning and contained grammatical and syntactical inconsistencies. The most recurrent errors were the following:

✓ Candidates are not making good use of the congiuntivo and the periodo ipotetico when writing;

✓   While many divide their work in paragraphs, there are still individuals who do not make a distinction between a paragraph and another. Students may choose to skip a line between paragraphs in order to facilitate their own revision work;

✓   There are 4 pages in the examination paper and examinees can make good use of all of them by writing a plan. Only a few students show planning of their work, while others show poor revising of work;

✓   Bad spelling because of English interference: "communicare", "technologia", "parkeggio" or because of Maltese interference: "decizione", "zvantaggio";

✓   Misuse of stiamo/siamo, dietro/indietro;

✓   The use of articles is diminishing. Many students choose to ignore the articles when writing a sentence, thus making it incomplete and difficult to understand. Even punctuation is a sore point and disturbs reading;

✓   Some students insert idiomatic expressions in their writings and this should be encouraged further.

In this section, 70 candidates got a pass mark (10 marks or more), i.e. 72%, and this can surely be considered as a positive and encouraging aspect.

Language Exercises

As usual only four exercises were set but they are indispensable to judge the candidate's ability in the use of Italian grammar. These exercises were structured in such a way as to test the candidates' knowledge in the use of prepositions with or without definite and indefinite article, verbal cases, pronouns and other parts of speech.

Exercise 1: Most of the candidates answered correctly to this part of the question. However, there were some who mistook around 5 out of the 8 possibilities. Others gave the impression they were not at all sure of the right answer and simply tried to guess.

Exercise 2: This part of the test on the choice of the correct verbal mood/tense turned out to be quite demanding. Many mistook the appropriate verbal form, often choosing the past tense instead of the present or/and the singular instead of the plural or vice versa.

Exercise 3: The great majority of candidates answered correctly the exercise relative to partitive/direct/indirect object pronouns while a modest number seemed to be inadequately prepared for this exercise. It helped to boost the total mark.

Exercise 4: Though at the outset this part of the grammar questions seemed to be the most demanding, a great majority answered correctly. Apparently candidates were well prepared for this exercise, something quite reassuring when compared to the results achieved in Exercise 2.

Paper III: Written comprehension and written summary

Written Comprehension

The text had a modern and interesting theme. The first two questions were quite easy while the others were more challenging.

A special mention to Question g, in which candidates were asked to explain 4 out of the 6 text expressions in bold. Candidates did not seem to have been trained enough to answer this question correctly.

✓   "valicando i confini bolognesi" – candidates just substituted the word "valicando" with "superando", but then they said nothing about "confini";

✓   "andare a ruba" - very surprisingly several candidates did not know this expression;

✓   "suggestioni della tradizione" – examinees substituted "suggestioni" with "idee" and then continued with "della tradizione";

✓   "come mosca al miele" - it was explained only literally while the figurative meaning was completely ignored;

✓   "il potere aggregativo" – this expression was quite difficult and was chosen only by a few, most of whom got it wrong;

✓   "con malta e cazzuola" – this expression referred to manual workers.

Only 7 candidates scored 8/10 or over, 35 got between 6.5 and 7.5, another 34 candidates scored between 5 and 6. This means that 80% of those sitting for the exam obtained 5/10 or more. The average mark was 6.

Written Summary

A good number of candidates have quite good idea of what is required to summarize adequately a passage in Italian of, roughly, 600 words in about one third of its length.
The following are the most common mistakes that candidates still do while summarizing a text:
✓   Some still copied whole sentences or phrases from the set passage though in the question paper, candidates were advised to refrain from doing so;
✓   Others (though these were few in number), gave their personal interpretation of the contents recounted in the passage;
✓   A good number of candidates started their summary by stating: "The author tells us that…" which naturally sounds discordant in the abstract;
✓   A small number of candidates even repeated this format at the beginning of every sentence thus giving the impression that they had never before tackled a similar task;
✓   In some cases, though not very common, candidates exceeded the prescribed limit.
This might explain why almost 60% of the candidates failed to reach a pass mark in this section of Paper III.

Paper IV: Anthology and the Novel

Section A – Anthology

The candidates' answers demonstrated a global grasp of the most important features and the key elements of Italian works proposed by the syllabus even though several mistakes clearly showed the candidates' difficulties to contextualize the texts and their lack of historical/literary knowledge and background. With some exceptions, practically no references are made to authors' life and their socio-historical contexts and when they are made, they are often wrong and/or contradictory. The analysis of the texts was generally satisfactory but the knowledge level appears to be on the decrease when compared to last year.
The effort to grasp the different literary styles and genres was generally satisfactory, particularly in light of the fact that the candidates' exposure to Italian literature had been quite limited before following the course at Advanced Level. However, a recurrence of grammatical errors and orthographical mistakes highlight the need for candidates to hone their writing skills and their studying skills. Several, repeated mistakes suggest that the candidates are lacking an adequate preparation and/or amount of time to dedicate to this subject.

Section B – TABUCCHI / BASSANI / TOMASI DI LAMPEDUSA (novel)

Out of 97 candidates, 59 managed to obtain a pass mark in this section (5 marks or more). Of these, 22 obtained 5 as a mark, 11 candidates obtained a 6, 15 candidates were awarded a 7, another 7 candidates were awarded an 8 and 4 candidates obtained a 9. In May 2017 session, over 70% scored 5 marks or better, while this year only 60% reached this level.
Most of the candidates should pay closer attention to detail. In their answers they are very generic and simply narrate a summary of the plot, and some answers are not relevant to what is asked in the rubric. As the marks show, only a handful of candidates managed to write a coherent essay, both from a content as well as from a linguistic point of view. The content is frequently not acceptable as it does not express what the question requested. From the linguistic point of view, it is worrying that students studying at Advanced level, are still not in a position to write coherent sentences, conjugate verbs (some still find it difficult even to use the present tense), use the right vocabulary and put accents over letters where required.

Chairperson
Examination Panel 2018