

Revision of Papers: Who Applies?

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Introduction and Methodological Notes

Revision of Papers is a service offered by the MATSEC Support Unit whereby a Reviser (a marker who does not form part of the original marking panel) corrects the paper of the candidate and writes a report about the candidate's attainment. In cases where there is an error in the original marking, the grade of the candidate is revised only if this results in an upgrade. A fee of €35 per subject is paid by the candidate on registration, which fee is refundable in cases where the Board of Examiners recommends a change in the original grade. In 2015, 26 of the 609 requests for Revision of Papers after the May session and three of the 106 further requests after the September session had their grades changed.

This study analyses applications for Revision of Papers (RoP) following the SEC May 2016 examinations. By analysing the attainment, gender, paper choice, and school sector of applicants, this report sheds light on whether some candidates are more likely than others to apply for this service.

When comparing trends in registrations, percentage registrations for Revision of Paper are compared to those for the subject. In this case, the latter serve as a control for comparison purposes. Given the numerical nature of the analysis, only SEC subjects with more than 20 candidates applying to have their papers revised are considered for this study.

Number of Registrations

A list of the subjects where more than 20 candidates applied for Revision of Papers, along with number of applicants for the examination and for Revision of Papers, is shown in the table below. This suggests that the number of registrations for Revision of Papers is not solely dependent on the number of registrations for the examination. Rather, one can note that the subjects required for entry into post-secondary education – Maths, English, Maltese and a science subject – all feature in the above list. Such subjects can be considered to be more 'high-stakes' than others. These are also the subjects offered for resit in the September session.

Table 1: Subjects with more than 20 applicants for RoP

Subject	Number of Registrations	Registrations for RoP
Maths	4597	151
English	4611	88
Maltese	4166	84
Physics	3424	61
Biology	1468	64
English Literature	2497	46
Chemistry	823	35
Art	719	26

English Literature, on the other hand, is one of the larger subjects. Thus, the number of registrations for Revision of Papers could be affected by the mere number of registrations. However, Religious Knowledge, Italian, Environmental Studies and French, boasting of 3364, 1814, 1392, and 1216 candidates each, only had 15, 7, 16, and 5 respective registrations for Revision of Papers. On the other hand, Art, had 3.6% of its original candidates applying for Revision of Papers. This is similar to Design and Technology where 11 from the 341 original registrants applied to have their papers revised (3.2%).

Attainment

When sitting for SEC examinations, candidates can achieve Grades 1 to 7, with Grade 1 being the highest, or an unclassified (U) grade. SEC Grades 1 to 5 are classified as Level 3 on the Malta Qualifications Framework while Grades 6 to 7 are considered as Level 2 on the same scale. Only Grades 1 to 5 are considered as ‘passes’ for post-secondary education. The table below shows the attainment of candidates in each of the selected subjects dichotomised by two sets, those obtaining Grades 1 to 5 and those obtaining Grades 6, 7 and U. One should note that adding the percentage of candidates under ‘All Candidates’ for any subjects does not necessarily give an answer of 100% as this table ignores absent candidates.

Table 2: Candidate attainment

Subject	All Candidates (%)		RoP Candidates (%)	
	Grades 1-5	Grades 6, 7, & U	Grades 1-5	Grades 6, 7, & U
Maths	54.1	41.3	20.5	79.5
English	65.6	32.1	31.8	68.2
Maltese	65.3	32.0	35.7	64.3
Physics	68.6	30.5	54.1	45.9
Biology	63.1	34.9	53.1	46.9
English Literature	71.1	26.1	47.8	52.2
Chemistry	75.2	23.5	74.3	25.7
Art	65.2	32.1	38.5	61.5

The data in this table suggests that, in most cases, it is candidates who do not fare very well in examinations who apply for Revision of Papers. This is as the achievement of the candidates applying for Revision of Papers is not as good as that of the total population. However, exceptions can be noted in the three sciences. Here, differences between the achievement of all candidates and that of those of applying for Revision of Papers is less marked, especially in Chemistry where the difference is minimal.

Gender

The table below shows the percentage of males and females sitting for each selected subject in the May session and applying for Revision of Papers. Except for the two subjects with less than 40 Revision of Papers registrations, the percentage of males applying for Revision of Papers is larger than the percentage of males sitting for the examination. This suggests that males are more likely than females to apply for Revision of Papers.

One reason for this could be the difference in attainment between the genders as females are more likely to obtain Grades 1 to 5 than their male counterparts in all subjects but Maths and Physics. The differences can be small, such as in Biology where 62.0% of males as compared to 63.6% of females obtain Grades 1-5, or large, such as in Maltese where 57.1% of males as compared to 73.1% of females obtain Grades 1-5.

Table 3: Percentage registrations by gender

Subject	All Candidates (%)		RoP Candidates (%)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Maths	46.4	53.6	49.0	51.0
English	46.8	53.2	52.3	47.7
Maltese	48.7	51.3	48.8	51.2
Physics	50.4	49.6	62.3	37.7
Biology	32.8	67.2	40.6	59.4
English Literature	40.6	59.4	52.2	47.8
Chemistry	42.4	57.6	40.0	60.0
Art	36.2	63.8	34.6	65.4

Difference in attainment, however, does not fully explain this gender difference as in Maths and Physics, subjects where male candidates outperform female candidates, one can still observe more male candidates applying to have their papers revised. A study by Dweck (1986 in Black *et al.* 2003) suggested that while girls are more likely to attribute academic failure to internal stable causes, such as ability, boys attribute their failure to unstable external causes, such as bad luck or marker inability. Such difference in psychology, thus, could explain why males seem more likely than females to apply for Revision of Papers. Having said that, the difference between the genders is minimal.

Paper Choice

While Paper I is a common paper for all candidates, on registration for SEC examinations candidates can opt for either Paper IIA or Paper IIB. Paper IIA is a more challenging paper that can lead to Grades 1-5 while Paper IIB is a less challenging paper that can lead to Grades 4-7. The table below shows the percentage of candidates applying for Revision of Papers classified by paper choice.

Table 4: Percentage registrations by paper choice

Subject	All Candidates (%)		RoP Candidates (%)	
	Paper A	Paper B	Paper A	Paper B
Maths	44.1	55.9	28.5	71.5
English	59.4	40.6	46.4	53.6
Maltese	63.2	36.8	47.7	53.4
Physics	63.1	36.9	59.0	41.0
Biology	71.4	28.6	78.1	21.9
English Literature	76.2	23.8	82.6	17.4
Chemistry	83.4	16.6	91.4	8.6
Art	66.3	33.7	84.6	15.4

The data in the table shows that while Paper B candidates were more likely to apply for Revision of Papers for the subjects of Maths, English, Maltese and Physics in 2016, the opposite was true for Biology, English Literature, Chemistry and Art. Moreover, it is interesting to note that while Paper A candidates who obtained Grades 1-5 still opt to apply for Revision of Papers, in these subjects, only

two Paper B candidates (one in Maltese and one in English) who obtained Grade 5 applied for Revision of Papers.

School Sector

Although state school candidates form the majority of candidates sitting for SEC examinations, the majority of candidates applying for Revision of Papers are not. Church and independent school candidates seem more likely to apply for Revision of Papers, especially the latter. For instance, while in Maltese 7.8% of the candidates applied as independent school candidates, for Revision of Papers this number skyrocketed to 29.8%. Private and post-secondary school candidates rarely apply for Revision of Papers if they obtain Grades 1-5, with only one such case in the selected subjects in 2016 (Maltese). This is shown in the table in the adjacent page.

Number of Revision of Papers per Candidate

While most candidates apply for one Revision of Paper, a notable number of candidates apply for two or more, with one candidate in 2016 applying for a total of 10 Revision of Papers. Although differences between males and females seem inconclusive in this regard, the 2016 data suggests that independent school candidates were more likely to apply for Revision of Papers in more than one subject. Also, the attainment of those applying for one Revision of Papers was lower than that of other candidates in 2016 (Grade U was computed as '8' for this analysis).

Table 5: Number of Revision of Papers per candidate, by gender and sector

Number of RoP		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	10	
All Candidates		308	96	33	12	3	1	2	1	
Average Grade		6.0	5.4	5.6	5.6	6.1	3.8	4.9	3.4	
Gender	Male	N	151	48	16	9	3	0	1	0
		%	66.2	21.1	7.0	3.9	1.3		0.4	
	Female	N	157	48	17	3	0	1	1	1
		%	68.9	21.1	7.5	1.3		0.4	0.4	0.4
Sector	State	N	54	20	5	4	0	1	0	0
		%	64.3	23.8	6.0	4.8		1.2		
	Church	N	137	48	16	4	1	0	0	1
		%	66.2	23.2	7.7	1.9	0.5			0.5
	Independent	N	49	22	9	4	2	0	2	0
		%	55.7	25.0	10.2	4.5	2.3		2.3	

Table 6: Percentage registrations by school sector

Subject	Maths		Maltese		English		Physics		Biology		English Literature		Chemistry		Art	
	All	RoP	All	RoP	All	RoP	All	RoP	All	RoP	All	RoP	All	RoP	All	RoP
State	41.8	22.5	46.1	13.1	42.8	25.0	50.8	23.0	30.4	6.3	39.3	6.5	32.1	11.4	55.6	30.8
Church	32.4	36.4	35.7	38.1	32.6	34.1	34.4	47.5	48.0	67.2	44.6	50.0	49.7	57.1	25.3	46.2
Independent	8.5	14.6	7.8	29.8	8.5	20.5	8.7	21.3	13.5	23.4	13.9	41.3	14.2	31.4	11.4	15.4
Post-Secondary	6.9	17.9	3.4	10.7	3.5	6.8	3.0	4.9	4.4	0.0	1.4	2.2	1.6	0.0	2.4	3.8
Private Candidate	10.4	8.6	7.0	8.3	12.7	13.6	3.0	3.3	3.7	3.1	0.9	0.0	2.4	0.0	5.3	3.8

Conclusion

The question 'Who is more likely to apply for Revision of Papers?' evokes a multifaceted answer. Although subject size cannot be ignored, the high stakes given to the examination (whether it is required to further one's studies) seems to be more of a determining factor. However, observations made when candidates were classified by attainment and by paper choice suggest that many candidates do not apply for Revision of Papers just to make the minimum grade required for entry into post-secondary education. A number of candidates who obtained good grades in the May session still opted to have their papers revised. This trend was more noticeable in the three science subjects.

Other factors that cannot be ignored are gender and school sector differences. Males seemed more likely than females to apply to have their papers revised for SEC 2016 examinations. This difference cannot be explained by looking solely at performance. In SEC Physics, for instance, although males outperformed females, they were still more likely to apply for Revision of Papers. Another notable difference is school sector whereby candidates from state schools seem to shy away from applying to have their papers revised when compared to church and independent school candidates. In addition, independent school candidates were more likely to apply for Revision of Papers in more than one subject.

References

MATSEC Support Unit (2016). *MATSEC Examinations Board SEC Examinations 2015: Statistical Report*. Retrieved from <http://www.um.edu.mt/matsec/reports/statisticalreport>

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