

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

MAY 2013

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE

EXAMINATIONS' BOARD

**SEC ENGLISH LANGUAGE
MAY 2013 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

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1.0 GENERAL INFORMATION AND STATISTICS

A complement of 5121 candidates registered for the May 2013 SEC English examination. Out of these, there were 2905 candidates who opted for Paper Syllabus A and 2216 candidates who sat for Paper Syllabus B.

YEAR	NUMBER OF CANDIDATES	% PAPER A	% PAPER B
2013	5121	56.7	43.3
2012	5326	54.0	46.0
2011	5371	53.2	46.8
2010	5692	50.9	49.1

TABLE 1 – Percentage of candidates sitting for Paper Syllabus A and Paper Syllabus B

1.1 Absences and Grade Distribution

Out of the registered candidates, there was a total of 63 candidates who were absent for all the components of the examination. Out of these, 14 were Syllabus A applicants and 49 applicants, by far a larger number, were absent from the Syllabus B Paper. However, it is worth noting that overall there were 1.4% fewer candidates who were absent this year than there were last year.

YEAR	PAPER A		PAPER B		TOTAL	
	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE
2013	14	0.5%	49	2.2%	63	1.2%
2012	11	0.4%	126	2.4%	137	2.6%
2011	22	0.4%	123	2.3%	145	2.7%
2010	27	0.5%	148	2.6%	175	3.1%

TABLE 2 – Number and percentage of absentees in Paper Syllabus A and Paper Syllabus B

The overall performance of the cohort sitting for SEC English May 2013 is indicated below:

MAY 2013										
GRADE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	ABS	TOTAL
PAPER A	188	560	714	640	508			281	14	2905
PAPER B				152	384	590	422	619	49	2216
TOTAL	188	560	714	792	892	590	422	900	63	5121
% OF TOTAL	3.67	10.94	13.94	15.47	17.42	11.52	8.24	17.57	1.23	100

TABLE 3 – Grade Distribution for SEC English Language May 2013

1.2 SEC English Language

The English SEC examination is designed to test the four language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking in two papers, Paper 1 and Paper 2. Each paper carries a total of 100 marks.

Paper 1 is made up of Part 1a, featuring the aural component of listening comprehension (30 marks), Part 1b or the oral component of picture interpretation (10 marks), Part 1c or role play (10 marks) and Part 2 which is made up of the language use component (50 marks).

Paper 2 consists of Part 1 which is the writing component (40 marks) and Part 2, the reading comprehension and brief writing component (60 marks).

Paper 1 is the same for all candidates sitting for SEC English but Paper 2 sets different papers for candidates of Paper Syllabus A and Paper Syllabus B, as per SEC syllabus for English Language (2013).

	Percentage weighting of papers %	
PAPER 1	15	Part 1a
	5	Part 1b
	5	Part 1c
	25	Part 2
Paper 2	20	Part 1
	30	Part 2

TABLE 4 – Scheme of Assessment

2.1 PAPER I Part 1: Listening and Speaking (50 marks)

The oral component in the SEC English Language examination is common to both Paper A and Paper B and consists of three tasks: a listening comprehension, a role play and a picture interpretation as a stimulus to conversation. Oral skills are weighted at 10%. This part of the examination paper is conducted by a separate set of examiners.

A training session was held prior to the actual examination, during which the procedure and rationale of the different oral components were made familiar to the examiners concerned. During the training session, the examiners were given instructions for reading pace and voice in preparation for the listening comprehension sessions as well as practice in the assessment of candidates for the picture interpretation and role play.

A recorded session using past paper material with participants whose profile is very similar to that of examination candidates and the rating scale intended for the examination were employed. This exercise ensured standardization among markers and a fair assessment of the candidates' performance.

The following Table illustrates candidates' performance in this part of the paper:

PAPER 1 Part 1	SYLLABUS A	SYLLABUS B
OBTAINED AN AVERAGE MARK OR HIGHER	98.5%	84.4%

TABLE 5 – Obtained an average mark or higher in SEC Paper 1 part 1

Listening

a. Listening Comprehension (30 marks)

In this component of the paper candidates are required to listen to two texts (Text A and Text B) which are similar in word length and level of difficulty and complete brief tasks on both of them. Uniformity across all sessions is ensured by means of the thematic continuity of both texts as well as the consistent number and types of tasks.

This year, Text A consisted of a transcript of a talk on a particular museum in London whilst Text B consisted of a transcript of a radio programme about a famous historical murder in London. The tasks on each of the texts were weighted equally, each carrying 15 marks. In all sittings there were two tasks on each of the texts: for Text A, a multiple choice and matching exercise and for Text B, a sequencing exercise and a True/False exercise whereby candidates were required to mark statements as true or false and provide a reason to justify their answer.

This variety of tasks ensured the testing of understanding at word level, at paragraph level and at whole text level. As has been the case in this paper in recent years, in all the tasks, writing was purposely kept to the barest minimum so that the focus remained on the listening skill.

Speaking

b. Visual Prompt (10 marks)

This task in the oral component normally consists of a visual prompt to generate a brief discussion about topics as dictated by the language area of the syllabus. This year's paper presented two pictures all related to the following topics: shopping, meeting people, studying, going places, playing games and reading. All the pictures were carefully selected to serve only as a springboard for ideas and certainly not to entail scrutiny for detail. The questions were also worded in such a way as to avoid any ambiguity. There were two sets of questions: the three questions in set one were compulsory for all candidates and candidates were expected to describe the pictures, state what they thought the characters in the pictures were feeling and why people generally enjoy the activity in question, for example reading etc. In set two there were 10 questions, and examiners were instructed to ask candidates four of these questions which tackled

the relationship between the candidates and the topic in question. Although relating to a different topic, it was ensured that the questions on each topic followed the same pattern.

c. Role-play (10 marks)

This component of the speaking examination requires the candidates to take on a role in a relatively realistic situation. Prompts are provided for a brief exchange to take place between candidate and examiner. Every session always gives an option of two situations which present parallel contexts and similar prompts to test the competence of the candidates to develop and conclude a dialogue and to express some functions, as dictated by the syllabus.

This year, the first role play situation required the candidate to take on either the role of a client who returns to the shop to return a bag/sportswear/ shoes or else the role of the victim of a theft who files a report about the theft. The second situation always involved the candidate in the role of a client who complains about service in a restaurant, or the poor standard of a music festival, or poor accommodation at a hostel, or mediocre transport arrangements after a national youth meeting, or poor service during a school leaving party at a hotel or poor service at a beach party. All sessions had six numbered prompts to better guide the candidates in their responses. The prompts were uniform across all role plays.

PERFORMANCE

a. Listening Comprehension

Overall, it was noted that this year's cohort fared well in the aural component as is evident in the Table below:

<i>Listening Comprehension</i>	SYLLABUS A	SYLLABUS B
OBTAINED AN AVERAGE MARK OR HIGHER	99.7%	92.3%

TABLE 6 – Obtained an average mark or higher in the Listening Comprehension component

What this result demonstrates is that by and large, candidates are fairly competent listeners.

Generally, the candidates performed better in the tasks on Text A than in those on Text B probably owing to the fact that the second exercise in each of the text A tasks proved to be the easiest whilst the True/False question, which was the most challenging of the four tasks set on the texts this year, was set on Text B. To do well in this exercise, candidates were required to concentrate on what was being read out as well as to analyse what they were hearing. Unfortunately, although overall candidates did score highly in this exercise, there were a number of candidates who did not, owing to the fact that they were not specific or accurate enough in the answers they gave and/or did not understand the statements provided. This was evident from the contradictory answers or the wrong reasons they gave, or from the fact that they could not provide a reason to justify their choice of True or False.

It must be pointed out that there were a number of candidates who did not follow the instructions given to them and although this did not impinge directly on the mark they obtained in this session, it shows that they did not pay much attention to the rubric, or, what is worse, did not understand what was required of them. For instance, in exercise 1 on Text B candidates were asked to write down a number. There were several who wrote a letter instead and, in exercise 2, instead of circling True or False as required of them, wrote their own True or False on the lines provided.

b. Picture Interpretation and c. Role Play

The following Table illustrates candidates' performance in this part of the paper:

<i>Picture Interpretation & Role Play</i>	SYLLABUS A	SYLLABUS B
OBTAINED AN AVERAGE MARK OR HIGHER	94.3%	68.3%

TABLE 7 – Obtained an average mark or higher in Picture interpretation and role play components

As these statistics indicate, the absolute majority of Syllabus A candidates did very well in the speaking component of the examination whilst the Syllabus B candidates did not fare too badly either. Overall it appears that candidates perform better in (b) probably because this component does not involve any reading and hence offers virtually no problems of comprehension.

The candidates who did well followed the cues or prompts given and delivered their responses quite smoothly. Those who struggled to obtain a good mark or an average one in this component of the paper did so because i. they missed the prompts or even ignored them completely, and thus did not manage to complete the task set and/or ii. they could not communicate in the language – produced language rife with grammatical inaccuracies, limited vocabulary and frequently Maltese words as fillers.

2.2 PAPER 1 Part 2: Language Use (50 marks)

The second component of Paper 1 tests the candidates' knowledge and use of the grammar and structures of the English language as required in different contexts of everyday life. This write-on paper tests both accuracy and appropriateness of the language.

This year, the language use paper presented nine tasks which were contextualised in order to render them more meaningful; there were:

- a. exercises which tested the candidates' knowledge of prepositions, comparatives and superlatives, compound words, tenses, and quantifiers
- b. cloze and word formation exercises as well as a sentence rewriting task

Overall, the paper tested a variety of abilities in language use, giving both an opportunity to the average student to come up with appropriate responses and challenging the higher achievers.

The following Table illustrates candidates' performance in this component:

<i>PAPER 1 Part 2</i>	SYLLABUS A	SYLLABUS B
OBTAINED AN AVERAGE MARK OR HIGHER	89.4%	26%

TABLE 8 – Obtained an average mark or higher in SEC Paper 1 part 2

Exercise 1 dealt with prepositions in the context of an article about Pudsey in *Britain's Got Talent*.

Although performance in this task was satisfactory, only a small minority obtained full marks.

This exercise was challenging for those candidates who did not seem able to distinguish between prepositions, verbs, conjunctions and pronouns or who were not in a position to know which prepositions were appropriate in the particular context. Numbers 3, 7, 9 and 10 were the ones that proved to be the most problematic, with most marks being lost owing to Language 1 (Maltese) interference. For instance in number 9 many candidates provided *with*.

Exercise 2 dealt with the comparative and superlative form of words in the context of a description of an experience at a musical.

This task was very much within the cohort's ability, with candidates scoring highly, demonstrating a good understanding of the use of comparatives and superlatives. Errors included the occasional use of *much* for the comparative form and spelling mistakes for the comparative and superlative forms of *happy* and *crazy* which were written as *happyer / happyier*, and *craziest / crazyest*. Other errors included the following: in **number 1**, instead of *best*, candidates wrote *greatest / goodest*; in **number 3**, instead of *better*, they provided *very good / great / more good*; **number 5** seemed to have caused most problems to the candidates since very few knew that *least* or *the least* was the correct answer. Many gave *a bit / littlest / most little / less / a few / much*; similarly **number 7** was answered incorrectly by the majority of candidates, even by those whose answers in the rest were correct. Instead of *elder, eldest*, they gave *older / oldest*; **number 8**, was given as *most crazy*; in **number 9**, instead of *happier, more happy / less happy* was provided; in **number 10**, instead of *worse*, a good number of candidates wrote *very bad / badly / more bad / least bad* and the most common answer *worst*. Some just added *est* to all the adjectives and gave: *goodest / powerfulest etc.*

Exercise 3 was a multiple choice exercise on the use of quantifiers in the context of a description of a reception.

Overall, candidates fared best in this task especially as they were asked to just underline the correct response. Spelling was not tested. The most frequent incorrect answers occurred in number 9 since many candidates provided *none* rather than *little*.

Exercise 4 was an exercise on opposites in the context of a short piece about a couple.

Many candidates struggled with this task. On the whole, candidates showed a limited knowledge of vocabulary as most of the numbers proved difficult, and candidates very often just provided very generic opposites. Some candidates wrote down an opposite word to the word in brackets but one which did not make sense in the context. Other errors included a word which made sense in the context but which was not the opposite of the word in brackets. Candidates had particular difficulty with numbers 8, 9 and 10, the last proving to be the most difficult, demonstrating that very few, if any at all, knew the meaning of *stinginess*. A good number of candidates, in fact, associated *stinginess* with manners or, even more frequently, with body odour! There was the occasional inaccurate spelling of *serious* (number 5).

Exercise 5 was an exercise on compound words in the context of an article about the discovery of the corpse of an old man.

The compound words required in this exercise were commonly used ones and should have been familiar to the vast majority. However, though the better candidates went through it with ease – save for occasional misspellings – many others averaged and the low achievers totally missed out. It proved to be difficult for some who just inserted whatever came to mind without checking whether the new compound word fitted the context – for instance *seaside* in number 1 instead of *seashore*, in number 5 *bedful / bedsick or bedrest*, in number 6 *wildlife* rather than *wildfire* and in number 8 *lifelong* instead of *lifetime*. A good number of candidates did not even know what compound words are, as they added suffixes to the given words, e.g. *safety*. Other errors included spelling mistakes such as *site* misspelt *sight* in number 4, *witness* misspelt *wittness* in number 10, and the grammar error of the singular form of *print* instead of *prints* in number 2.

Exercise 6 focused on tenses and the candidates' ability to handle tenses in the context of a newspaper article. Clearly, candidates were challenged by this task as getting the tense right proved tough for many of them.

The present/past tenses were very often confused; very few candidates provided the correct tense in numbers 8 and 9 and only very few worked out the tense in 10 correctly indicating that candidates are not familiar with the use of the Future Perfect form; errors included *will be*, *would have been*, *is going to be* and occasionally *is being*. It must also be pointed out that in number 3, some candidates gave the wrong participle for *had run* writing down *had ran*, and used the modal *have to* as a tense writing down *have to concentrate* in number 6.

Exercise 7 was a word formation exercise in the context of an article about road names.

This exercise tested the ability to form appropriate, well-spelt words from the ones given in brackets. Candidate performance was average and overall, candidates lost marks for not writing the correct form of the word in brackets and for spelling mistakes such as *commamoration* for *commemoration* (number 3), *assosiation* for *association* (number 8), and *controversial* for *controversial* (number 10). Some left the gaps blank. The majority of candidates got numbers 2, 4 and 8 correct; numbers 1, 7 and 10 were guessed but not spelt correctly and numbers 6 and 9 seemed to have been beyond the cohort, with number 6 proving to be the most challenging for all candidates.

Exercise 8 was a cloze exercise in the context of a short text on passwords.

Many candidates struggled with this task and generally did not demonstrate familiarity with the examples of collocation called for in the task, such as *only* (number 1), *ever* (number 2) and *again* (number 3). Although the sentence was in the first person plural *we*, candidates switched to the second person *you* or *yourselves*, or even the impersonal third person *one* or *oneselves* in number 5. Some candidates used a word which appears close in meaning but inappropriate in the context such as *create* in number 10 instead of the more appropriate word *invent*. Numbers 1, 2, and 3 proved to be difficult (in number 1, instead of *only*, *really* / *but* / *like* / *even* / *actually* were provided; in number 2, several answers such as *passwords* / *it* / *always* / *life* were given whilst in number 3, *time* and *years* were the most common answers given). Numbers 7 to 10 elicited the most correct answers. Many candidates also lost marks due to spelling mistakes.

Exercise 9 required candidates to rewrite sentences in a context in such a way that the meaning remained the same.

This exercise tested different grammatical rules and therefore challenged the cohort who evidently found themselves in some difficulty as they laboured through the sentences provided. It must be said that the above average students mastered the whole exercise with occasional word sequence and spelling pit-falls. The below average students managed to get one or two correct answers at the most, but in their vast majority they presented jumbled and wrongly tensed sentences.

Overall, errors included wrong sentence patterns such as *Could it be the reason that* or *Could it be the reason the fact* in number 3, and the unnecessary change of the active voice into the passive voice in number 5 *The nutritionist said that a new book was / is being written*. Some candidates did not demonstrate a knowledge of reported speech with a few candidates writing down direct speech in quotation marks instead of reported speech for number 5, *The nutritionist said "I am writing.."*, while other candidates did not use the reporting form of the tense or used the wrong tense – for example, *The nutritionist said she/he is writing / has written*. Many candidates, in particular Paper B candidates, struggled with number 2 indicating that they do not have a clear understanding of the use of inversion. Some candidates who seemed to recognise the call for inversion, wrongly gave the third form of the verb *Not only does eating junk food leads to*. Some candidates did not recognise the inevitable notion of the first conditional in number 4 and wrote *If*

we do not change our diet, we can have / could have / might have instead of *will have*. Marks were deducted for: spelling mistakes; the misuse of capital letters such as *We have been warned by Nutritionist*; the omission of phrases such as *We have been warned by nutritionists about the dangers of fast food (for years omitted)* or *We have been warned for years about the dangers of fast food (by nutritionists omitted)*.

3.1 PAPER 2 Question 1: Writing (40 marks)

In this section of the paper, candidates were required to write fluently and accurately on a title of their own choice from those presented. The candidates who opted for Syllabus 2A were expected to develop their writing in 320-350 words whereas the candidates who registered for Syllabus 2B had to develop their task in 180-200 words.

Candidates are specifically instructed to pay attention to aspects of vocabulary, grammar, paragraphing, layout, spelling and punctuation. This year, three different writing tasks were offered. In both Paper A and Paper B, candidates were given the choice of a short story, an article or a letter, and thus, candidates were expected to show their ability to narrate, argue and give their views, as set out in the current English Language syllabus, in tasks which are practical and realistic.

In Paper 2A and Paper 2B, all three tasks in each paper were attempted, but to varying degrees. The numbers below give a clear indication of the choice made by the candidates:

TASK TYPE	PAPER 2A %	PAPER 2B %
Short story	38%	38.2%
Article	39.5%	23.4%
Letter	22.5%	38.4%

TABLE 9 – Percentage distribution of writing tasks in Paper 2 question 1

PERFORMANCE

SYLLABUS 2A & 2B

Candidates' performance was as follows:

WRITING	SYLLABUS 2A	SYLLABUS 2B
OBTAINED AN AVERAGE MARK OR HIGHER	64.4%	22.5%

TABLE 10 – Obtained an average mark or higher in SEC Paper 2 question 1

PERFORMANCE

1. Content & Organisation:

SYLLABUS 2A

Q1: The narrative

What the majority of candidates wrote was relevant to the task. The title lent itself to rather predictable essays dealing with hijacking or racist attitudes. Most of the stories were about an individual who was looked down upon due to their appearance or to their being newcomers at

school, for example, or to someone who used some means of public transport – plane, train, bus – and was feared by the other passengers because of their race or religion. In the latter case, the individual was commonly male and usually committed a criminal act like hijacking. Other common ideas included negative reactions towards social outcasts. A few interesting ideas included a dog for a passenger or a father giving a lift to a man carrying a goat. An ambitious and successful attempt having a twist at the end, involved a terrorist who, rather than the Muslim man sitting next to him, turned out to be an American citizen. A few attempted an original approach and told of snakes, stowaways and hidden pets as the unwelcome passengers. One striking essay was about the candidate himself/herself who was the unwelcome passenger.

In this particular writing task one could notice a strong American influence both on the style and the ideas. There was a sense of adventure that was inevitably present in certain writing tasks that was influenced by American films. In fact, most of the narratives which took place beyond the Maltese islands were set in American cities.

Some candidates even wrote the moral of the story or a message at the end condemning racism or criticising people for being judgemental.

On a negative note, however, many essays did not concentrate on one particular passenger but on an organised group of criminals. Furthermore, a number of candidates concentrated on the unwelcome aspect in the title and did not include the *passenger* aspect in their narration or vice versa. These compositions were deemed partially out of point as they were not correctly developed. Some candidates even ignored the title and wandered off by relating how uncomfortable they were whilst travelling, without giving any hint as to why this was so.

Markers understand that the candidates are working against time and are under pressure. However, candidates need to be aware that, even within fiction, realism is desirable. Some of the hijackings described show that few candidates understand the motive behind a hijacking. In quite a few instances the hijacker on the plane robbed everyone at gunpoint and fled!

It must be pointed out that candidates lost marks for the organization of their work in the sense that most of the writing was taken up with the setting of the scene, only shifting the focus to the unwelcome passenger towards the very end of the writing and describing what should have been the main action of the narrative in a rushed way. The unwelcome passenger was consequently not the focal point of the narrative but a secondary character who appeared much later in the story, typically in the penultimate paragraph or the conclusion. In such cases where the notion of the unwelcome passenger was lightly touched upon at the end, the task was deemed not well-achieved. Candidates seem to believe that by mentioning the unwelcome passenger, and describing them as such, at the very end of the narrative they are justifying the relevance of the whole task.

Many short stories also lost marks for excessive length as candidates tended to write longer essays than required, often weakening the organisation of their writing in the process. In this particular question, many wrote more than the given word limit and lost marks because of that. At other times, however, it was as if the students were just interested in reaching the 320-350 word limit, thus giving a string of words meticulously counted without attaching any real importance to what they were writing about. In this question, planning was crucial; at times markers felt that candidates just started writing and developed ideas as they went along.

Question 2: The article

Many candidates who attempted this task revealed a good knowledge of the topic. In fact, the content was generally relevant with many candidates focusing satisfactorily on the reasons why English is so important nowadays. The material was clearly structured and the range of thematic

vocabulary was satisfactory. Those candidates who had a higher than average mastery of the language wrote in a formal style, avoided contractions and used appropriate diction.

Unfortunately there were candidates who mistook the article format for a letter format, giving a signature and salutation at the end of their writing. The material written repeatedly degenerated into ways as to how one can learn the English language, for example, through school, TV, books, the internet and listening to songs. At times, there was also a discussion about the use of the Maltese language versus the English language. In addition, some candidates tended to use contractions and an informal style of writing, possibly due to the fact that the article was meant to appear in their school magazine, so thus they presumed that the article they were writing was intended for a 'fellow' student.

Marks were also lost by candidates who treated the article as an argumentative essay about the importance of English, demonstrating that their concept of what writing an article actually involves is rather vague.

The central theme was *more important than ever*. Consequently, those essays which dealt with how they learnt English from an early age were not considered relevant. Some candidates gave the essay/article a different title and flew off at a tangent whilst a small number of candidates tended to be repetitive and at times failed to argue in a cohesive manner.

It was also disturbing to note how uninformed many of the candidates who chose this essay were. An essay at SEC level does certainly not need to have the rigour of a research paper but examiners expect a modicum of accuracy in statements of fact.

Question 3: The letter

On the whole the letter was handled quite well by most candidates who chose it. Almost all those who opted for this question knew what an adventure reality show is. Most of those who attempted this question answered both parts, namely why they would like to take part and why they should be chosen and offered varied and plausible reasons as to why they considered themselves to be suitable participants. Most hit the right note of cheery self-confidence. In general there was a certain flow in their writing and the ideas were conveyed coherently.

Unfortunately, however, a few confused the import of the advert and thought it was a casting call with the prospect of employment. These were considered to be partly irrelevant and marks were deducted. A few candidates faced difficulties when answering the two different parts of the question. An insignificant number of candidates disregarded the first part completely, namely why they wanted to apply. Others gave more importance to the second part of the question, with the bulk of the letter being about why they believed they should be chosen. At times, the material written degenerated into a description of the programme *Liquorish* or a story-telling of an adventure done by other family members.

A worrying fact that emerged from marking these tasks was that the formal letter format turned out to be a problem for a good number of candidates. Most did not know how to lay out the addresses of a formal letter. Some forgot the date. Almost none of them knew that starting a letter *Dear Matthea Abela* is wrong, or that *Dear Matthea* is too informal. Some candidates seemed to have forgotten that they were supposed to sign off as *Sam Borg* and so included another name. Others even wrote a different address from the one they were supposed to use. This shows lack of attention towards the wording of the question or that the candidates just skim through the title and start writing straightaway.

It was also noted that in this question a good number of candidates tended to write much less than the given word limit, sometimes as little as 200 words for which they were penalized.

SYLLABUS 2B

Question 1: The narrative

All candidates grasped the idea that the title required a first person narrative technique with the narrator as the hero of the piece.

However, most candidates who made this choice narrated stories with a very tenuous link to the title *My quick thinking saved us all*. It was evident that many did not understand the implication of *quick thinking* and therefore produced plodding narratives of domestic accidents with the narrator doing nothing more exciting or proactive than calling for an ambulance. *My quick thinking saved us all* should have been a narrative about a group of individuals who were in a life-threatening situation and needed saving. Thus, sheltering from the rain, or coming up with another venue where to hold a party when the first one became unavailable, were considered irrelevant. Moreover *saved us all* implies a group of three or more, not just two friends alone in a house.

It must be noted that the content, overall, was worryingly infantile. Many fifteen-year-olds are still writing *We went to Buskett and we played with the ball and then we played Hide and Seek* or *The policeman put the man in prison* or *We caught a lot of fish that we went to the market to sell the fish and go back out to sea to catch some more*. Considering that most fifteen-year-olds can be seen with smartphones, interesting and original use of this technology could have featured in the stories, for instance using a GPS system coupled up with sms and You tube to get them out of a pickle.

As with some of the Paper A narratives, there were many compositions that lacked proper organisation. Consequently most of the time, the quick thinking that saved them all, if at all, came at the very end, after a very lengthy introduction. In such cases, most of the work consisted of details of planning for the day (since most narratives revolved around planned outings) and what was done during the day up to the moment when the incident happened. There was no proper importance given to the actual incident, and the quick thinking was only dealt with in the concluding paragraphs.

The majority of the candidates who opted for the narrative went beyond the word limit for which they were penalized.

Question 2: The article

Candidates were required to write an eyewitness account of a rainstorm, describe the ensuing damage and give the piece an emotional slant, as opposed to writing an objective report.

Regrettably, only a few candidates satisfied all the criteria required in this writing task, namely giving a detailed description of what they saw and a description of their feelings. Most candidates tended to focus on the disaster caused by the rain and omitted their feelings, or else included them in only one sentence towards the end of their writing thus partly answering the question. Most of the candidates did not score high grades as they presented weak arguments and tended to be repetitive.

Generally, the standard of the essays was average to mediocre because many candidates were at a loss how to describe the damage. Many wrote about *car crashes* or *cars flowing away and broken windows* or *caving in of roofs*. Few described how they felt at this damage and some even blamed the local council for all this. The council was also threatened by some if action was not to be taken!

It was also evident that the candidates found it very difficult to distinguish between a narrative/descriptive essay and an article with the consequence that a good number of candidates wrote a narrative rather than an article. The very informal type of language used is also an indication that they are unaware of the correct rules of article writing.

Question 3: The letter

The majority of candidates understood the question and achieved their task to varying degrees. A great number of sensible reasons were given to explain why they were volunteering and why they should be chosen. Amongst these were references to the importance of gaining experience with children before embarking on a Bachelor of Education degree course or an MCAST Diploma in Childcare. Others cited experience with younger siblings or said they had children that age and combined the offer of their services with a request to bring their children along too. Some said they had volunteered for similar work abroad in the past and wanted to repeat the experience here. Almost all candidates had a good knowledge of what goes on in a summer school and the generous impulse and the child-centred culture of the candidates were evident.

It must be said, however, that overall there were problems with the correct format of a formal letter as well as with the appropriate style and vocabulary required in such a task. Many did not write the addressee's name above the latter's address and also used an inappropriate salutation (e.g. *Dear Mary Saliba*) and closure (e.g. *Yours faithfully,*). Tone was also at times problematic, with some candidates begging to be chosen, for example.

A very small number of candidates treated this task as a job application with references to payment thus implying that they did not know the meaning of the word *volunteer*.

Many candidates who attempted this question found difficulties in writing the required number of words and so lost marks because they wrote less whilst others failed to divide their writing into a number of paragraphs.

2. Expression and grammatical accuracy:

SYLLABUS 2A & 2B

Marks were also lost for grammatical errors and poor expression across the whole range of writing tasks.

Where **grammatical errors** are concerned, a good number of candidates demonstrated a very poor grasp of **tenses**, even in their simplest form. There were too many instances of confusion especially in the case of narrative tenses. As in the past years, for both Paper 2A and 2B candidates, basic errors in **punctuation** abounded, with candidates using capital letters indiscriminately or not at all (for instance in words such as *english, french, i*) and often showing an inability to distinguish between the comma and the full stop and the comma and semi-colon, often using them interchangeably. There were cases too where an entire paragraph consisted of one long never-ending sentence with the result that sentences lost their focus and the subject of the sentence shifted halfway through. Few candidates appeared to know how to punctuate direct speech. In general, **spelling** remains a problem for many candidates. Basic spelling mistakes included confusion between *where/were, their/there, and then/than*, just to name a few. The word *etc* was mostly spelled in Maltese. The following were often spelt incorrectly: *each other, best friend, necessary, whether*, the ie/ei rules; *whom, who's/whose, lose/loose, its/it's, going to (gonna), passenger, adventurous, advertisement, a lot, in front, Yours Sincerely*. Spelling mistakes were also made with respect to words ending in *ant, ent, able, ible, ation, ition, ission*. Some candidates also demonstrated problems in the use of conjunctions and prepositions.

Expression is also problematic for candidates. A syntactical mistake that kept appearing time and time again was *Me and my family/my friend/etc.* Another mistake which also appeared quite often was *By time*, typically appearing at the beginning of the sentence, meaning *After a while* or *Eventually*, as in *By time the rain got in the bus as well.* Furthermore, the range of vocabulary was generally limited and hence weak. There were many instances of basic, repetitive and unidiomatic language, with candidates resorting to a direct translation from Maltese to make do.

There was also poor use of linking devices in all tasks. Linking words to achieve coherence in formal writing, for example *firstly*, *secondly* etc. were scarcely used in both Paper A and B. In some cases too, there was little attempt to link ideas between paragraphs.

It was noted in the articles that very few candidates were capable of using the non-sexist pronoun *they/them* to refer to an individual of any sex. Although *one* was also widely used to refer to the subject of a sentence, it is the pronoun *he/him* that was then commonly used to refer to it, as in the following sentence *One can change them to his preferred language.* Another example showing a lack of cohesion within the sentence was *If one doesn't have at least an 'O' Level in the language you will not be accepted in any sixth form.*

In some essays idiomatic expressions were overused or misused. For instance, there were several candidates, particularly those sitting for Paper 2A, who made excessive use of stylised expressions in all three tasks. Candidates should be aware that such expressions are not always suited for all tasks, particularly the formal ones, and that most of these expressions are either archaic or should be limited to informal interactions. Moreover, excessive use of these expressions is not an indicator of the quality of the writing task and proficiency in the language. Some examples of these expressions were : *I should be chosen because ... I am as bold as brass; I am like a cat on hot bricks; it was raining cats and dogs; singing like a lark; I would be in the seventh cloud with joy; I will be on pins and needles if you will choose me; I am in the seventh heaven to hear from you; English its not that difficult its become easily as a peanut; I roll up my sleeve and put my head to the grindstone.*

Other comments:

i. More candidates need to get used to **planning** their essays. The space allowed for this part of the task was not used often enough. As a result some candidates presented their ideas in a manner which was difficult to follow and tiring to read. Subject shifts half way through paragraphs and last-minute thoughts violently inserted into paragraphs were common.

ii. As mentioned earlier the majority of candidates do not respect the word limits set in both papers. This results in marks having to be deducted, regardless of the quality of work presented. Candidates who did not confine themselves to the given **word length** were penalised up to 1 mark if they were ± 15 words off the range and 2 marks for anything beyond that. The great majority lost at least 1 mark due to this failing. Candidates should be aware that, because a mark or two hangs in the balance (sometimes the crucial mark or two which can make the difference between a pass and a fail) examiners are required to count every individual word - not in vague line averages. It is irksome to count up to 400 and beyond and find that the candidate has written *325 words* at the end of their essay.

iii. Overall, a lack of reading, with its concomitant lack of finer thinking skills, is becoming distressingly apparent.

3.2 PAPER 2 Question 2: Reading and Writing (60 marks)

In this component of the paper, a reading comprehension including a summary task and a brief writing task are set, in both Paper Syllabus A and Paper Syllabus B. The reading skills tested in the A and B paper are largely similar as are the question formats. The difference lies in the difficulty level of the texts, the amount of reading required, and the level of the reading skills required of the candidates. The texts in each sitting purposely vary in topic and in type in order to ensure a more accurate representation of the candidates' reading abilities. The reading skills tested range from reading for gist, reading for detail, inference, working out the meaning of vocabulary from the context, summarising part of the information to working out the author's intention. The questions, meant to test the candidates' ability to read, understand, evaluate and interpret the reading material, may range from multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions, inference questions, locating information, True and False questions and giving a reason to explaining the meaning of a word or phrase. Writing skills are tested at the end of the paper by means of a brief read- and-respond task.

Syllabus A

This year, the Paper 2A comprehension task featured two reading passages: a narrative text about an Antarctic Expedition and an informative text about British parks. The questions tested candidates on a variety of comprehension skills, including understanding the gist of the information given, understanding at paragraph level and understanding more specific lexical items like expressions and vocabulary, confirming statements and giving a reason. Following the questions on the first passage, candidates had to write a summary of between 100 and 110 words on the main events that took place on December 14. The brief writing task at the end required candidates to write an email, using only between 60-80 words, encouraging a friend to join them as a volunteer in a Cleanup Day at the National Park.

Syllabus B

This year, the Paper 2B comprehension task featured two reading passages: an informative text about the aftermath of a volcano eruption in Villa La Angostura in Argentina and a personal experience of swimming with crocodiles in Australia. The two represent very different text types intended to assess candidates' reading skills more widely.

The questions tested candidates on a variety of comprehension skills, including understanding the gist of the information given, understanding at paragraph level and understanding more specific lexical items like expressions and vocabulary, confirming statements and giving a reason. The brief writing task at the end required candidates to write an email, using only between 50-60 words, suggesting an adventurous outdoor activity to a friend.

PERFORMANCE

SYLLABUS 2A & 2B

Candidates' performance was as follows:

READING	SYLLABUS 2A	SYLLABUS 2B
OBTAINED AN AVERAGE MARK OR HIGHER	81.8%	40.6%

TABLE 11 – Obtained an average mark or higher in SEC Paper 2 question 2

PERFORMANCE: SYLLABUS 2A

Questions on Passage 1

The questions with the most correct answers were: 1a, 3, 4 and 6. The questions that candidates answered incorrectly or did not attempt at all were: 1b, 2, 5, 7, 8 and 9. One may state that candidates generally dealt well with questions which involved lifting directly from the text such as questions 3 and 4 or questions which involved listing such as question 6. However, they did not do as well when asked to give the answer in their own words such as in question 8 or to explain the intended meaning of an expression such as in question 9.

Question 1a: This question was intended to test candidates' ability to understand the gist of the text through underlining the most appropriate title. Candidates had no problems in answering this question correctly. Very few got this wrong.

Question 1b: In this question candidates were expected to provide justification/reason for their choice in 1a and yet this question proved to be more demanding than 1a. A common error was the repetition of the wording in the title (1a).

Question 2: In this question candidates were required to locate specific information in the text and render it in their own words. The key elements should have been *exploration* and *scientific research*. Most candidates faced difficulties in providing a correct answer mostly because they simply lifted /copied the sentence from the text or because they only provided *one* of the key elements.

Question 3: This task required candidates to scan read lines 1 to 6 of the text in order to find synonyms for the four words given. A substantial number of candidates encountered problems with the first word: *experienced – seasoned*. Quite a number of candidates were careless in copying correctly, for instance, *seasond, ambitious, determind*.

Question 4: This was a True and False exercise where three statements were given and candidates had to say whether they were True or False and provide a suitable, logical reason to show their understanding of specific information contained in the text. Examiners find that this dispels most doubts over whether the candidate has truly comprehended or not. Clearly, both parts of the answer need to be correct for candidates to achieve the full marks. In general, most candidates managed to obtain full marks for this task. However, there were a few candidates who lost the mark assigned to each statement either by getting the first part (True/False) incorrect or else by providing an incorrect reason.

Question 5: This question required candidates to understand the meaning of the part sentence quoted from the text (*making the deepest push of all - l. 15-16*) and provide two objectives achieved as a result, through locating specific information and through inference skills. Many candidates could only provide *one* objective, which was *connecting the unmapped interior with the heights of Oates Land*. This was the most obvious objective (locating specific information) and it is clear that candidates need to develop their inference skills. A good number of candidates even wrote *he wanted to make the deepest push of all into the unknown* by simply lifting the statement from the question itself.

Question 6: This was the least problematic of all the tasks because almost all candidates, even those who did badly in other tasks, obtained full marks.

Question 7: Again, this question required candidates to infer the reason why Mertz had a *look of alarm on his face*. A substantial number of candidates gave an incorrect answer to this question as they did not refer to *the sudden disappearance of Ninnis*. Many stated that *Mertz had seen Ninnis fall down the crevasse*, which is incorrect. Recurrent errors noted were: *because he heard a dog's whining; because he was anxious; because something terrible had happened*.

Question 8: This question tested language at a higher level. Here, candidates had to explain, in their own words, the meaning of a selected phrase – *The featureless plateau of snow and ice – l. 26*. Many candidates failed to provide the correct answer.

Question 9: This question tested candidates' knowledge of idiom and only those who know what the expression *hoping against hope* means were able to explain it in their own words. Candidates encountered problems in answering this question correctly, especially since the element of *remote possibility / impossibility* was not included in most answers.

Question 10: This was the summary question.

A number of points need to be mentioned here:

i. Unfortunately, many candidates failed to adhere to the number of words prescribed in the task, with a few candidates writing less than 100 words and a substantial number of them writing more than 110 words as a result of which they were penalised.

ii. In terms of content, this task required candidates to focus on extracting the key points of the last four paragraphs of the text. Candidates generally did well in terms of marks awarded for content yet there were occasions where they included either irrelevant detail from previous parts of the text, or mere explanatory or incidental detail, rather than focus on the sequence of events which led to the tragic event. Furthermore, a number of candidates included a lengthy introduction and thus failed to mention many relevant points.

iii. Many candidates were penalised for grammatical errors, mainly in tense usage, punctuation and spelling, as well as for lack of accuracy in expression and for inappropriate linking of sentences. Candidates often copied word for word from the passage.

iv. Candidates did not always use their own words as instructed.

It is clear that most candidates need to improve on their summary techniques and require more practice in this particular skill.

Questions on Passage 2

Questions 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 11 mostly yielded full marks. The most demanding questions were 2 and 9, whilst for questions 1, 8 and 10 candidates gave partially correct answers.

Question 1: Many candidates encountered difficulties in answering this question accurately. A few candidates failed to understand the meaning of *awestruck*; many others only referred to the beauty of the parks without mentioning that Olmsted was fascinated by the way *Art had been used to create beauty from nature*.

Question 2: In this question, candidates were asked to explain the meaning of *oases of greenery* in Queen Victoria's times. Many candidates could not infer the meaning of *oases* in the context of *smog-choked cities*. Instead, many referred to *countryside-obsessed poets*. Another common error included *the industrial revolution made parks oases*.

Question 3: In this question, candidates were required to locate four characteristics that make a park *quintessentially British* (l.16). These could be found within the immediate context of the selected expression. In fact there were seven from which candidates needed to select four. Most candidates provided the correct answers.

Question 4: Candidates were required to explain the meaning of a selected part sentence: *not all parks are of this pedigree*. Many candidates could not provide a correct explanation due to their inability to bring out the meaning of *pedigree*.

Question 5: Candidates needed to provide a reason by locating specific information within the text for *maintaining Victorian parks rather than creating new ones*. Candidates generally did well.

Question 6: Once again, this was a listing exercise whereby candidates had to provide four reasons why parks became *bleak no-go areas* (l. 35). The reasons were easily identifiable within the immediate (two lines) context of the selected expression. Consequently, most candidates provided correct answers.

Question 7: This question required candidates to identify an informal idiomatic expression from lines 33 to 37 of the text that means *improved one's strategy*. This was largely done correctly.

Question 8: Candidates were required to scan read lines 38 to 44 in order to extract three factors which helped parks get a *career boost*. Many candidates provided correct answers, although there were a few who only provided one factor which they erroneously interpreted as three: 1. *fed up with derelict*; 2. *grim* and 3. *closed cafes*.

Question 9: This question required candidates to understand the meaning of *Engaging people with their local parks* and to provide two reasons why this is important. Many candidates failed to answer this question correctly with a substantial number wrongly *giving people want security; to have food and allotments; to breathe fresh air* and *to grow food* as their answer.

Question 10: In this task, candidates had to scan read part of the text (lines 33 to 54) to identify four single words that have opposite meanings to the four provided in the grid. A substantial number of candidates failed to locate these words. Moreover, certain candidates provided synonyms instead of antonyms, for example, giving *derelict* for *dirty* instead of *derelict* for *well-maintained* and *pristine* – *well-maintained* instead of *pristine* for *dirty*.

Question 11: Candidates generally did well with regard to this reference task though there were a few who encountered problems in e and f.

In general it appears that candidates found questions which involved lifting the answer from the text and listing quite manageable. On the other hand, they found it more challenging to successfully tackle questions which required them to state the answer in their own words and questions which involved explaining the implied meaning.

Short Writing Task

Examiners expected a short email in which the greeting and signing off were appropriately informal, the content consisted of at least a couple of reasons why the friend should join the candidate, and the word limit was respected.

Candidates' emails were marked and assessed according to specified criteria, namely one mark for appropriate format (informal greeting, and informal salutation), two marks for task achievement (mentioning plan to volunteer AND encouraging friend to join in), two marks for appropriate expression (choice of vocabulary and appropriate informal register) and five marks for grammatical accuracy (punctuation, spelling, tenses, syntax, and appropriate linking devices).

The following points were observed:

i. Candidates generally did well in terms of marks awarded for the general greeting and salutation, for achieving the aims of the task, that is, encouraging their friend to join them in a Cleanup Day, and for adopting an informal tone when writing. In some cases, however, the greeting and/or salutation was/were missing, or written as part of the letter rather than indented at the top or at the bottom of the text respectively. At times the greeting was too informal (*Hey*) while the salutation was too formal (*Yours sincerely, Yours truly, Yours faithfully*).

ii. Many candidates did not adhere to the word limit, either writing more than 80 words or fewer than 60 words for which they were penalised.

iii. Where expression and grammatical accuracy are concerned, it is especially disconcerting to note that candidates pay little attention to sentence structure, tense usage, cohesive devices and coherence in their writing. There were also some problems in spelling and punctuation.

PERFORMANCE: SYLLABUS 2B

Questions on Passage 1

The majority of candidates showed a good understanding of the gist of this passage, doing well in questions 1, 2, 6, 8 and 9, whilst half of them had difficulty in numbers 3, 4, 5, 7 and 10.

Question 1: This question was intended to test candidates' ability to understand the gist of the text through underlining the most appropriate title. A good number of candidates scored the one mark allotted to this question.

Question 2: This question required candidates to find a reason, and most located the answer in the text.

Question 3: Many candidates only managed to score one mark out of the two allotted to this question, the reason being that they did not make any reference to Villa La Angostura being restored to what it had once been. The problem lay in the fact that they misunderstood the question which did not ask for a reason but for an explanation of *born again* and hence gave answers such as *The woods and lakes are bursting once again with colour*. The word *again* gave the indication that the candidates in a way understood the fact that *born again* implied *as before*.

Question 4: This question tested candidates' vocabulary at word level and required them to lift a word from the text which matched a meaning. Unfortunately, a few candidates quoted more than one word, and it was a pity to note that some candidates copied the words incorrectly thus losing the half mark for that particular word.

Question 5: In this question candidates were asked how the town was affected positively and negatively by nature. This should have been a straightforward question accessible to all. Unfortunately, though, many candidates did not understand the rubric where, instead of identifying the aspects of nature which affected the town positively and negatively, they gave very general answers such as *the town was clean again*. A good number of candidates only answered correctly part (b) of the question thus scoring half a mark.

Question 6: This question required candidates to write the main attractions of Villa La Angostura in summer and winter. Most candidates scored well in this task.

Question 7: Most writing involves the use of reference devices, and understanding these goes a long way to understanding the text. This question focused on candidates' understanding of how a text is hinged together. Although most candidates answered (b), (c) and (e) correctly, the main problem elsewhere was lack of precision where a substantial number of candidates gave *people* as an answer to (a) and (d), and gave an incomplete/partial answer to (f) such as *winter season*.

Question 8: Most candidates managed to score the full two marks allotted to this question by correctly mentioning the four ways in which the eruption was of benefit to Villa La Angostura and its residents.

Question 9: Listing in point form is a form of summary writing and although candidates generally managed to list five facts about Villa La Angostura, it was evident that many candidates showed that they do not quite know what *facts* means since they wrote about the temporary

repercussions the eruption had on the town by mentioning facts such as *the town was covered in ash; many people left town; hotel occupancy was a failure; there were only a third of the normal number of visitors* and similar answers thus forfeiting marks.

Question 10: This was another vocabulary exercise, but this time at phrase level, and candidates did not do well. Quite a good number of candidates gave incomplete answers to both parts (a) and (b) of this question. With regard to part (a) *take its toll on*, some candidates did not refer to the negative aspect and only wrote *left an impact*. The same happened in part (b) where the vast majority of students referred to *hoping* but did not refer to what they were hoping for, that is, something in particular.

Questions on Passage 2

Although most candidates seemed to have gained a general understanding of the passage, and questions 2, 4, part of 5, part of 7, 9, 10 and 11 were answered correctly by the majority, many candidates found questions 1, 3, 6, 8 and 12 quite demanding.

Question 1: This question was split up into two connected parts with the second being dependent on the first for marks to be awarded. The first part required candidates to recognize the text type of the comprehension passage from a selection, while the second required them to justify their choice. A large number of candidates answered this question incorrectly. Even though part (b) was not marked when part (a) was incorrect, answers to (b) gave indications why candidates answered (a) incorrectly. Because the passage was written in the first person, candidates automatically assumed that it was part of a diary. Many candidates also thought that the passage was taken from an animal encyclopaedia simply because it was about animals. Those candidates who answered correctly included the fact that the writer refers to his *Australian tour* in their reason for part (b).

Question 2: This question was well answered by a good number of candidates. Most of them made reference to the fact that the weather was hot.

Question 3 a & b: This question required candidates to guess something which was indirectly stated in the text and then infer why the writer says *I take my hat off to him*. Many candidates answered incorrectly. In a. unfortunately, many of them only gave a partial answer, that is *the person who measured the crocodile*, thus forfeiting the mark. There were many candidates who answered that the *poor soul* was actually Wendell the crocodile! In b. a number of candidates did make a reference to showing respect, however, there were many others who took the phrase literally and gave answers such as *the writer took his hat off as he couldn't swim with his hat on*.

Question 4: This task required students to provide three reasons. In general, candidates fared quite well in this question, many of those who answered, obtaining the three marks allotted to this question.

Question 5: This question tested candidates' vocabulary at word level and required them to lift two words from the text which matched the meaning of *frightening*. Most candidates did not obtain the full mark as they gave the word *fear* as one of the answers. Regrettably, some copied the word *harrowing* as *harroving* thus losing the mark.

Question 6: This question tested language at a higher level than in other vocabulary questions. It tested candidates' knowledge of idiom and only those who know what the expression *to throw something out of the window* were able to understand what the writer meant and explain it in their own words. The majority of students who answered this question took the phrase in the literal sense and made reference to the writer actually throwing some kind of survival manual out of the window to attract the attention of the crocodile and perhaps make it move.

Question 7: This was a True and False exercise where five statements were given and candidates had to say whether they were True or False and provide a suitable, logical reason to show their understanding of specific information contained in the text. Clearly, both parts of the answer needed to be correct for candidates to achieve the full marks. Many candidates performed badly in this question and although quite a lot got the True/False part right, many did not support their answers with a valid reason. In (d) many candidates wrote that *it was a hot day* instead of *the crocodile soaks up the sun*. They missed the point that having a sunny day does not necessarily mean that the day is hot. Part (e) presented major difficulties and only very few candidates managed to answer correctly.

Question 8: This question tested candidates' vocabulary at word level as well as their awareness of the use of language. Many candidates did not do well because, rather than write down the feelings the writer is expressing, they wrote examples to show why the crocodile is referred to as *a killing machine* and *a great predator*.

Question 9: Similar to question 8 this question tested candidates' vocabulary, this time at phrase level. A good number of candidates gave an incomplete answer thus losing one mark from the two allotted to this question. Such candidates made reference to the fact that one would not like to meet the crocodile face to face but did not make any reference to being with a crocodile in a restricted place.

Question 10: In this question candidates were expected to compare the techniques of the two crocodiles. Many candidates managed to score the mark allotted to this question by correctly differentiating between Houdini's and Denzel's techniques. There were a good number of others, however, who failed to draw any kind of comparison and only described one technique. No mark was given in such cases.

Question 11: This question required candidates to list six facts about crocodiles from the whole text and most candidates scored well in this task. There were instances of rephrasing of the same fact and in such cases no mark was awarded.

Question 12: This question invited candidates to read between the lines and infer. This proved to be challenging for most. The great majority of the candidates only scored one mark as they only gave one part of the answer, that is, that Wendell was *about to attack*. In the other part of the answer, many wrote that Wendell was about *to walk* or *to eat* rather than that Wendell was being *annoyed* or *disturbed*. There were also several candidates who ignored the instruction to use their own words even though this was written in bold in the question.

Short Writing Task

Examiners expected a short email in which the greeting and signing off were appropriately informal, the content consisted of at least a description of the activity and why they should do it, and the word limit was respected.

Candidates' emails were marked and assessed according to specified criteria, namely one mark for appropriate format (informal greeting and informal salutation), two marks for task achievement (mentioning plan to volunteer AND encouraging friend to join in), two marks for appropriate expression (choice of vocabulary and appropriate informal register) and five marks for grammatical accuracy (punctuation, spelling, tenses, syntax and appropriate linking devices).

The following points were observed:

i. In terms of content, some candidates did not seem to understand what an adventurous activity is, mentioning activities like going for a bus ride and visiting a museum. Similarly, quite a number

of candidates mentioned places (e.g. Buskett) rather than activities. Future candidates need to understand the importance of reading the question carefully, and not simply skimming through it.

ii. In terms of format, although a good number of candidates did attempt to structure their email correctly, it was disappointing that many did not start on a new line after the greeting, an example of which is *Dear Paul, I am writing this email...* Most candidates used the correct greeting, that is, *Dear Paul*, however many of them were not awarded the mark because they did not start the rest of the email on a new line. There were a number of acceptable endings to an email of this type but it was important to be informal, therefore endings like *Yours faithfully* were inappropriate and in such cases the mark for the salutation was not awarded.

iii. In terms of expression and accuracy, there is still much to be done regarding the ability of the candidates to think in English and write correctly. Common errors included the incorrect use of tenses, inaccurate spelling and sentence structure, and poor use of English idiom. The most basic words were often badly spelt, and it is obvious that students hear words in English but do not see them written; e.g. *abseiling* was written *upsailing* by more than half of the candidates. Other words which were often misspelt included *heard* for *heard*, and *your coming* for *you're coming*. The following pairs were often confused: *its* and *it's*, *taught* and *thought*, *there* and *their*, etc. There were also many instances of Language 1 interference.

It is disappointing to see many candidates achieving the task yet, because of poor language abilities, being prevented from expressing themselves clearly and accurately, hence resulting in their obtaining a poor mark in this exercise.

iv. Most candidates went over the word limit. Some wrote such long-winded introductions that they didn't get to the point of the writing task within the word limit. Candidates need to understand that i. they are penalised if they do not respect the word limit and that ii. they need to abide by the instructions given, for instance to use the names provided, as there were candidates who used a different name in spite of the clear instruction in the rubric.

4.0 Conclusion

Overall, it appears that candidates are performing relatively well in the oral and aural components of the paper. However, one cannot but note the very different level of performance in the written components where examiners have reported that inadequate levels of grammatical accuracy, spelling, punctuation and expression were very much in evidence. After many years of exposure to the English Language, many candidates still have a poor command of the language. This should certainly be of great concern to all.

*Chairperson
2013 Examination Panel*