

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

ARABIC

MAY 2013

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE

EXAMINATIONS' BOARD

**SEC ARABIC
MAY 2013 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

GENERAL INFORMATION AND STATISTICS

The examination consisted of Paper 1, the core paper, and Paper IIA and IIB. This year, there was a good number of candidates who sat for Paper A and a small number of candidates who sat for Paper B, with 21 (80.8%) candidates opting for the A Paper and 5 (19.2%) candidates sitting for the B Paper, thus 26 candidates in all sitting for the examination.

ABSENCES

This year two Paper A candidates and 1 Paper B candidate were absent for all the components of the exam.

GRADE DISTRIBUTION

The overall performance of the total cohort sitting for the May 2013 session is depicted in the Table below:

GRADE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	ABS	TOTAL
PAPER A	3	0	3	7	4			2	2	21
PAPER B				1	0	0	0	3	1	5
TOTAL	3	0	3	8	4	0	0	5	3	26
% OF TOTAL	11.54	0.00	11.54	30.77	15.38	0.00	0.00	19.23	11.54	100

SEC Arabic Language Paper

The May 2013 paper was made up of two main components – the oral component (Listening Comprehension, Dictation, Topic Conversation and Reading Comprehension) common to both Paper A and Paper B, and the written component; Paper A consisted of a translation from Arabic into English, another translation from English into Arabic, essay writing, grammar drills and culture knowledge whereas Paper B comprised a translation from Arabic into English, essay writing, grammar drills and culture knowledge. The SEC Arabic examination is set according to the SEC syllabus for Arabic Language.

Performance

In Paper A, seventeen candidates scored from grade 1 to grade 5 whereas two obtained a U and two were absent. In Paper B, out of five candidates, one was absent and one managed to obtain a satisfactory grade.

Paper 1

The Oral Component

The oral component in the SEC Arabic Language examination is common to both Paper A and Paper B.

Listening Comprehension

This part of the examination entailed listening to one text and answering questions based on the text. The listening comprehension text was a narrative text with four questions with varied format mostly requiring eliciting brief information from the story read out by the examiner. 8% of the total marks were allotted to the testing of the listening skills. Unfortunately, some of the candidates did not give correct answers to some of the questions and their answers were full of spelling mistakes and grammatical errors.

Dictation

This section was a medium length narrative and descriptive text taken from a contemporary Arabic story book and carried a 7% weighting of the total marks intended to test the candidates' phonetic and spelling skills in Arabic. Those students who sat for Paper A on average scored good marks in this section but unfortunately those students who sat for Paper B scored very low marks. Among the common spelling mistakes, most of the candidates failed to distinguish between أ\ع\اء and also ended plural masculine verbs in the past tense with the suffix وا with a و only. Other outstanding spelling mistakes were the mix up between ك\اق، ناداض، صاس. Some other candidates did not manage to write the whole dictation text while others left out either words or whole phrases from the dictation.

Reading Comprehension

The reading comprehension was a long passage with facts of Arabic history in the narrative text. The five questions carried a 20% weighting of the total marks which the candidates had to answer orally to test their comprehension skills. The questions were set in such a way as to avoid any ambiguity. Most of the questions involved reasoning and eliciting details or facts; questions asking for personal opinions were not set in this section. Many of the candidates who sat for this examination may have been of Arab origin or native speakers of Arabic since they scored high marks. Some students struggled in this task while some others were unable to provide a correct answer for some of the questions related to the reading comprehension text.

Conversation

This component of the paper requires the candidate to take on a role where language is put into practice in a relatively realistic situation for a brief exchange to take place between the candidate and the examiner. A choice of three different topics was given, taking into consideration the cohort's ages and experiences as well as the language areas dictated by the syllabus. The candidates had to choose one topic and engage in a 10 minute conversation with the examiner. This exercise has a 15% weighting of the total marks. The first part of the conversation led by the examiner is usually a warm up session and in the second part, the candidate indicates to the examiner the chosen topic for conversation. During the conversation the examiner leads the candidates with prompts and cues to test their competence to continue and conclude a dialogue and to express some functions like formulating explanations, descriptions, suggestions and expressing surprise.

It was noted that the task was completed to varying degrees. In the majority of cases, Arab origin candidates followed the cues given and delivered their responses quite smoothly and fluently. In other cases, performance suffered mostly because the candidates appeared to miss the prompts or even ignored them completely. Arabic speaking candidates showed difficulty in refraining from switching to dialectal Arabic while some Maltese speaking candidates were at times completely tongue tied or otherwise used Maltese words instead of ones in Arabic. Unfortunately, the majority of the non-Arab candidates had poor pronunciation, diction and intonation in Arabic and thus scored low in this section of the examination.

Paper 2 A

The Written Component

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

Translation from Arabic into English – 10 marks

Out of the 21 candidates that sat for this Paper, 13 coped very well with the narrative text given for translation. Unfortunately, although the text was a simple narrative and descriptive story, some of the candidates showed that they have a poor level of everyday vocabulary and that they even lack basic vocabulary. Two candidates were absent for this part of the examination.

Translation from English into Arabic – 10 marks

In this exercise, there was a range of responses, and credit was given wherever students demonstrated comprehension of the text. None of the candidates obtained full marks for this translation. Several phrases and sentences were omitted, while many spelling and grammatical mistakes were committed. The examiners noted that some of the candidates severely lack idiomatic expression, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge as basic skills to handle translations

Essay – 20 marks

Only some of the candidates managed to write at least 120 words for their essay despite a varied, easy choice of titles. There were some spelling and grammatical mistakes and some had very poor handwriting. With the exception of a couple of essays, the rest lacked ideas, imagination and originality. Some other candidates showed problems of coherence and sequencing ideas. Those candidates who scored badly could not express themselves in Arabic and included some Maltese phrases or sentences in the Arabic alphabet. Important vocabulary and verb conjugations proved to pose a problem for some of the candidates to be able to produce an acceptable essay. This being said, some candidates did well in essay writing and examiners were pleased to note an improvement from previous examinations in this section.

Grammar – 5 marks

The aim of this exercise is to examine the candidates' grammatical skills through full vocalization of the five sentences provided. The grammar posed problems for several candidates, who seemed unable to vocalize the five separate sentences correctly. More than half of the candidates either did not do the vocalization or else scored badly. The

examiners are sorry to note that the poor performance of a number of candidates in this section indicates that they have not yet grasped the basic grammatical rules or else have an inadequate knowledge on how to correctly apply the grammatical rules. Only two candidates scored full marks in this exercise.

Culture – 5 marks

In this simple exercise the candidates had to fill in the blanks with one suitable word of information; five separate sentences dealing with Arabic culture on topics or personalities according to the SEC Arabic syllabus were given.

On the whole, candidates did not cope well with this exercise. Many failed to identify the correct answer or else left the answer blank. It is quite evident that most of the candidates were not well prepared for this section.

Paper 2 B

The Written Component

Paper 2B consists of a translation from Arabic into English, essay writing, a grammar drill and culture knowledge; all components together are weighted 50% of the global mark.

Out of the five candidates who sat for Paper 2B, only three candidates attempted to tackle this section as two were absent. Therefore no comments on performance may be given since any attempt to comment will jeopardize the privacy of these candidates.

General Overall Performance

The examiners noted that overall there were hardly any instances of good practices in the SEC Arabic examination this year, with the exception of Paper 1 that entailed oral skills. Very poor performance was noted in grammar, spelling, knowledge of vocabulary and Arabic culture. Although a lot of time and effort is dedicated to the teaching of Arabic, it is a pity that in most cases, accuracy and fluency in the four language skills are still not being achieved satisfactorily. It has become evident that more exposure to reading, speaking, listening and writing in Arabic is necessary. Candidates are also encouraged to acquire more training in the actual handling of the examination. They need to prepare themselves more on how to deal with the language tasks at hand. Candidates also need to understand the significance of working diligently and rigorously in every component of the paper. Their commitment towards studying Arabic should be demonstrated throughout all their scholastic years since Arabic is a very demanding language for non-native speakers and thus requires much more preparation for one to succeed.

*Chairperson
2013 Examination Panel*