

SEC Italian Listening Comprehension Examination

**held on the 25th March 2017
at De La Salle College**

THE MATSEC EXAMINATIONS BOARD



University of Malta

10th April 2017

1. The MATSEC Office received a number of e-mails complaining about the quality of the audio used in the SEC Italian Listening Comprehension examination held at De La Salle College. On considering these complaints, the pros and cons of four possible courses of action were considered to ensure that candidates were not disadvantaged:

- Scrap the examination, and grade the candidates on the one-to-one oral, the two written examination papers and a pro-rating for the missing listening comprehension component;
- Award full marks to all candidates who could have been affected;
- Set the examination again for all Malta candidates since Gozo candidates were not affected;
- Compensate Malta candidates by adding a percentage mark to their performance.

2. Before deciding which action to take, it was agreed to mark a representative sample of scripts and analyse the results to assess the extent of the difficulty the candidates may have encountered. A sample of every fourth script by index number of the Malta candidates registered for the examination were selected to ensure that all examination rooms and all four sessions of the examination were sampled equally. This procedure also ensured the inclusion of a representative sample of candidates who registered for Papers IIA and IIB. Additionally all the scripts of Gozo candidates were marked. The analysis could then include a comparison of the overall results and the part results of each of the three exercises of the examination obtained by candidates in Malta and Gozo. Furthermore this year's results could be compared to the results in the Italian listening comprehension exam obtained by Malta and Gozo candidates in 2015 and 2016. A more detailed analysis could also be carried out by comparing the results obtained by Malta candidates in the twenty rooms actually used in the examination.

3. The results obtained by the sample of 365 Malta candidates are shown in Figure 1 below. Overall, there is a fairly normal distribution of marks, with 7.2% of candidates obtaining a mark over 90% and another 20.4% obtaining a mark between 88% and 76%. By comparison, at the lower end of the scale 15.6% obtained a mark between 40% and 29% and 5.3% of the candidates obtained a mark of 26% or less. The highest score obtained by Malta candidates in the examination was 100%, that is, a mark of 21 and the lowest score was 9.5%, equivalent to 2 marks.

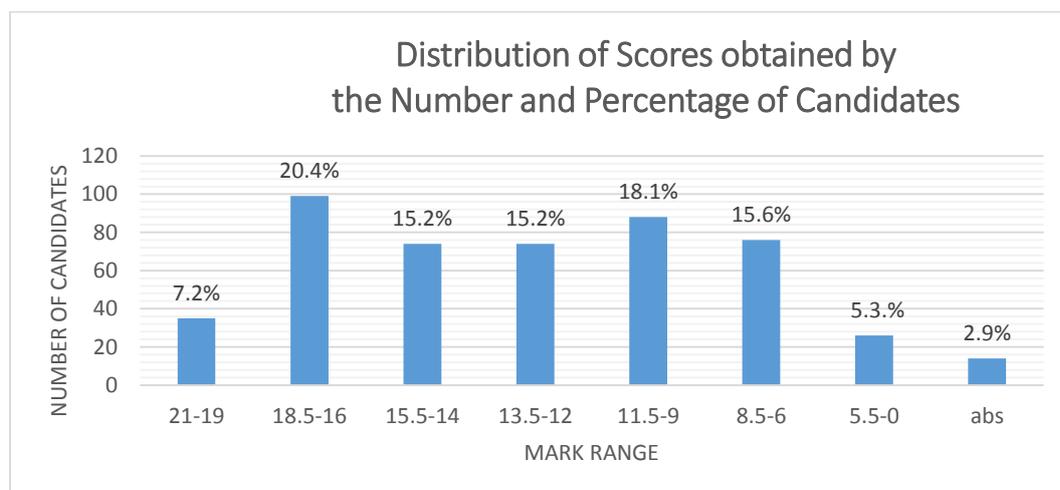


Figure 1. Distribution of scores of Malta candidates in the SEC Italian Listening Comprehension examination

A more detailed representation of the distribution of marks is shown in Figure 2.

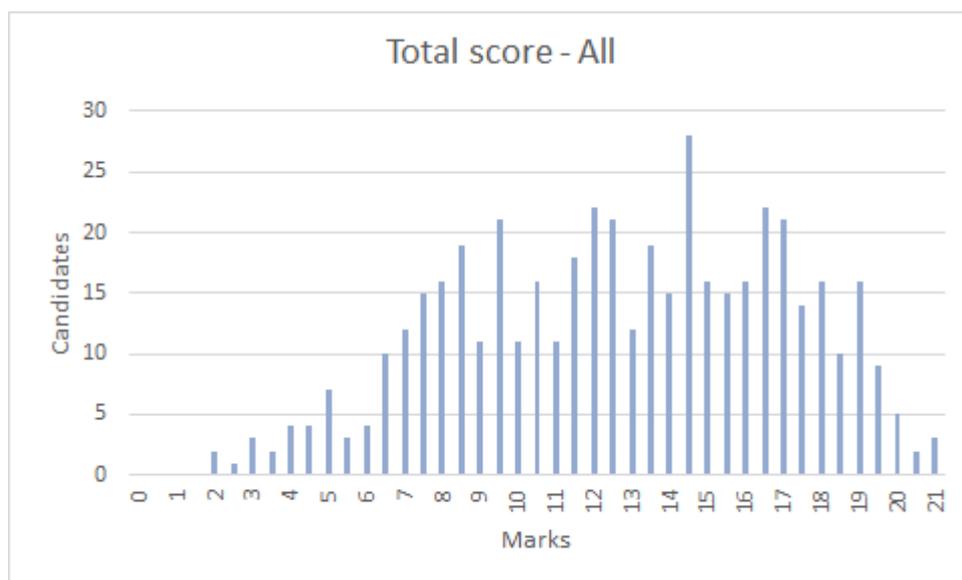


Figure 2. Detailed distribution of scores obtained by Malta and Gozo candidates

4. The scores obtained by the Malta candidates, who claimed that the audio was of inadequate quality, were then compared with the scores obtained by Gozo candidates, who did not report any difficulty with the audio system used in the Gozo Centre. This comparison needs to be considered very carefully because in the last two years, Gozo candidates performed significantly better than Malta candidates in the SEC Italian Listening Comprehension examination. The differences in the mean scores obtained in 2015, 2016 and 2017 are presented in Table 1. These differences range between 1.9 marks in 2015 to 2.4 marks in 2016 in favour of the Gozo candidates. In 2017, the difference in mean scores of the sample of Malta candidates and all Gozo candidates is 2.3 marks, which is within the range observed in the previous years.

Table 1. Mean scores obtained by Malta and Gozo Candidates in 2015, 2016 and 2017

Year	Locality	N	Mean	Difference
2015 ¹	Malta	1668	16.3	-1.9
	Gozo	122	18.2	
2016	Malta	1639	13.7	-2.4
	Gozo	134	16.2	
2017	Malta	365	12.2	-2.3
	Gozo	107	14.5	

5. The analysis included a comparison between the scores obtained in each exercise of the examination. The Italian Listening Comprehension examination consists of three exercises. Some of the Malta candidates complained that the problem with the quality of the audio affected Exercise 2 in particular. It was therefore decided to compare the scores obtained by Malta and Gozo candidates in the three exercises to check whether Exercise 2 presented greater difficulties than the other exercises. The results of this analysis are shown in Figures 3a, 3b and 3c.

¹ In 2015, the Listening Comprehension examination had a different format and it was allocated 15 marks. The mean mark in the table is based on scores corrected for this difference by using the formula $(X \cdot 21/15)$.

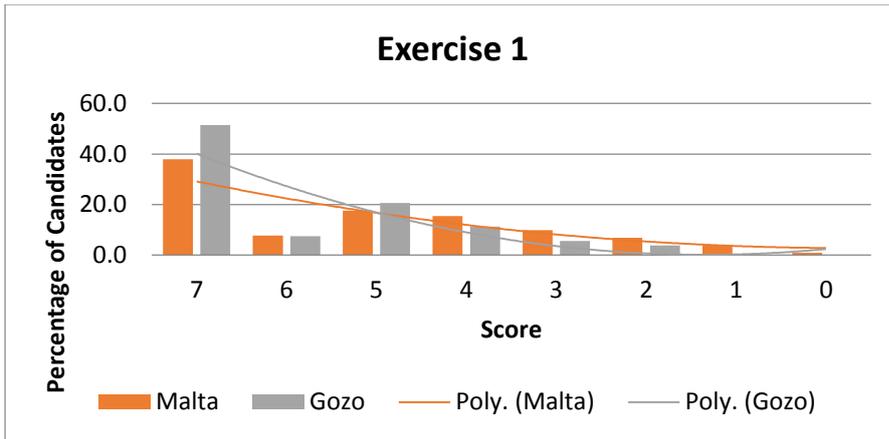


Figure 3a

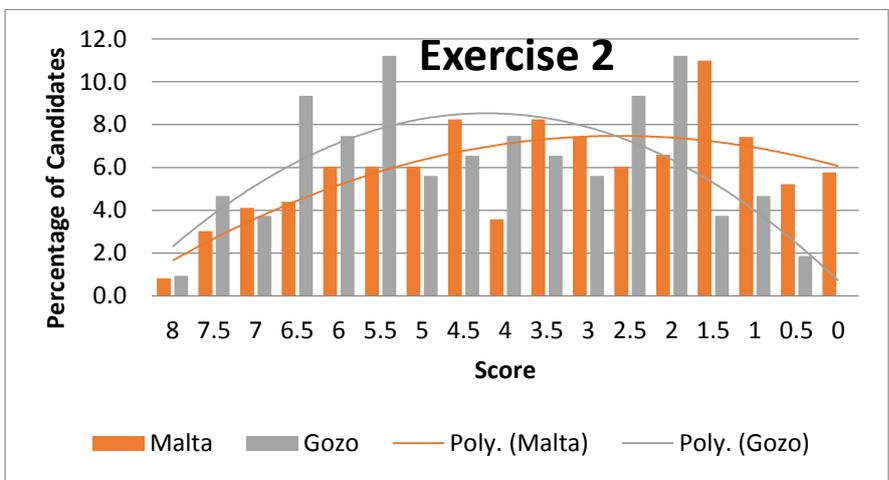


Figure 3b

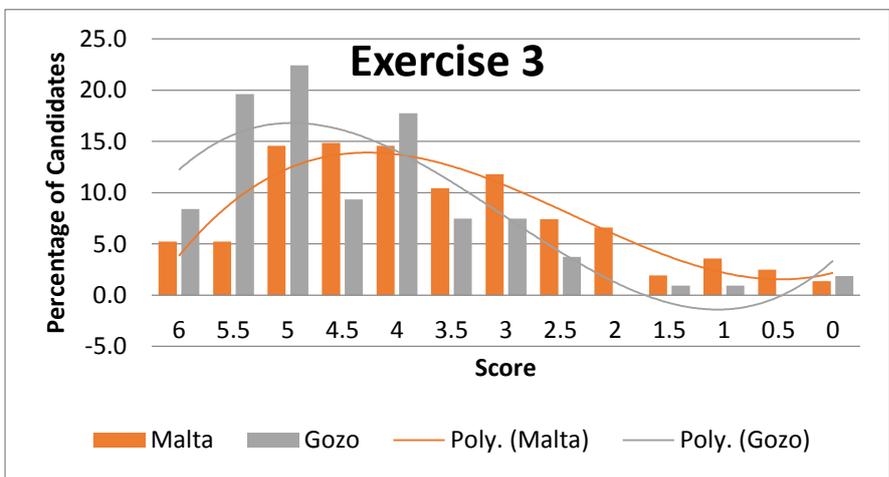


Figure 3c

Figures 3a, 3b and 3c show that the trends in the distribution of candidates obtaining specific scores are similar for Malta and Gozo candidates in all of the three exercises of the Listening Comprehension examination. They also show that while both Malta and Gozo candidates performed very well in Exercise 1 and quite well in Exercise 3, the performance in Exercise 2 of both Malta and Gozo candidates was lower. Indeed the average score in exercises 1, 2 and 3 were 74.9%, 45.1% and 64.3% respectively. It is also clear that Exercise 2 discriminated quite well between candidates with a

higher than average ability and those with a lower than average ability in the skill of listening and understanding the foreign language.

6. From these analyses it appears that the distributions of the scores obtained by the Malta candidates overall and in each part of the examination do not indicate a very significant problem with the audio used for transmitting the recording. Indeed a large proportion of candidates obtained higher than average scores in all exercises. The comparison of the Malta candidates' scores with the scores obtained by the Gozo candidates, who did not have a problem with the audio at the Gozo Centre, confirm these observations. Yet, the fact that a number of candidates reported a problem with the audio as soon as they exited from the examination should not be disregarded.

7. The MATSEC officers who were present during the examination reported that in the first session of the examination a candidate in Room 1 complained about the sound and the invigilator in that room panicked. This caused some disturbance which then spread among the candidates who were scheduled for the examination in the next three sessions. This disturbance could have affected the performance of all candidates during the examination.

8. Another cause of disturbance could have been the school bell which went on automatically at intervals during the examination in all sessions and which could not be turned off by the officials who were present as it was inaccessible.

9. Going back to the original four courses of action under consideration, the analyses indicate that the best way forward is to compensate candidates for the disturbance caused by the claims that the audio was muffled in certain parts.

10. At this point, the chairperson of the SEC Italian examiners' panel was consulted and reference was made to the guidelines on special consideration issued by the UK Joint Council for Qualifications, which regulates the procedures of the major GCSE and GCE awarding bodies. These guidelines stipulate that candidates are eligible for special consideration if there is "serious disturbance during an examination, particularly where recorded material is being used. Finally, it was decided to award Malta candidates a compensation of 5% on their performance, which is well above the 1% compensation given by the JCQ guidelines in circumstances of "noise during the examination which was more than momentary".

11. Furthermore, in order to cover all possibilities, it was decided to offer a re-sit of the examination to candidates who felt that they were severely disadvantaged by the quality of the audio. This offer was extended to Gozo candidates for the sake of fairness. The original scores obtained by candidates who take this offer will be deleted from the record and replaced by their scores in the re-sit.

MATSEC Examinations Board
10th April 2017