

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

ITALIAN

MAY 2014

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD

**SEC ITALIAN
MAY 2014 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

General information**1. Registrations**

In the 2014 session, a total of 1924 candidates registered to sit for the SEC Italian examination. Out of 1924, 1007 candidates applied for Paper IIA (52.3%) and 917 candidates for Paper IIB (47.7%). There was a slight decrease in the number of registrations for SEC Italian in 2014 as compared to the May 2013 session (1.11%). However, the percentage of candidates who registered for the 2014 session is still higher than that in the 2012 session, where the lowest percentage for Italian registrations was recorded.

Table 1: Registrations

Year	Total SEC registrations	Italian SEC registrations	%
2012	7295	2025	27.76
2013	6694	2026	30.27
2014	6599	1924	29.16

2. Attendance

Out of a total of 1007 candidates for Paper A, 6 candidates did not sit for any part of the examination. For Paper B, 40 candidates out of the total number of registrations (917) were absent. Table 2 outlines the distribution of grades in 2014 whereas Table 3 demonstrates a comparison between 2013 and 2014 in terms of grades obtained.

3. Overall performance**Table 2: 2014 Grade distribution**

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	Abs	Total
IIA	124	196	319	213	84	-	-	65	6	1007
% of Total	12.3	19.5	31.7	21.2	8.3			6.5	0.6	100
IIB	-	-	-	173	237	190	100	177	40	917
% of Total				18.9	25.8	20.7	10.9	19.3	4.4	100
Total	124	196	319	386	321	190	100	242	46	1924
% of Total	6.4	10.2	16.6	20.1	16.7	9.9	5.2	12.6	2.4	100

Paper A

Compared to 2013, in the 2014 session, there was a slight increase in the number of candidates who obtained grades 1 and 2. There was a 1.31% increase in candidates obtaining a grade 4. The number of candidates who obtained an unclassified grade was also higher (+1.78%). A decrease was registered in the number of candidates obtaining grades 3 and 5. Whereas the difference in the number of candidates obtaining a grade 3 was slight (-0.58%), the difference in the number of candidates obtaining a grade 5 was significant (-2.71%).

Paper B

The results show that in 2014, as compared to 2013, the number of candidates who obtained an unclassified grade decreased significantly (-3.13%). There was also, however, a decrease in the number of candidates who obtained grade 4 (-0.68%) and grade 5 (-2.45%). There was a slight increase in the grade 7 results (+0.42%) and a more significant increase in the grade 6 results (+3.66%). There was also an increase in the number of candidates who did not turn up for any session of the examination (+2.18%).

Table 3: 2013-2014: a comparison

	2013		2014	
	Number of candidates	% of those who sat for the examination (n=1996)	Number of candidates	% of those who sat for the examination (n=1878)
Grades 1-3	687	34.4	639	34
Grades 4-5	786	39.4	707	37.6
Grades 1-5	1473	73.8	1346	71.7
Grades 6-7	260	13	290	15.4
Grades 1-7	1733	86.8	1636	87.1

4. Scheme of assessment**Table 4: Total marks allotted to each task**

The Italian examination is divided into four sessions. The table below shows the weighting and distribution of the examination:

Section	Marks
Paper I (Part 1) Oral	15%
Paper I (Part 1) Listening	15%
Paper I (Part 2) Language Use	25%
Paper II Comprehension	20%
Paper II Writing	25%
Total	100%

5. Comments on the candidates' performance**Paper 1 Part 1: oral / aural skills**

Speaking skills were weighted at 15% and the component consisted of three exercises, namely a role-play, 'extended speech' (which involved a brief presentation of a set text chosen and read by the candidate) and a free conversation.

The marking scheme used by the examiners (this part of the examination is conducted by a separate set of examiners) was based on the following aspects:

- (1) the candidate's ability to interact spontaneously and autonomously in a conversation;
- (2) the candidate's ability to communicate coherently in Italian, giving priority to communicative skills and strategies.

Some of the examiners involved in this part of the examination commented on the fact that there are still quite a few candidates who presented themselves for this examination and could not even show knowledge of basic communication in Italian. Some depended totally on the examiner's questions in order to express themselves. For the oral component, marks are mainly determined on the basis of the candidate's ability to communicate effectively in Italian.

The Role Play:

This year's role plays took the form of a conversation. Situations included buying from shops, ordering food, talking to Italian friends, and giving instructions to passersby. The roles candidates had to take included giving or asking for information and explaining a particular situation.

Candidates need to practise speaking skills regularly before sitting for the exam. This practice should start early, as soon as the candidates start to learn a language. Speaking is a productive skill and like the other language skills, it should be given its due importance. Candidates should take part in meaningful, authentic speaking activities which will help them feel at ease in a conversation, both in real life and during oral examinations.

The 'Extended Speech':

A number of examiners involved in this part of the examination commented on the fact that there were candidates who presented themselves for this examination without having read any of the set texts. Some candidates were not even aware that there existed a list of set books as specified in the SEC syllabus for Italian. The examination syllabus needs to be adhered to as otherwise candidates will be penalized and lose precious marks during the examination. The text book list contains titles which are suitable for foreign language learning, and books are easily available in school libraries and bookstores.

The Free Conversation:

Candidates were asked to talk about two topics of a general nature, with most of them being related to daily occurrences or to topics which candidates were familiar with. Some of the topics which candidates needed to converse about were cinema, sports and technology. The examiners helped the candidates by asking questions and giving prompts. Examiners pointed out that candidates were more at ease with this exercise and performed better when compared to the role play. This means that some candidates still have difficulties picturing themselves in a given situation and talking about it.

Listening

Listening skills were weighted at 15%. This component consisted of three exercises. In the first exercise, candidates were required to match comic strips to phrases. In the second and third exercises, candidates listened to a short text on which they were to answer questions in writing. The questions asked assessed a number of enabling skills, including listening for detail, listening for gist, working out the meaning from the context, and inferencing. The format of the questions was varied and included:

- reference questions
- fill in the blanks
- matching
- true or false (and stating the reason for the candidate's answer)

Paper 1 Part 2: Language Use

Candidates are allowed one hour and a quarter to complete this paper, the last component of Paper 1 which is common to all candidates. It requires metalinguistic and analytical skills. Section A tests the candidates' accurate use of the language, covering knowledge of spelling, morphology, vocabulary, syntax, structures and sociolinguistic competence whereas Section B tests Culture.

Section A: Language

Exercise No.	Content tested
1	Vocabulary
2	Vocabulary
3	Notions/Expressions
4	Verbs
5	Prepositions
6	Pronouns
7	Vocabulary/spelling
8	Adjectives
9	Adjectives
10	Spelling in context (mistakes)

This section of the paper tests language use. Most of the exercises are placed in a context and require also reading and understanding. There were 3 exercises which proved to be the most difficult for the candidates, namely exercises 4, 6 and 10. This shows that candidates need to improve in basic grammatical notions, consolidate the use of verbs and be more aware of language used.

Section B: Culture

Exercise No.	Content tested
1	General culture in context with prompts
2	Food
3	General culture (multiple choice)
4	General culture with prompts

As in Section A, candidates needed to read and understand the context to answer the questions correctly. The candidates fared very well in this section.

Comprehensions

The candidates' reading skills were tested by means of two texts for each Paper (A & B) on which questions were asked. The reading skills tested in the IIA and IIB papers were largely similar as were the question formats. The difference was in the level of difficulty of the texts, the amount of reading required, and the level of reading skills required. The question formats in both papers included short answer questions, reference questions, true and false questions requiring candidates to give a reason for their answers, and eliciting the meaning of words or phrases. This format was very similar to the one adopted in previous years, with questions set to test a varied amount of skills including skimming, scanning, inference and vocabulary. The two texts in each paper varied in topic and in type thus allowing the examiners to achieve a more accurate picture of the candidates' reading abilities.

The markers of this part of the paper commented that both comprehension texts were well within the students' language competency and the topics discussed were particularly suited to the students' age group. Candidates mainly struggled in questions where they needed to provide other words in Italian for particular phrases (Paper A *Brano* 1, question 6, *Brano* 2 question 6), and where they had to answer questions which required knowledge and understanding of specific parts of the text (Paper A *Brano* 1, question 8). There was also difficulty in the questions which required summary skills (Paper A, *Brano* 2, question 7, Paper B, *Brano* 1, question 8). While most of the candidates attempted the question, many failed to mention all the points which summarized the text or did not use their own words while doing so. This emphasises the importance of reading and of creating a sound vocabulary base. In Paper B, candidates were not required to summarize the text but needed to read a series of phrases and put them in order according to the storyline. This proved to be a daunting task for the students which shows that there needs to be more emphasis on reading skills paired with understanding.

Writing tasks

The writing tasks set are as follows:

Paper A	Paper B
1 x 50 words	1 x 50 words
1 x 200 words approx.	1 x 150 words approx.

The tasks in Paper A are essay/short message titles which the candidates need to write about without any prompts. For Paper B, the writing tasks are guided and there is a clear outline of how the candidates can develop the task. Notwithstanding this fact, some candidates do not even attempt the tasks, write short paragraphs which contain more words in Maltese and English than Italian, and some even fail to understand the title and guidelines provided.

In Paper A, the candidates' effort in writing a coherent text is noticeable. Most candidates use punctuation marks well and divide their ideas in paragraphs. Some candidates tend to write well over the established number of words. Normally, however, candidates stay well within the parameters of the word count required.

There are some shortcomings with regard to fluency in writing. Many times the sentence structure needs changing and while some students clearly do revise their work and correct the texts, it is evident that many do not reread their work or make any changes. As regards tenses, unfortunately many seem to confuse present and past tenses in the same sentence.

In Paper B, on the other hand, the trend is that little or no punctuation is used, and the texts produced by the candidates are very often difficult to understand. Some texts do not have even a basic notion of continuity; they are a series of disjointed words on paper. Candidates need to make a greater effort when it comes to reading so that they can have better ideas, write more structured sentences and use punctuation marks as necessary.

Spelling mistakes are evident in both Paper A and Paper B work, however in the latter, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge are usually restricted. As already outlined in previous years, there is room for improvement.

6. Conclusion

A good number of candidates who sat for the examination reached the standards required. Performance is very similar to previous years, but it can be improved. There needs to be more emphasis on productive skills. It is evident that with regard to listening skills, the trend is for students to fare better than in the other skills required for language use. As regards writing and speaking skills, candidates need to make an extra effort by reading more in order to learn vocabulary and correct sentence structure.

*Chairperson
2014 Examination Panel*