

**UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE**

ITALIAN

MAY 2007

EXAMINERS' REPORT

**MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS
BOARD**

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1 STATISTICAL INFORMATION

Table 1a - 2006

	PAPERS 1 AND 2 A	PAPERS 1 AND 2 B	TOTAL
NO. OF APPLICANTS	1273	1521	2794
PRESENT FOR AT LEAST PART OF THE EXAMINATION	1263	1452	2715
ABSENT FOR ALL PARTS	10	69	79

Table 1b - 2007

	PAPERS 1 AND 2 A	PAPERS 1 AND 2 B	TOTAL
NO. OF APPLICANTS	1264	1396	2660
PRESENT FOR AT LEAST ONE PART OF THE EXAMINATION	1251	1316	2567
ABSENT FOR ALL PARTS	13	80	93

1.1 DISTRIBUTION OF GRADES

Table 2

	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	U	Absent
Candidates Paper A	119	284	402	152	122			172	13
Percentage of 1264	9.4	22.47	31.8	12	9.65			13.8	1
Percentage of 2660	4.47	10.67	15.11	5.7	4.6			6.46	0.5
Candidates Paper B				312	211	235	157	401	80
Percentage of 1396				22.35	15.11	16.8	11.25	28.7	5.7
Percentage of 2660				11.72	7.93	8.83	5.9	15.1	3
Papers A and B	119	284	402	464	333	235	157	573	93
Percentage of 2660	4.47	10.67	15.11	17.44	12.52	8.83	5.9	21.54	3.5

At a glance:

Table 3

	No. of candidates	Percentage of those who sat the examination, 2567	Percentage of those registered for the examination 2660
Grades 1, 2 and 3	805	31.36	30.26
Grades 4 and 5	797	31.05	29.96
Total Grades 1 - 5	1602	62.4	60.22
Grades 6 and 7	392	15.27	14.74
Total Grades 1 - 7	1994	77.7	75

These percentages are very similar to last year's. This year there were 13 more candidates achieving grades 1 – 3, but 80 fewer achieving grades 4 or 5. Those reaching a grade 6 or 7 level were also fewer by 40. This year, however, there were 134 fewer registrations than last year.

In 2005 the number of candidates who achieved Grades 1 to 5 was 1748; last year they were 1669 (79 less) and this year 1602 (yet another loss of 67). One can see an encouraging sign with the better candidates, but with the Grades 4 to 7 the downward trend is not being stemmed. One has also to add that this year's examination was considered by many teachers and candidates a very reasonable one.

1.2 ABSENCES – APPEALS UNHEEDED

Table 1 gives only a partial picture of the absences; it speaks only of those who were absent for all parts of the examination. As usual, absences for particular components of the examination, especially for the Oral are, despite our appeals year after year in our report, still alarming.

Table 4a. 2006 – Absences (Registered candidates 2794)

	ORAL	LISTENING COMPREHENSION	PAPER I PART 2 LANGUAGE USE	PAPER 2
PAPER A CANDIDATES - 1273	30	27	13	13
PAPER B CANDIDATES - 1521	171	126	93	96
TOTAL - 2794	201	153	106	109

Table 4b. 2007 – Absences (Registered candidates 2660)

	ORAL	LISTENING COMPREHENSION	PAPER I PART 2 LANGUAGE USE	PAPER 2
PAPER A CANDIDATES - 1264	36	34	17	18
PAPER B CANDIDATES - 1396	180	162	106	109
TOTAL - 2660	216	196	123	127

This is an **alarming** phenomenon indeed because even **with 134 fewer registrations, absences are still on the increase**. This situation warrants school-based studies into the reasons for the year on year increasing absences despite falling registrations. One need hardly say that in several cases renouncing to the 15 points of the Oral or the Listening Comprehension meant renouncing to a Grade; even a good one.

1.3 WRONG OPTION

Paper 2A: This seems to be a problem for which there is no solution. Again, year after year, we warn B students not to opt for the A paper because they do not have the required level. Notwithstanding the fewer registrations this time round registration for the A paper remained practically the same; the loss came from Paper B candidates. Yet, even a quick glance at the scores obtained in the various parts of the examination leaves no doubt that some 150 Paper A candidates should have opted for Paper B and another 50 should not have attempted the examination at all. Even if one can now obtain a Grade 5 by sitting the Paper A it is not wise to do so unless one is of the level expected to tackle the more challenging Writing and Reading Comprehension papers. Some 60 of these candidates might have not remained Unclassified had they opted for the less demanding Paper. Some of those awarded a Grade 5 could easily have got a Grade 4 by opting for the B Paper.

Paper 2B: Again, of those opting for Paper B, some 90 should have opted for A, and at least 5 of them stood a good chance of achieving even a Grade 1.

There were 39 fewer Grade 4 and 10 fewer Grade 5 compared to last year but there were 125 fewer registrations; the percentages were practically identical.

As in past years a considerable number of these candidates, this year 400, remained unclassified. Indeed nearly 300 of these candidates should not even have attempted this examination. If we add the 50 similar

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cases from Paper A we have 350 candidates (i.e. 13% of all registrations) who would have been wiser to prepare themselves better for other examinations.

We are convinced that schools do advise students on the choices they should make. It is sadly very apparent, however, that the message is not getting across clearly enough. Perhaps certain schools should revise or extend their services so as to reach parents more effectively.

2. COMMENTS ON THE CANDIDATES' PERFORMANCE

The general reaction of teachers and students to the examination this year was very positive. The slightly modified Ex 1 set in the Listening Comprehension was very well received and the great majority of students did very well in it. However, a slightly less long Language Use Paper (which also covered quite a broad spectrum of the syllabus) while permitting most Paper A students to score high points was generally on the difficult side for Paper B students

In the opinion of the markers however – and each candidate was marked by five markers some of whom very experienced – the level of proficiency demonstrated by the candidates was, like last year's, not very encouraging. While we are conscious that there are quite a few candidates who have not studied Italian at school, the number of candidates whose Italian is just 'survival' must include quite a few who have followed a five-year course; and we find this unacceptable.

We feel we have to repeat, word for word, what we said last year: yet still more shocking than the level of Italian was the level of many candidates' **thinking skills**. This lack was not evident only, as one would expect, in the Listening and Reading Comprehensions but also in the Language Use paper and in the Writing tasks. This is not, of course, a responsibility limited to teachers of Italian, but it is their responsibility too. Students should be involved in problem solving in every lesson. Thinking skills are more useful to life than Italian is, and good thinking skills help to learn Italian faster and better.

Table 5 – Performance in Papers 1 and 2

	PAPER 1 (out of 50)				PAPER 2 (out of 50)			
	Mean	Median	Mode	Highest	Mean	Median	Mode	Highest
A candidates	32.75	33.5	38	50/50	28.3	29.5	33.5	47/50
B candidates	20.2	20	18	42.5/50	19.85	20	18	45/50

Paper 1: Paper A candidates - 222 (17.5%) scored 40 (on 50) or more; 34 scored 15 or less.
 1079 (85%) cleared the halfway line.
 Paper B candidates - 7 scored 40 or more; 408 (29%) reached the half-way mark and 62 scored less than 6.

Paper 2: Paper A candidates - 71 scored 40 or more; 91 scored 15 or less.
 840 (66.5%) cleared the half-way mark.
 Paper B candidates - 10 scored 40 or more; 423 (30%) cleared the half-way mark and 406 scored 15 or less.

Some markers, especially of the team marking the Language Use paper, remarked that they suspected that quite a few of the candidates had never been coached in examination skills through past SEC Italian papers; some candidates had no idea what was expected of them.

2.1 THE ORAL – 15 POINTS

2.1.1 Statistics

Highest mark for both A and B candidates: 15. Lowest: 1, for A, and 0 for B.

'A' Candidates: More than 1000 scored 50% of the marks. Mean 9.7, Median 10, Mode 10.

'B' Candidates: 517 passed the half-way mark. (The B candidates who obtained a Grade 4 or 5 was very close to this figure: 523). Mean 7, Median 7, Mode 7.

Absences of B candidates: Of the 1396 who registered, 180 (13%, almost 1 out of every 8) did not present themselves for this part of the examination. We wish to discover the reason for this 'unreasonable' behaviour. Is it 'fear' or shyness? Could these be due to lack of practice in class? Is it lack of information that the majority of candidates achieve a better score in the Oral than in the other parts of the examination?

There were, however, 260 candidates (21% of those taking the test) who scored only 4 points or less. We do not think we need comment on these.

2.1.2 Comments made by the examiners:

They were mostly identical to last year's, so they are reiterated below.

2.1.2.1 Extended speech - The book

The three most encouraging features this time were that:

- a) the vast majority of the candidates had actually read at least one of the suggested readers,
- b) the range of titles has widened, and
- c) the number of candidates who were not ashamed to talk about *Cappuccetto rosso*, *Hansel e Gretel*, *Biancaneve* and the like, has dwindled. Unfortunately, it has not disappeared. One hopes this will happen by next year. The same is true of candidates who chose to speak about a book they had read in English; this was certainly not the aim of the syllabus writers.

We were again disappointed to see that some schools are still preparing their students on a single book, the same for all. The 'examination mentality' still makes some people, regrettably even some teachers, fail to see the wood for the trees. When asked why they had chosen that particular book, these candidates said that it was not they who had chosen it but the teacher. Some went further: they said that they did not even like the book. Again one hopes that by next year more people will begin to be convinced of the benefits of wider reading.

Yet again, examiners were surprised, unpleasantly so, at the number of students who came for the examination with a passage learned by heart and who ran into great difficulties the minute they were interrupted and asked to speak about a specific aspect of the book. We see no benefit in students learning such speeches; indeed, we would like them to go beyond repeating the story line and give opinions on what they have read and possibly make comparisons with other books.

Contrary to what one should expect this is not the part of the Oral in which candidates performed best; they have a full nine months (Summer holidays following Form 4 included) to prepare themselves for this task. Judging by the **narrow range of vocabulary** at their disposal one would say that most students had probably read just that book, and nothing else. We think that some teachers and some schools can do more about this.

2.1.2.2 Role Play

It might come as a surprise to several that most candidates were more confident and did better in the role play than in talking about a book. We are of course not referring to those who are apparently still receiving insufficient coaching in role playing. It is usually these candidates who still try to memorize the prompts. What was said last year bears repeating: there is no need to memorize anything; **this is not a memory test**. The examiners will help out even if the students do not see the coherence in the prompts they are given. And if this help is not immediately forthcoming the candidates can, and should, ask for it. If they do, it reflects well on their linguistic abilities (unless, of course, this is done continuously). Notwithstanding this assurance, some of the candidates who got blocked felt embarrassed when the examiner gave them cues on how to continue. They felt that they had done something wrong.

A major shortcoming in this interactive task is that most candidates are not able to use the *Tu* and *Lei* forms correctly and consistently.

2.1.2.3 Free Conversation

What we have just said about the use of the familiar and polite form of address was, obviously, very evident here as well. It was also noticeable in the written task set in the Language Use Paper. Also still true is what we said last year about students being afraid, or to ask for the meaning of a word they do not understand. No one seems to have told these students that asking for an explanation or clarification is a natural, and necessary, feature of conversation and reflects linguistic flexibility.

This part of the Oral examination tests vocabulary in certain semantic areas and the use of various tenses. A common pitfall is not listening carefully and not noting the tense the examiner is using, or is expecting the candidates to use. Most candidates are confident only with the present tense and the *passato prossimo* (but here many confuse the auxiliary verb and the agreement with the subject; obviously more problematic still is the agreement with preceding pronouns).

Mastering the correct form of address and the correct tenses does not come through grammar exercises but through **frequent practice** in free conversation and role-play. Indisputably, the skills our students will need most all their lives are listening and speaking.

2.2 LISTENING COMPREHENSION – 15 POINTS

2.2.1 Statistics

Paper A candidates: sitting 1230

Exercise 1 (5 points): Mean 4.4. Almost 800 scored full points and another 250, 4; only 50 scored 2 or less.

Exercise 2 (10 points): Mean 6.8. 19 scored full points, 51 scored 9.5 and another 84 scored 9.

Still there were 173 who scored less than 5. No candidate for Paper A should score less than 6 in this common Paper; hence our remark that some 200 of these 1230 candidates made the wrong choice.

Overall: Mean 11.2. 1143 scored 7.5 or more, but no A candidate should score less than 9 (on 15) in this part; and 189 scored less. 14 scored full points, 38 scored 14.5 and 70 scored 14. 13 students scored 4 or less.

Paper B candidates: sitting 1234

Exercise 1 (5 points): Mean 3.8. Over 500 scored full points and another 240, 4; only 214 scored 2 or less.

Exercise 2 (10 points): Mean 4.1. Only 1 scored full points; 8 scored 9.5 and 19 scored 9. 500 scored 5 or more. But there were nearly 400 who scored 2.5 or less; of these more than 100 scored 0.5 or a 0!

Overall: Mean 7.9, which is quite satisfactory. 170 achieved 4 or less. Nearly 750 passed the half-way mark. (N.B. Only 523 achieved Grades 4/5! Why then do so many students stay away from this test?)

We will again repeat that the skill of listening and understanding is the one on which everything else hinges. It is particularly important for the lower ability classes and for the less motivated students. Testing Listening skills well can even be enjoyable; though it is not easy. On the other hand, **teaching** and **developing** Listening Comprehension skills is much more difficult, and teachers should strive continually to improve their skills through professional reading and practice.

2.2.2 Comments submitted by markers:

2.2.2.1 Ex 1. Matching short texts with titles

As the statistics show, this introductory item was quite easy. The common pitfalls were:

- i) not being careful enough to avoid the distracters;
- ii) not understanding the humour, or the irony, of the title. Several students do not even seem to know the meaning of *ironia*.

2.2.2.2 The longer text

This was naturally a more demanding exercise, which besides good comprehension skills required also the ability to take down very short notes quickly.

- The markers note that many students are still poor at this latter skill. Some write down such lengthy notes on Section A that they leave no space to write anything on Section B.
- Many others write notes which they absolutely do not need. This shows that they have not read the questions carefully and are not scanning the passage for the parts they need.
- As usual, **numbers** were a stumbling block for too many. Incredible, but some students still do not understand '*in cifre*'. We do not learn numbers to do our Arithmetic homework. In teaching Italian, or any language, one cannot divorce the language from life; and mathematical calculations are a continuous, and important, part of life.
- The questions on every passage are meant to test various subskills. There are always, for example, easy referential questions, questions of medium difficulty on cohesion and coherence, and questions requiring higher order skills like inferencing. These latter ones are always a stumbling block. Not that the questions are terribly difficult and above the ability of the 'average' student. (E.g. Many could not answer correctly what "*Chiudendo la porta di casa*" or "*pareti di carta*" meant in one of the passages). Students should always be encouraged, and challenged, to think while they are listening and reading. Exposure to jokes and cartoons would be an effective way to make them think.
- A widespread inability to be accurate and focused in one's answers, giving long answers with loads of waffle in the false hope that it includes the correct answer, or telegraphic ones which do not convey the meaning they are supposed to convey, were all too common. If candidates believe they can get points for this, they are mistaken. These are signs of minds not disciplined in their thinking.

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- Candidates are specifically asked to answer “**in their own words**” and yet many, Paper B candidates especially, quote the text word for word, showing that they have not really understood the text. Again, this strategy will not win them marks.
- Too many candidates, and not only Paper B ones, have difficulty deducing meaning from context; cases in point were *spazzatura, bellico, cicca, docenti, aldilà, etc.*
- An unholy hurry to finish and get it over with, or an inability to read questions properly was evident. Examples of these are: questions answered in part, or with information that is only marginally relevant; students are given a multiple choice question and asked to select the **two** correct answers but they indicate only one; then they are asked to answer either a) or b) and they answer both.
- And once more, candidates give answers which come from their knowledge of the world and not from the passage they have listened to.

Those who read past Reports will know that we have been pointing out these shortcomings for years. Yet, we cannot but keep repeating them, even because most of them hold true also for the Reading Comprehension part. Perhaps there are still teachers, and we are not referring only to Form 5 ones, who still do not read these Reports.

2.3 PAPER 1 PART 2 (LANGUAGE USE) – 20 POINTS

2.3.1 Statistics

Paper A candidates: sitting 1247. Absent 17.

Maximum points scored 20 on 20; lowest 1.

Mean -12.2; Median - 12.5, Mode - 14.

302 (24%) of the candidates scored 15 or more.

Nearly 1000 (77%) candidates scored 10 points or more; 125 scored less than 8.

Paper B candidates: sitting 1280. Absent 106.

Maximum points scored 17.5 on 20; lowest 0.

Mean - 6.4; Median - 6.4; Mode – 5 (Very low).

Only 5 candidates scored 15 or more; and nearly 500 (39%) scored 5 or less.

2.3.2 Comments submitted by Markers

General comment: All the markers, not only those marking this Paper, stressed the candidates' restricted vocabulary. Several students were unable to understand even simple rubrics, notwithstanding the examples given for nearly all the exercises.

Es.1 Vocabulary (recognition). Very good response by A candidates, much less so by B ones. Most of the latter candidates need some coaching in how to approach this type of exercise. They must be told, for instance, that it is not necessary to understand all the words given. The odd word stands out like a sore thumb even if you understand only two other words. Difficulty in answering this question no doubt indicates also a very restricted vocabulary.

- Es.2 Vocabulary (production).** Some students did not understand what was required of them and, for example, instead of adding the name of another fruit they wrote the hypernym '*Frutti*', or instead of another colour they wrote '*colori*'. Clearly they had never done an exercise of this sort. Great difficulty was experienced in producing *carcere*, and in some way this could be expected; not at all expected though was the fact that many could not produce *coltello*. Besides the abundant bad spelling, e.g. *spinache*, *carrotte*, *cortello*, quite a few suggested *sicchina*, but even *spada* and *pugnale*; or *charfosa* when they could have said *cipolle*, *carote*, *zucchine*, all basic words.
- A minor point but worth noting because it indicates lack of discipline of mind: the candidates were given a list of nouns in the plural form, but very many answered with a singular. Such mistakes are not penalized, but students need to be trained to be more precise.
- Es. 3 Vocabulary (recognition)** this time with distracters which asked candidates to make a careful choice. This was an easy exercise for A candidates, and was answered quite well even by B ones. The most common difficulty was with *riconoscibile*.
- Es.4 Vocabulary (Word formation):** Was quite easy for A candidates, quite difficult for B ones. The latter could only manage the 3 adverbs ending in *mente*, sometimes even spelt *mento*. Only a few realized that in the case of *seguire* they had to make the agreement *seguite*, not *seguiti*. Again, many answered *partecipante* instead of *partecipanti*, and *definizione*, instead of *definizioni*.
- Es.5 Vocabulary (recognition).** Choosing a more precise verb than *dare*, *dire* and *fare*. 'A' candidates performed very well, and 'B' ones quite well. Still, some wrote the verbs they had to substitute in front of the correct verb; others formed words from the verbs given, e.g. *presto* from *prestare* and *donato* from *donare*.
- Es. 6 Prepositions.** This exercise was problematic for most candidates. Teachers would do well to repeat this exercise with their classes to discover the real reasons for this rather poor performance.
- Es. 7 Tu – Lei.** Again a very disappointing performance by both A and B candidates. Several candidates did not even understand the rubric and copied the whole passage. Again, this is not penalized; but it says something worth noting. Some even used the *voi* despite the fact that it was clearly stated that they had to transform from *tu* to *lei*. Many 'A' candidates got the *gliel'ha* and the *gliene* wrong. Most of the B candidates could only manage the four easy ones: *deve*, *Lei*, and the two *sua*
- Es. 8 Discorso Indiretto.** Notwithstanding the fact that the exercise was presented in such a way that the candidates did not have to realize for themselves what to change – this was provided – it still proved to be rather difficult even for the A candidates. Quite a few 'B' candidates did not even understand what was required of them, even though at least 2 of the 5 gaps should have been easy for the majority; unfortunately, they were not.
- Es 9. Correct use of tenses.** This is definitely not an exercise for the less able candidates; even though there are always at least three gaps within their easy reach out of the ten. Strangely enough quite a few of the B candidates conjugated all the verbs in the first person singular (presumably because the first gap, given as an example, was in the first person singular). Of course this meant that they did not understand the text and seemed to have slipped into a grammar-exercise mode. The difficulty in this exercise lies not only in being able to conjugate the verbs but to realize in each case which is the appropriate tense in the context. Only the better students can do well in this exercise. Other students should be coached to leave this to the end, and tackle the easier exercises first. However, most of the A candidates, did quite well.

Es. 10. Jumbled up sentences. 'A' candidates did very well though quite a few got (iii) wrong; not as wrong, however, as that 'B candidate' who said that it was la nipote (not la camera) who was ben arredata. This is a very useful exercise because it trains students to couple articles with nouns, nouns with adjectives, subjects with verbs, etc.

Es.11 Joining sentences. Year after year we keep setting this exercise, year after year we repeat that students do very badly in it, and yet we never see any real progress. We will not report about those students who join all sentences with allora, così, ma, perché when the rubric expressly prohibits them; we remark about those many others who have never heard of anche se, siccome, those who do not know what the gerund is, those who do not distinguish between quando and mentre, those, in brief, for whom there are no other ways of joining sentences except the ones ruled out by the rubric. Only a handful could say Né Tia né Luca vogliono studiare chimica. This lack of ability shows up again in the writing tasks; not so much in actual faulty connection of sentences as through obvious avoidance strategies.

Es. 12 Parts of speech. This was an easy exercise in which the majority did well, or very well.

Es. 13 Editing. We thought we had set an easy exercise; it was not so easy for 'A' candidates and very difficult for the B ones. And yet at least 6 of the 10 errors candidates had to correct were very elementary ones: plurals (le automobili, regole) spelling (è, può, fresca; slightly more difficult were parcheggiate, and appoggiamo) and the article (gli alberi).

Why do we ask students to revise they work carefully if they cannot do this kind of editing on their work? It is a skill that every student must develop; but it has to be taught. As usual, quite a few corrected what needed no correction; others spotted the error but did not know how to correct it or to spell it (e.g. bisogna, melio, melgio, etc). Others did not know what they had to do and, interestingly, because we had similar cases last year, wrote numbers (!) instead of words, as answers.

Es. 14 Gapped text. This time round the gaps were only 10 instead of the usual 20 and 'A' candidates found the exercise easy; not so the B ones. In fact quite a few of the latter did not even attempt it. They did not even try to fit in the 3 words given.

2.4 WRITING (5 + 20 = 25)

2.4.1 Statistics: very close to last year's but showing a slight improvement.

Paper A candidates: sitting 1246. Absent 18.

Messaggio: Average 3.1 Highest score 5; lowest 0. Some 1000 scored 2.5 or more; and 78 scored 4.5 or 4; 83 scored 1.5 or less.

Rapporto: Average 11.26 Highest score 19.5. Lowest score 0.5. Only 846 scored 10 or more; of these 117 scored 16 or more; 48 scored 5 or less.

Overall: Average 14.4 Highest mark 24.5; Lowest 0.5. 860 scored 12.5 or more. 90 scored 8 or less.

Paper B candidates: sitting 1287, absent 109.

Messaggio: Average 2.3 Highest score 5; lowest 0. 609 scored 2.5 or more; those scoring 1 or less were 238 (of these 42 either did not attempt this task or scored no points!).

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Rapporto:	Average 7.5	Highest score 18. Lowest score 0. Only 369 scored 10 or more; of these 17 scored 16 or more; 362 scored 5 or less (of whom 54 either did not attempt the task or scored no points).
Overall:	Average 9.8	Highest mark 22.5; Lowest 0. Only 400 scored 12.5 or more (of these 105 scored 17.5 (i.e. 70% of the marks) or more. Then there were 311 who scored 6 or less (of these, 57 scored 1 or less).

2.4.2 Comments by Markers

- **Presentation** This time we will put this item at the head of the list - not because it is the most important point, but because it is often neglected. Many candidates have a handwriting, which if not untidy or illegible, is hard to decipher; that of not a few others is 'simply terrible'. Careless and even dirty presentations were not at all uncommon. Teachers should stress that a first judgement of a person is often made on these two aspects; this to some might seem of scarce importance. Let us remind one and all that the syllabus states that "Answers in hardly legible handwriting shall be ignored".
- **Spelling** mistakes are still rampant. It looks as if teachers have given up on this. Spelling not being terribly difficult in Italian, teachers should feel they have failed their classes if at the end of the year their students are still making more than one spelling mistake per line. The Communicative Approach does not mean 'spelling does not matter'. Accents *e* and *è*, *puo/ pò for può*, *ho* and *o*, the 'ch', the inversion of 'uo' (*scoula, voule, nouvo*), which is just a question of correct pronunciation, the double consonants, do not need superhuman intelligence to correct. Why should sixteen year olds write *quatro, quinque, dicasete, majjo* (maggio), etc. after five years of Italian? Should teachers not feel responsible for this? Is it just that so many students are impermeable to excellent teaching?
- **Punctuation** is another sore point. Teachers should make it one of their objectives that ALL their students can use the full stop and the comma. One might say that we have really touched the bottom by making this appeal but even at this level we still get a number of compositions without a single full stop or comma. Who will teach, or when will the students leaving school now learn, to use these two marks? We are perfectly aware this is not a task for teachers of Italian only, but it is also their task.
- **Organisation** of writing. Not many plans were seen on the candidates' scripts, even though there is ample space, not only for a plan but also for a rough copy of both tasks on the examination paper. This is indeed a pity. And then one can see at least 20% of the candidates, including better achievers, leaving the examination hall after just one hour when they a full 2 hours to complete the 4 tasks. So it was a pleasure every now and then to come across a spidergram or a simple *scaletta*.

One is hardly surprised then to find a glaring lack of organisation of ideas and of coherence. One could very well write a *Rapporto* which does not require paragraphs; but then most of the *Rapporti* submitted did. More so the articles submitted.

- **Vocabulary** was found to be quite restricted, not only by the markers of this component of the examination, and not only among Paper B candidates, but for the vast majority. It seems that the drive to make students read several readers suited to their abilities is not gaining ground. Reading would also no doubt even help in correcting bad spelling and improving sentence construction. So this it is a real pity to note no improvement in this respect.
- **Grammar.** The many grammar errors committed by a considerable number of the candidates, again not just Paper B candidates, often hampered or even blocked communication. This was most apparent in the *Rapporto*.

- Many of the errors, which did not hamper communication, were of a very basic nature: the article (we do not mean only errors of the type *i studenti*, but simpler ones like *i personi*) very common prepositions (*sulla televisione, sul telefono, parlare su, pensare su* – one has to highlight these interferences repeatedly in order to correct them). It was disappointing to see most students writing *Mi scusi* to a friend and not *Scusami*. In giving instructions, many used the Imperative wrongly.

The **more common errors noted** were: incorrect use of tenses, particularly in the sequence of tenses; errors in the agreement between adjectives and nouns or that between composite verbs with their subject; indirect pronouns (*le, gli*); auxiliary and reflexive verbs.

- **Writing skills** are still quite basic. This can be seen from the many, useless and irritating repetitions and the very, very limited cohesive devices used. Students know they can make fewer mistakes by avoiding certain structures, but then their writing becomes monotonous and terribly boring; even with many Paper A candidates. We need hardly remark in this context that the *congiuntivo*, the *periodo ipotetico*, and the *gerund* are nearly extinct species.
- **Understanding and following the rubric.** Some, though not most, students still do not read the rubric well. For example, the *messaggio* asked for 4 things; many candidates gave only 2 of these. Of course their task was considered 'incomplete'. Quite a few did not even understand that their friend was still in Italy. Others did not respect the instructions given regarding the minimum and the maximum number of words to be written; all paid a price for not following the rubric.

As for the 'Rapporto' it was evident that several candidates had never written one and do not know what it should look like and contain: they included details which were absolutely irrelevant and then they forget to add those very things one wanted to read. Some wrote the report as if they were actually speaking to the investigating officer; e.g. *Quando siete arrivati voi i ladri erano già scappati. Siete arrivati tardi come sempre.*

The diario was generally better executed (one could, though, do worse than leave out that *Sempre tuo* at the end.) than the article, in which many lost sight of their audience. However, many candidates still wrote their diary page as if it were a letter, or narrated a fictitious event, probably straight out of a film. This task asked for narrative element which proved quite difficult for several.

- **Dependence on the traccia.** Too many students still think they can simply copy the *traccia* offered adding precious little of their own. Need we say that it is only the value-added that matters?
- **Creativity and Being up-to-date.** We did not expect much, but we got even less. So much so that we may quote as quite original the student who had to apologize for having offended a friend and ended up blaming him. But then one can hardly appreciate the creativity of *bordo delle note* (have you guessed it? It's the noticeboard), *dessanduto, engognare* (to enjoy), *forgetto, gambetta, garare, imbottato, madumi, panicare, praspure, riccosi, sparatura, tombato, ecc.* Some students became very creative when describing the thieves: in the dead of night they could see the colour of their eyes and the tattoos they had on the left and right arms.

Of those candidates who chose to write about a news item which had had a strong effect on them (Paper B) it was disappointing to discover that there was very little variety: most chose to speak of the Twin Towers tragedy; memorable indeed, but one which goes back quite some years for these 15, 16-year olds. A. More probably it shows a lack of exposure to current events, both local and foreign. However, several candidates did quite well; probably because they had done this task at school. To some this might be consolation enough.

2.5 READING COMPREHENSION (PAPER A 10 + 10 + 5 – PAPER B 13 + 12)

2.5.1 Statistics

Paper A candidates. Sitting: 1246. Absent 18

Testo 1: **Dalla lira all'euro** The 5 marks for the riassunto are included with the marks for this comprehension.
Highest mark 14 (out of 15); Mean 7.4 (quite low, in part due to summary); Lowest mark 0. Only 745 (not quite 60%) scored 7.5 or more (strong enough evidence of lack of reading). Results are poorer than last year's. 259 candidates scored 5 or less! And these opted for Paper A!

Testo 2: **Eroi in calzoncini**

Highest mark 10 on 10; Mean 6.15 (better than in the first text but still rather low; 349 (27.5%) scored 8 or more; 922 (73%) scored 5 or more; 162 (nearly 13%) scored 3 or less. Very similar to last year's results.

Overall: Mean 13.9 (equals 55.6 out of 100), which is rather low for Paper A candidates. Highest mark 23 (out of 25). Lowest mark 0.5. Only 832 (66%; 10% lower than last year) reached the half-way mark; of these 103 (8%) scored 20 or more.

Paper B candidates: sitting 1287, absent 109.

Testo 1: **I nostri nuovi eroi** (12 points)

Highest mark: 12; lowest 0; Mean 5.3
587 candidates (42%) reached the half-way mark.
261 (18.7%) scored 2 or less, of these 54 were 0s.

Testo 2: **Studiare costa** (13 points)

Highest mark 12.5; lowest 0 Mean 4.8
Only 376 (27%) reached the half-way mark.
389 scored 3 points or less; of these 51 were 0's.

Overall: Highest mark 24 (out of 25); 27 candidates scored 20 marks or more
Mean 10. Lowest mark 0 (51 of these).
465 (33%) reached the half-way mark; 346 scored 6 or less.
Results very similar to, but slightly lower than, last year's.

2.5.2 Comments by Markers

As we said above, at least 20% of the candidates left the examination hall after just one hour (they had already completed the four tasks: *messaggio*, *rapporto/articolo* and 2 comprehension tests); and we keep repeating that many do not plan their writing tasks, not even superficially, and many others do not read half-carefully enough neither the passages nor the questions.

Most of what was said in 2.2. Listening Comprehension holds good here too, for example, reading the question well, answering to the point, without being incomplete or even telegraphic to the point of being unintelligible, or annoying with useless waffle.

Paper 2A

Even in the ability to understand written Italian, students varied from the excellent to those so poor that they did not even have a clue what the texts were about. Many, however, need to improve their reading skills; a Paper A candidate should have found no difficulty explaining, or working out from context, the meaning of *cifre*, *spietati*, *la cara estinta* (explained in a footnote), etc. It was obvious to both markers of this section that several students' reading is far from satisfactory.

In the first text, some candidates thought the author was speaking about Malta! Others thought that the boy mentioned in the first paragraph of the second text was the author himself, others that the author was John Wayne.

Lack of focus, is another thing we keep pointing out year after year. For example Test 1, Q1. The answer "The change from the lira to the euro" is not exact; it should be that "People have by now gave got used to that change".

Testo 1, Q.6 was something of a problem for many; which is a real pity.

6a needed a careful reading of the text, and these texts are meant for intensive reading, and a very careful answer.

6b just needed the answer $200 \div 10 = 20$, and yet many did exactly what the text told them not to do, i.e. $40000 \div 2 = 20000$, meno 3 zeri = 20 euro (a much more complex calculation; the very reason why the author find it ridiculous).

We repeat, language must not be separated from the realities of life, and everybody does mathematical calculations many times every day.

Testo 2. Many gave an incorrect answer to a simple question like no.4 and the not too difficult no.8; and earned only half a mark for no.10 because they explained only one word of the title.

Heartfelt thanks go to those candidates who cheered our endless hours on these scripts with answers like: *Perché l'autore usa 'sarà'? = È sua sorella*; *Spiega "Eroi in calzoncini" = un bambino è guarito da solo con un calzoncino, mordeva i calzoncini e non emetteva neanche un suono*; *Chi sono i nuovi eroi = Gli eroi sono l'olio, e in calzoncini perché lo fanno sui piedi*".

The summaries (the two passages were chosen by practically equal numbers) were generally quite well done, in some cases even excellently done; but we still find others who simply invent things in no way related to the passage, and others who, regardless of the rubric, just write as many words as they like. The instructions are clear and markers adhere to them. Quite a few, on the other hand, have no clue what a summary is.

Paper 2 B

What was said above for Paper A candidates *a fortiori* holds for those of Paper B.

In the **first text** many candidates thought the author was being ironic and the heroes became the *impiegati sfaccendati*, others even fished out Napoleon and Leonardo da Vinci; Having for some reason taken the author to be ironic it was obvious that these candidates would find Q.10 and 12, which looked for gist, problematic.

In this text, many took off on the wrong foot: they thought the *ginnasio* (Q.1) is a gym; apart from the fact that this institution is part of Italian culture, the word could easily be understood from the context. Intriguing was the answer of that student who said that it meant *un posto dove vanno gli amanti per sposarsi*.

To the easy Q3 several, strangely enough, answered *altra* instead of *alta*. Many wrong answers were encountered in Q4 which required candidates to look for synonyms from the passage. Lack of focus was evident in the answers to Q.6: instead of saying 'why' several candidates gave examples. In Q7 more than a few said that *diffuso* means *non comune*, others just said *molto* or *tanto*.

In the **second text** many again began on the wrong foot getting a quite easy Q1 wrong; they answered *Cercare un miliardario* or *vanno a lavorare* (not mentioned in the text!).

Lack of focus or of mental discipline in answering is often accompanied by distressing ignorance of grammar; e.g. *Cosa vuol dire 'miliardario'?* Answer *"Uno che aveva molti soldi"*.

Few got Q4 and Q.5 correct. The answer to the former was not "deve pagargli gli studi" or "sborsare un minimo di centomila dollari"; it was to be found in the footnote; it required careful, intensive reading. Q.5 was inferential; always a stumbling block for most students. In fact, many candidates did not even attempt

these two questions. To Q.6 very many did not give the answer *in cifre* and of those who did, several gave the wrong answer: 2012. Only a handful got *Ci* (Q.12) right. To many it meant *noi*.

Candidates are improving in their ability to tell who is the subject of a certain verb (Q.7); many, however, still do not know that in this kind of question they cannot answer that the subject of *gli* is *a lui*, or *a loro*; and several others have still to learn that the subject is usually a word to be picked up from the text, usually in the same line or the one above.

Also heartening is seeing that many candidates are able to identify discourse markers.

Teachers should also explain clearly to their students when they should answer in their own words and when it is enough, indeed it is expected, (e.g. *Riporta dal testo*), to copy from the text,

2.6 CONCLUSION

We close by repeating the invitation to teachers of Italian to express an honest opinion on the level of this examination. If they think it was difficult we invite them to write to Matsec about it pointing out which were these difficulties. It is the only way forward to gaining an understanding of what perception the various stakeholders have of the desired level. We do not believe this examination was a difficult one for candidates who have followed a 5-year course; what has become more difficult is teaching Italian if students never watch Italian TV. This does make teaching Italian a difficult task; as teaching all foreign languages is. The remarks made in this report are intended to help teachers face the new difficulties. It is hoped that teachers rather than trying to solve their problems on their own, will chose to pool resources and ideas with their colleagues, including those in other schools.

Chairperson
Italian

1 July 2007