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EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
EXAMINATIONS BOARD

**SEC English Language
MAY 2007 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT**

1.0 General Information and Statistics

1.1 Statistical Information

1.2 Note on absences

2.0 Comments on candidates' performance

- 2.1 Paper 1 Part 1 (a) Listening Comprehension**
- 2.2 Paper 1 Part 1 (b) Speaking using Picture Prompts**
- Paper 1 Part 1 (c) Speaking using a Role Play**
- 2.3 Paper 1 Part 2 Language Use**
- 2.4 Paper 2 Writing**
- 2.5 Paper 2 Reading Comprehension**

2.6 Conclusion

1. General information and statistics

This report assumes that the readers are familiar with the English Language SEC 2007 Syllabus and format of the paper. The components and weighting are the following:

- 10%: Speaking Skills
- 15%: Listening Comprehension
- 25%: Language Use
- 25%: Reading Comprehension Skills
- 25%: Writing Skills (20% Writing Task, 5% Shorter Writing Task)

1.1 Statistical Information

The number of candidates for the SEC English Language examination was more or less the same as last year's. However, there was a marginal fall from that of 2005. In May 2005 there were 6229 applicants. Last year there were 6004 candidates (219 less than 2005) whilst this year there were 6006 candidates. Of these, 2920 (49%) opted for Paper IIA and 3086 (51%) for Paper IIB. This marks a difference to last year's balance when 47% of the applicants opted for Paper IIA and 53% chose Paper IIB. This increase is even more evident when compared with the balance for 2005, where 44% opted for Paper IIA and 56% chose IIB.

For the fourth consecutive year there are more applicants for Paper IIA. The reason appears to be the inclusion in 2003 of another pass grade, Grade 5, for the A paper.

Table 1: Percentage of candidates choosing A and B papers

YEAR	PAPER A	PAPER B
2007	49%	51%
2006	47%	53%
2005	44%	56%
2004	44%	56%
2003	34%	66%

This swing towards Paper A continues to be worrying as this year 258, that is a good 9% of candidates taking the A paper, got an Unclassified mark. Of these, 182 could have been awarded Grade 6 or Grade 7 had they opted for the B paper. Again, among the B candidates there is more to worry about. Out of 3086, who took the examination, 880 (29%) did not make it to Grade 7 and remained Unclassified. Of these 281 (9%) scored less than 25 marks overall.

The two issues pointed out in last year's report remain, namely that there is a sizeable group of students who should not have opted for the A paper and a large group who should not have taken the examination at all as they were not ready for it.

Table 2: Distribution of grades

Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	Abs	Total
IIA	216	661	718	533	508	--	--	258	26	2920
%	7.4%	22.6%	24.6%	18.3%	17.4%			8.8%	0.9	
IIB	--	--	--	273	543	591	676	880	123	3086
%				8.8%	17.6%	19.1%	21.93%	28.5%	4.0%	
Total	216	661	718	806	1051	591	676	1138	149	6006
%	3.6%	11%	11.6%	13.4%	17.5%	9.8%	11.3%	19%	2.5%	

1.2 Absences

Only 26 (0.9%) out of the 2920 IIA candidates absented themselves from all examination papers. This is a marked contrast with 123 (4%) IIB candidates who did not show up for any part of the examination. The latter is the same percentage as in last year's examination.

This year 42 IIA candidates missed both oral and listening parts of the examination. This is a marked increase over last year's 7 candidates. There were 248 IIB candidates who missed both oral and listening parts. These candidates effectively forfeited 25% of the total marks. One must reiterate last year's comment that it is highly improbable that these lost marks can be compensated for on the other parts of the examination. One cannot but stress the importance of Speaking and Listening skills which should be given their due in the preparation of students for this examination.

2. Comments on the candidates' performance

The recommendations and comments made in this report are aimed at all teachers of English in Secondary Schools and not just at teachers of Form Five, as the latter cannot possibly achieve results without the proper groundwork of the previous years.

2.1 Paper 1 Part 1 (a) Listening Comprehension

In this part of the examination candidates listen to two texts and answer questions based on the texts. 15% of the total marks were allotted to the testing of listening skills and the two texts were weighted equally. The texts dealt with two different semantic areas but in the two sets of texts used there was thematic continuity. The first set consisted of the reading of a page from a diary of a boy or girl evacuees from London during World War II. The second set of texts consisted of the transcript of a speech of a tour leader welcoming a group of tourists to London, giving them information about the particular area of London they were about to visit.

There was a very evident difference between the performance of candidates sitting for the A and B papers. A good 88% of Paper A candidates scored more than a total of 15 (out of 30) marks and it was not uncommon to come across very high marks (27-30). Only 35% of Paper B candidates managed to score 15 marks and over, and one often came across very low marks (0-3).

The questions asked assessed a number of enabling skills including listening for detail, listening for gist, working out the meaning from context, and inferencing. Thus, the testing of the ability to comprehend at word level, at sentence level and at a general level was ensured.

The format of the questions was varied and included the following:

- Grid filling
- Selecting words
- Responding to True and False questions and giving a reason
- Reference questions

The grid filling exercise differentiated among students' abilities. The exercise where candidates had to indicate whether a statement was True or False and give a reason proved the most challenging because of the two-step thinking process. Some candidates found it difficult to substantiate their answer from what they had heard. Selecting and listing information (Exs. 3 Text B) was also found to be challenging.

2.1 The Oral

Oral skills were weighted at 10% and the test consisted of a role play and a conversation prompted, this year also, by one picture. 91% of Paper A candidates obtained a pass-mark in the Oral compared to 61% of the Paper B candidates.

This part of the examination is conducted by a separate set of examiners. During the briefing session the examiners were familiarized with the format and rationale of the speaking test.

2.2.1 Paper 1 Part 1 (b) Speaking using a Picture Prompt

Candidates were shown a picture intended to visually prompt them and activate their schematic knowledge. By looking at the pictures candidates are led to the semantic area they will be asked to talk about. A few of the examination questions relate to the picture itself, other questions are general and arise from the picture. Examples this year included, among others, a restaurant scene, leisure, going on holiday, places of entertainment and others.

Candidates are more at ease with the picture prompt when compared to the role play. This results perhaps because the picture involves no reading and is easy to comprehend.

2.2.1 Paper 1 Part 1 (b) Speaking using a Role Play

This year a different form of role play was used. The prompts were provided by the examiner's statements. The candidate had to respond by asking a question. Different question structures – open ended, wh-questions, question tags – were expected. Many candidates did not find it difficult to understand what they had to do, however, question structures used were often incorrect. Very few came up with the correct form of a question tag.

The roles candidates had to take were of young people asking about part-time work, a film or football match they have watched, a new mobile phone and so on.

It is imperative that candidates practise speaking skills in class regularly and throughout the scholastic year. They should practise meaningful, authentic speaking activities which will help them feel at ease during oral examinations. Speaking is a skill which is as important as writing and reading and it should be given its due by teachers in class.

2.2 Paper 1 Part 2 Language Use

This is the last component of Paper 1 which is common to all candidates (the other components common to A and B candidates are the Listening Comprehension and the Oral). Candidates are allowed one hour and a quarter to complete this paper. The tasks test the candidates' accurate use of the language and cover knowledge of: spelling, morphology, vocabulary, collocations, syntax, structures and sociolinguistic competence. It is worth stressing that this paper and the writing task in Paper 2 reward accuracy and marks are lost for spelling mistakes.

This component of the examination served to differentiate well among candidates and those with a higher competence were able to show what they could do. Only 27% of B candidates went past the 25 marks (out of 50) compared to 88% of A candidates. Indeed, over 200 A candidates managed to score over 40 marks, whereas only one B candidate managed to score 41 marks – the highest mark for B candidates. It is important to reiterate that this part of the examination is completely based on accuracy.

All exercises presented language in a mini-context thus creating an acceptable level of meaningful language. This emphasises and ensures that what is being tested is the ability to use language in a context, and not the ability to manipulate the mechanical aspects of grammar.

Exercise 1 was a word formation exercise which tested the candidates' ability of putting together new words by using suffixes and prefixes. However, many candidates seemed to be oblivious to suffix and prefix patterns required for the task. The main stumbling block was the formation of the adjective *unrivalled*. Very few candidates got this right and even fewer spelt it correctly. A considerable number of candidates encountered difficulty in spelling *height* and *safety*.

Exercise 2 was a word collocation exercise. Candidates had to choose the correct form of the verbs *make* or *do*. Some candidates found this exercise challenging because apart from making the correct choice of word, a change in tense was also required. Many had difficulty with completing 'made a lot of mistakes' and wrote 'did' instead.

Exercise 3 was a cloze passage. Candidates had to complete the passage by filling in the missing words according to the context. Performance was mixed. Many candidates were at a loss especially when the answer involved set phrases e.g. 'ways / methods / means of solving / tackling / problems'.

Exercise 4 required candidates to choose the correct utterance when making requests at a restaurant. Candidates fared well in this exercise as it required only recognition and not production. Many managed to identify the most appropriate utterance.

Exercise 5 focused on tenses and the candidates' ability to handle tenses. Candidates were required to put the verbs in brackets in the correct form. This task, once again revealed that candidates still struggle with tenses, having particular problems with perfect tenses as in '*had been climbing*', '*had not happened*' and also the conditional, as in '*would not have gained*'. Moreover, quite a number of candidates misspelt '*caught*', required in the first answer.

Exercise 6 dealt with phrasal verbs. Candidates had to choose the correct phrasal verb from a given list and put it in the correct form to complete a dialogue. Many candidates found this challenging as they failed to select the correct phrasal verb and work out the correct tense. The two phrasal verbs that proved most problematic to candidates were '*taken up*' and '*pulling out*'.

Exercise 7 focused on reporting speech set in an authentic context. Candidates found this a very challenging task at times not even understanding what the task required of them and instead wrote out a completely irrelevant exchange between two speakers or even left blank spaces. There were problems with tenses. This exercise differentiated between those candidates that know how to report speech and those who simply do not.

Exercise 8 asked candidates to fill in one word which continued an idiomatic expression in context. The expressions were fairly common like *feel like a fish out of water*, *hold their tongues*, *disappear into thin air*, *crystal clear*. Many fared badly and one gets the impression that they have never come across such common expressions. Others just gave vent to their imagination.

Exercise 9 dealt with prepositions. This is another area that candidates feel unsure about. This points to a lack of exposure to the language. The exercise was challenging for the majority of candidates who had problems applying the right preposition especially in the case of '*sweeping across*', '*confine to*,' '*caught on*'. Another difficult one proved to be '*websites for/about sudoku*', with candidates giving '*on*', most likely, as a result of L1 interference.

Exercise 10 dealt with punctuation. Candidates fared reasonably well in this exercise. One of the most common mistakes was placing the comma after inverted commas instead of before. Weaker candidates simply inserted a range of marks wherever.

As a general concluding comment one has to point out that generally candidates demonstrated very poor spelling and not enough extensive reading.

2.4 Paper IIA and IIB Question 1 Writing Task

Candidates were required to write either a letter, a short story, a report or a diary entry. Candidates were expected to show the ability to describe, narrate, argue, persuade and compare, as set out in the current syllabus, in tasks which are realistic and which they might need to produce in real life.

2.4.1 General remarks IIA and IIB

Choice of writing task

All choices were tackled, but not in equal numbers. In paper A the letter (question 1) attracted most candidates. In fact 46% chose to write the letter. 36% opted for the report (question 3) whilst only 18% chose to write the short story (question 2).

In Paper B 44% chose the diary entry (question 3); 36% chose the short story (question 2) and 20% opted for the letter (question 1).

Some 1300 (48%) of the A candidates who were present for this part of the examination failed to achieve a pass mark on the writing task (i.e. 20 marks or more out of 40); on the other hand, 82% of the B candidates who were present for this part of the examination, also did not reach the pass mark. This poor performance is very worrying. The highest mark among the B candidates was 31, while among the A candidates one was awarded 38 on 40.

Length of writing

Previous examiners' reports have pointed out that overlong pieces which ignore the word limit lose marks. Yet year in year out many candidates ignore this warning and produce longer pieces of writing to the detriment of the logical organization of the writing. Candidates are to be warned that marks are deducted when the word limit is not adhered to. Candidates' writing that is less than the stipulated length is also marked down. It is also to be noted that examiners are generally unimpressed by inflated word counts. On the other hand, those candidates who put down 350 words at the end of their composition when in fact they have written over 400, have had marks deducted.

Planning

Although there were several attempts by candidates to use the blank space on the examination paper for planning, this is still very much underused. Candidates are encouraged to plan their writing before they actually start. Practice in class in this aspect is encouraged and recommended.

Accuracy

One marvels at the high degree of inaccuracy in this part of the examination where the candidates are instructed on the examination paper itself 'to pay attention to vocabulary, grammar, paragraphing, layout, spelling, and punctuation'. In many instances these are disregarded with the consequence of loss of marks. Last year's comment in the examiners' report about this point needs to be repeated: "It appears that the rampant practice in our schools of grammar drilling through the filling of decontextualised, meaningless exercises at sentence level, taken off a book with no relevance to students' lives is misguided and is bearing no fruit".

Task achievement

Candidates are to be coached in understanding the rubric well and in following the instructions it presents. If the writing task is a formal letter or report, then a formal style is required. Another warning is

that when candidates are in doubt about some aspect of the title, discretion becomes the better part of valour – a recommendation candidates ignore at their own risk.

Instances of good practice

A small number of candidates showed that they are able to produce pieces of writing that were a joy to read. These pieces were relatively free of inaccuracies, achieved the task, were to the point, respected the required word limit and the conventions of punctuation and format.

The comments below generally point to failings in candidates' writing, however, this is done with a purpose: that of serving as guidelines of what examiners' expect and for candidates to avoid such inaccuracies.

2.4.2 IIA Writing Task

1) The writing task chosen by most candidates (46%) was the letter to the Mayor arguing in favour of or against the setting up of a Bring-in Site.

The vast majority of candidates showed insufficient knowledge of the layout required for a formal letter, notwithstanding the fact that they were helped because the Local Council's address was provided in the rubric. Errors in layout/format were penalised. Layout/format errors included:

- Writing the candidate's name on top of address;
- Forgetting the date;
- Inappropriate formal complimentary close (*Yours sincerely* for *Yours faithfully* when the salutation is *Dear Sir/Madam* or *to whom it may concern*);
- Inappropriate salutation;
- The use of contractions, e.g. aren't, and won't, which are not acceptable in formal letters;
- Leaving out the position of the addressee – The Mayor – before his/her address.

Many letters merely produced versions of the candidates' environmental studies notes and very often examiners were regaled with irrelevant details of all the environmental ills that will befall the planet if Merhba does not install its bring-in site. Such details were irrelevant because usually these details replace serious and convincing arguments. Some arguments did not follow: how installing bring-in sites makes people aware of the beauty of nature is absolutely beyond one's imagination. This was given as a valid reason for their installation in many of the letters.

There were the usual absurd idiomatic mistakes: *I hope this does not go through dumb ears, the apple of our eye will breathe healthy air, chemicals end up in the air, etc.*

The candidates who scored well

- Used correct formal letter format;
- Started the formal letter with the purpose of the letter;
- Included the relevant information ;
- Ended the letter by stating the action the writer expects the recipient of the letter to take.

Almost all candidates wrote in favour of installing the site; however the few who wrote against were actually the more convincing, because these produced solid arguments like the smell, the distance one has to travel by car (creating more pollution), inconvenience, lack of discipline among Maltese, the sites as an eyesore, etc.

2) The second writing task and the one which was the least chosen (18%) was the short story titled 'The Alibi'. This task attracted attempts that scored the highest and the lowest marks. The best candidates who knew the meaning of the word gave full vent to their imaginative faculties and had the linguistic competence to do justice to their imagination. Candidates who did not know the meaning of the word (and there was quite a good number of such candidates) wrote irrelevant attempts that invariably scored low marks.

The term "alibi" appears to be outside the average 16-year-old's range of vocabulary, which comes as quite a surprise considering the onslaught of crime stories across the entire media. Quite a few knew that "alibi" was connected to crime but were not sure how; a few thought it referred to the witness of the crime. However, the predominance of totally irrelevant pieces of writing was a cause for concern. Stories ranged from being lost in the Alibi rainforest, to Alibi little green men jumping on your shoulder, to referring to persons, buildings, things, to one's alibi being that which gives meaning to one's life, to a curse called Alibi that would kill the first born. The spectre of essays written to another title began to raise its head here.

As stated elsewhere in this report, when candidates are in doubt about some aspect of the title they should not choose it.

To their credit, there were a few creative candidates who tried to create a twist in the tale; but these were offset by the majority of totally irrelevant stories that obviously cost the candidates precious marks.

3) The third writing task and the second most popular choice (36%) was the report about school property that was damaged during after-school rehearsals.

As in the case of the letter there were major problems with correct layout/format. The majority of attempts showed that candidates were insufficiently coached in the correct layout – subheadings, the necessity of recommendations and in the use of the right register – use of passive and avoidance of narrative style. Such errors made the candidates lose marks.

Many candidates spelt the word *rehearsals* incorrectly. The word was part of the rubric, and the spelling error is ample evidence of shoddy writing. There were many instances of poor spelling and idiom, as well as much confusion of verb tenses in this particular task. *Damages were done to school property by vandals. The palc/ palk was set on fire (or as in one case, school property was fired) and crops were ruined; concert has to be transferred, the neighbourhood phoned the police, school stuff was thorn and the school has to be arranged.*

2.4.3 IIB Writing Task

1) The letter to the Head of School about the advantages of setting up a Students' Council was the least chosen (20%). Many candidates who chose this task again failed to produce the correct letter format of a formal letter. Even when a candidate had written the addresses correctly, invariably '*Dear Head of School*' made an appearance or '*Dear Mr Borg, Head*'. It is evident that more practice in class is needed of writing formal and semi-formal letters; all too often the introduction went something like "*I am writing to tell you that I attend Alpha-beta college and we should have a student council.*" The comments about formal letter writing made earlier in this report apply here too.

A basic lack of fluency was evident particularly in this task: *students which come to school, attends to our school, attending in your school...etc.* Language interference, unidiomatic English, a poor grasp of tenses and spelling errors were the worst offenders. Some candidates took the words 'Students' Council' to mean 'School Counsellor' and consequently went out of point as they discussed the need for a guidance teacher in the school.

On the positive side, most students seem to be very well-informed about the composition, statute and functions of a Students' Council.

2) The short story was the second most popular choice (36%). Candidates had to come up with a story that included a thief, the top floor of a building and somebody who drinks something poisonous. They also had to give the story a title.

This task revealed how important planning is, because most candidates failed to integrate all the elements in the story precisely because they have a lack of planning skills. At best those who chose this task came up with fairly imaginative material. At worst there were others whose stories lacked sequence

and coherence. Quite a few forgot to include one or more of the elements and had marks deducted. Many forgot to give the story a title and lost marks for not following rubric instructions.

Many problems of L1 interference were evident in this task – *He finished in jail, He gave him the first help, The phone he didn't catch it, Everyone cut his wish...etc.* More exposure to the English language is recommended.

3) The diary entry about an argument with a best friend was the most popular choice (44%) among B candidates. In fact the better compositions were written to this title, because it allowed candidates to be emotional, expressive and fairly casual in their style. Most candidates achieved the task although there were a few who mixed up the time frame: they started out by saying "*this morning I had an argument*" and concluded by saying "*from that day I never spoke to her again*". Quite a few left out the date – basic to a diary – and therefore lost marks for format.

The majority of candidates choosing this task displayed problems with basic punctuation and spelling. L1 transfers were also common. Moreover, most attempts showed a limited lexis and syntax. Paragraphing was in quite a few cases non-existent and the vast majority of candidates found problems with the use of connectives / discourse markers.

2.5 Paper 2 Reading Comprehension

The reading skills tested in the IIA and IIB 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 reading skills required.

The question formats included mainly short answer questions, matching, reference questions, true and false together with a reason, and explaining the meaning of a word or phrase.

The reading skills assessed covered reading for gist, reading for detail, inferencing, working out the meaning from context, summarizing part of the information and working out the author's intention.

The texts varied in topic and in type thus allowing the examiners to achieve a more accurate picture of the candidates' reading abilities.

2.5.1 Reading Comprehension IIA

The two texts varied in topic. Different question formats were used for the two texts. The average mark was 34 on 50 with a good number of candidates scoring over 40 marks.

Text 1

Question 1: This question was answered correctly by nearly all the candidates.

Question 2: Most candidates found no difficulty in tackling this reference question.

Question 3: Most candidates did well in this question with some identifying and even attempting to explain the metaphorical connotations of *has added a new string to its imitation bow*.

Question 4: This question was answered correctly by most candidates.

Question 5: Most candidates got this right.

Question 6: Very few candidates managed to get full marks here.

Question 7: This was a Summary question. Here the students' efforts were very disappointing. Most failed to read the question carefully and did not notice the importance of the words "summarizing the advantages of building replica towns". Had they done so they would have realized that they should have gleaned the points from the passage. Instead, many ignored it and gave their own views to show why replica towns are a positive feature. A good number included the disadvantages as well. By the time they came to the point they had already exhausted the word limit of 55 words. It is evident that candidates need more coaching in summary writing as most do not possess the techniques to do so. Indeed, many candidates produced a disjointed, unlinked and at times incoherent piece of work, with many exceeding the word limit.

Text 2

Candidates found no difficulty in answering questions 1, 2, 4, 11 and 12.

Question 3: This question presented some difficulty especially the words *surrounded*, *fretted wary* and *enrolled*.

Question 5: Few candidates noticed the instruction “find the word or phrase”. Instead they quoted the complete sentence from the passage.

Question 6: This question proved the most difficult for many candidates. They were not sensitive enough to appreciate the meaning of “coax”. On a positive note, many made praiseworthy attempts to extricate the innuendoes of the phrase and they were rewarded.

Question 7: Some candidates found it difficult to answer this question correctly. The hurdle was in the word “ways”.

Question 8: Here candidates were asked to quote a sentence. Many ignored “sentence” and wrote a phrase. Many candidates, it seems, do not know the difference between a phrase and a sentence.

Question 9: Many candidates were unable to bring out the “contrast” between the warmth and cold which was very evident.

Question 13: Some candidates failed to see the difference between “examples of Gingold's love for music” in question 9 and “characteristics that make a really good musician” in question 13. They repeated the same answers.

2.5.2 Short Writing Task

For this task the candidates had input from the reading text. They were asked to imagine they were Tom and to write a letter to Julia. Most of them started the letter Dear Julia but few signed Tom. Many signed using another name. This was meant to be a friendly letter so they should not have signed “*Yours truly*” or “*Yours faithfully*”. However, most students managed to obtain a pass mark (5 on 10) in this section. Indeed, some candidates demonstrated good writing skills and were rewarded with high marks.

2.5.3 Reading Comprehension IIB

Text 1

Question 1: Many students answered this question correctly.

Question 2: Most students scored marks in this question. When they lost marks, they did so for the same reason, namely that they repeated facts which they listed as separate points. For instance, “*the hospital is full of malnourished children*” and then “*the wards are packed*”. There were also some candidates who wrote about the writer, thinking he was Wajir!

Question 3: (a), (b) (d), (i) and (j) posed the fewest problems. (c) and (f) proved to be beyond the reach of many candidates.

Question 4: Most students obtained 2 marks or under. There were various reasons for this. Some candidates provided reasons to explain why attendance rose or declined without actually stating that this happened. Others simply stated that attendance rose or fell without accounting for this whilst there were also candidates who listed two identical facts as two separate points.

Question 5: The absolute majority gave a correct answer.

Question 6: (i) Many candidates stated that the good news was that students were attending school yet unfortunately went on to state that this was in order to obtain food which proved that they had not really understood the point made by the writer.

(ii) In spite of missing the point in (i) many candidates still managed to score full marks here.

Question 7: Candidates did not score too highly. Many actually believed that bells were sounded.

Question 8: Most candidates failed to obtain any marks or more than half marks in these questions. The reasons are various. Many copied directly from the text. Others provided their own interpretation as to what help was needed, listing things such as “*preserves*”, “*medicines*” etc. Very few mentioned that help was needed from countries abroad and that the government could have done its part as well.

Text 2

Candidates seemed to have found passage 2 less demanding than passage 1 for they scored higher marks in this section of the paper.

Question 1: The majority answered (c) *A medical journal*.

Question 2: Although there were some candidates who inferred the reason for the comparison, there were many who missed the point altogether which may demonstrate that when some thinking is required of candidates, they fail to produce the correct answer.

Question 3: There were many correct answers although a number of candidates ignored the rubric altogether and quoted more than 3 words for each one. All those preparing for such an examination should be trained to pay particular attention to such matters.

Question 4: (a) and (b) seemed to have posed no particular problems though (c) and (d) were not answered correctly by many.

Question 5: (a), (b), (d) (i) and (j) were, on the whole answered correctly. The rest left much to be desired. Very few candidates got (e) right. It is evident that candidates need further training in such exercises.

Question 6: (c) and (d) posed more problems than (a) and (b). In fact, few candidates were in a position to provide the correct answer.

Question 7: Most candidates scored highly in this question. The reason is probably owing to the fact that there were more than 6 possibilities.

Question 8: Most scored highly in this question. Those who lost marks did so very often since they listed "*they fake an attack*" as an effect rather than "*they were accused of faking an attack*" which is very different.

2.5.4 Short Writing Task

There were candidates who lost marks for not using the proper format. Some mistook this for a formal letter, adding on a new address which they wrote on the left hand side. Others ended the letter in a very formal way.

Where content was concerned, most answers were valid yet these were, unfortunately, riddled with spelling and grammatical mistakes for which candidates were penalised. There were serious problems concerning tenses and agreement in particular, whilst idiom left very much to be desired in the absolute majority of the scripts.

2.6 Conclusion

2.6.1 Comments, queries and suggestions regarding this report can be communicated to the Chairperson through the Director, MATSEC Support Unit.

2.6.2 After correcting around 6000 scripts, the examiners feel that the use of accurate and fluent English leaves much to be desired at this level. Improving the level of written and spoken English is a must. Teaching methods which revolve around the manipulation of the mechanical aspects of grammar need to be replaced by methods that expose the candidates to the language rather than just making them learn about the language. Moreover, all language skills need to be given their due. Recommendations made in previous Examiners' reports about "a national impetus to revisit teaching methods and scrutinize practices" still hold.

Chairperson
Board of Examiners

August 2007