

**UNIVERSITY OF MALTA**  
**SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

**FRENCH**  
**MAY 2015**

**EXAMINERS' REPORT**

**MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE**  
**EXAMINATIONS BOARD**

**SEC FRENCH  
MAY 2015  
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**1. General**

**1.1 Registration for Examination**

899 candidates registered for Paper A and 297 candidates registered for Paper B.

**1.2 Attendance for Examination**

12 candidates who registered for Paper B were absent for all the examination.

**1.3 Overall Performance**

1.3.1 Grades awarded were distributed as indicated by the table below.

<b>SEC FRENCH 2015 - Paper A</b>										
<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>ABS</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Candidates</b>	115	212	281	139	74	-	-	78	0	899
<b>% of 899</b>	12.8	23.6	31.3	15.5	8.2	-	-	8.7	0	100

  

<b>SEC FRENCH 2015 - Paper B</b>										
<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>ABS</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Candidates</b>	-	-	-	47	85	73	41	39	12	297
<b>% of 297</b>	-	-	-	15.8	28.6	24.6	13.8	13.1	4.0	100

  

<b>Totals</b>	115	212	281	186	159	73	41	117	12	1196
<b>% of 1196</b>	9.6	17.7	23.5	15.6	13.3	6.1	3.4	9.8	1.0	100

For the purposes of comparison, the figures for May 2014 are reproduced below:

<b>SEC FRENCH 2014 - Paper A</b>										
<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>ABS</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Candidates</b>	108	220	296	153	91	-	-	62	5	935
<b>% of 935</b>	11.5	23.5	31.7	16.5	9.6	-	-	6.6	0.5	100

  

<b>SEC FRENCH 2014 - Paper B</b>										
<b>Grade</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>ABS</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Candidates</b>	-	-	-	69	92	90	58	67	14	390
<b>% of 390</b>	-	-	-	17.7	23.6	23.1	14.9	17.2	3.6	100

  

<b>Totals</b>	108	220	296	223	182	90	58	129	19	1325
<b>% of 1325</b>	8.2	16.6	22.3	16.8	13.7	6.8	4.4	9.7	1.4	100

## 2. Analysis of Tasks Set

### 2.1 Interprétation de l'Image

The same procedures and formats adopted in previous years were used this year. A number of pictures were selected and sets were compiled. Candidates chose a picture at random and were given time to examine it and to read the guiding hints provided.

During the examination itself, the same principles of assessment were retained. The questioning techniques were kept uniform throughout the exercise. Questioning proceeded from objective discussion of the content of the picture to a more subjective analysis. Candidates were expected to be able to briefly speak about the setting, describe a person or persons, and to answer more open questions giving their own opinion.

It is felt by examiners that candidates are now well used to this exercise, but are experiencing difficulties which can be ironed out with more practice. These difficulties are practically the same as those mentioned in 2.2 below.

### 2.2 Jeu de rôles

According to examiners who carried out the *Jeu de rôles*, candidates are starting to feel more confident in this exercise. The decision not to allow candidates to consult the detailed guiding hints (provided in the Corridor Sheet) during the exam itself has enabled the conversation between the examiners and the candidates to be more fluid.

That being said, it is a pity to note that candidates are still relying on monosyllabic utterances and are still lacking in pragmatic skills (like prolonging the conversation and asking for clarifications). A number of candidates also lack the basic skills of courtesy when meeting the examiner and when the exam is over.

### 2.3 Dictation

The texts chosen for the dictation were of the same type, ensuring the same level of difficulty in words chosen to test a range of components.

Markers commented that only weak candidates failed to obtain a mark higher than 5/10. Quite a number of candidates did very well in this component.

The following are some of the most common categories of mistakes which future candidates should be made aware of:

- making incorrect logical decisions in the use of the Past Tense / Imparfait / Infinitif (*arrivé / arrivait / arriver*);
- lack of phonetic discrimination (difference between *le/les; du/de; en/un/une; qui/que; ce/c'est; beauté/bateau*). Finer points include homophones like *ma/m'a* and *c'est/s'est*;
- items which appear in all French scripts: *à/a*.

### 2.4 Compréhension d'un texte oral

As in previous years, an attempt was made to choose candidate-friendly, age-appropriate texts. Overall, candidates seemed comfortable with this section and fared well, with a substantial number doing remarkably well in this component. This is a very good sign of sustained progress in the receptive competence of candidates. That being said, markers noted that there is room for improvement. Some candidates did not even attempt questions from Section C which is

understandably the most challenging.

## 2.5 Message à rédiger

The choice of tasks set is intended to cater for different levels of candidates, offering real-life situations which prompt the candidates to write. This is one domain where markers consistently report that there is still room for improvement. This does not mean that there is no good production.

A comment by one of the markers is significantly positive: “*Quite a good number of candidates wrote [...] good messages with hardly any mistakes. There were others who used idiomatic expressions such as ‘haut comme trois pommes’ or ‘noir comme la nuit’; other expressions were ‘noir avec des poils blancs’ and ‘de taille moyenne’ in the description of the cat/dog or else ‘il (referring to a cat/dog) est sous médication’.* This shows that there are still candidates who read and use what they learn and who show that they are being trained in writing.”

Another marker “*noted that on a few occasions, a number of candidates could make proficient use of more complex grammar structures like the use of the COD, COI, imperative, demonstrative pronouns etc.: ‘Aidez-moi à le retrouver s’il vous plaît, Je donnerai 100€ à celui qui le trouve, Si vous le voyez [...], Regardez la photo ci-dessus, on vous donne [...]*” and some varied vocabulary like *‘C’est facile à le reconnaître. Max a une tache noire près de son oeil gauche, Il est calme / animé, Il est mon meilleur ami, Je suis très attaché[...], Il est tout brun, sauf une petite tâche noire sur le nez[...]*”.

Some candidates started with words like *Aidez-moi!*, *Attention* or *Mon chien a disparu!* and ended with *Merci*. This shows that they perfectly understood the situation and the purpose of writing. However, messages were not always coherent, and quite a few were presented raw in form. Some candidates thought that they had to talk about their pet in general; they mentioned their dog’s preferred food and that it liked to play ball, etc. However, this information was irrelevant to the context since the task required producing a poster asking for help in finding a pet. There were also those who were at a loss for words and copied the question, and others who left out the information they were asked to give.

Some messages showed lack of planning and were carelessly presented, with sentences crossed out, pieces of information scattered all over the page, and use of arrows and asterisks. Candidates should also be encouraged to be realistic in their writing. Is it realistic to offer a reward of €1000 or even €3000?

## 2.6 Culture et Civilisation

The *Culture et Civilisation* component followed the same format presented in past years.

Markers generally commented that candidates scored relatively well in Exercises 2 and 3, and less well in Exercise 4. The content tested in this exercise should be very familiar, and yet candidates give *costume* for *coutume*, and misspell *poignée* and *chataigne*. The performance of candidates can improve if they take these details more seriously.

## 2.7 Compréhension de l’écrit

Markers were in agreement that candidates seemed to have understood the text and did well in the first two sections of this component which tested the basic level of understanding of the text.

Questions tested a number of skills: skimming, vocabulary, inference, allowing markers to get a clear picture of candidates’ reading abilities.

Many candidates struggled where they had to provide other words in French for a set of given words (Question A). It is evident that candidates are still experiencing difficulty in rephrasing, in avoiding the copying of phrases from the text when writing in French, and in inventing a slogan/ title for the text (many opted to copy words/sentences from the text itself).

Candidates are having problems with higher order skills, in particular with the skill of rephrasing (as mentioned) and with questions requiring inference where they need to draw a logical conclusion from the passage.

Some candidates managed to at least score significantly in Questions F and G. With practice, candidates should be able to rephrase part, if not all, the sentence required: « *la victime du harcèlement n'est jamais tranquille* », « *qui est harcelé n'est jamais calme/content* ».

Markers found it strange that quite a few candidates could not identify an adverb, an adjective in feminine form and/or a verb in the infinitive (Question G). This points to a greater need of metalinguistic discussion (in this case of the simplest level).

Strange practices subsist, which are time-consuming to say the least: some candidates translated the whole Comprehension to English and then answered in French. The candidates' excessive reliance on the English language was also present in the answers they gave.

The last question (Question H), requiring the candidate to invent a title or slogan, another higher order skill, should not be taken lightly. One marker in particular remarked that the great majority of candidates do not know the difference between a title and a slogan.

Markers indicated their liking of certain slogans, of which three will be reproduced here:

- *Ensemble contre le harcèlement !*
- *Oui aux amis mais non au harcèlement !*
- *Arrêtez le harcèlement maintenant !*

## 2.8 Language exercises

Markers remarked that, overall, the 2015 SEC French examination paper seemed well suited for the candidates. Language exercises were achievable and inclusive. In exercises 3 and 4, there were candidates who achieved very high marks although few obtained these high marks in both exercises.

Markers pointed out that candidates seemed to be experiencing difficulty with the *Impératif*. The term *Présent de l'Indicatif* also seems to have misled even the strongest candidates. The alternative would be that candidates did not know the conjugation of *être* and *savoir*! With regard to *notre histoire n'était*, upon seeing *notre*, candidates answered *étions*.

## 2.9 Tâche à accomplir

As in past years, identical titles were offered in both Paper 2A and 2B. Candidates sitting for Paper 2B were given support in the form of ideas for planning.

Topics chosen were familiar to candidates. The communicative aspect of the task was marked out of 6 and the linguistic aspect was marked out of 9. The two marks were given by separate markers.

One marker noted that some candidates possessed extensive vocabulary (*l'affection, la complicité, la patience, chaleureuse, cultiver une amitié, partager, toujours disponible, nous nous sommes rencontrées par hasard, travail humanitaire...*) and other expressions which were included successfully in the candidates' writing task. There was also a remark about some candidates' good

use of *Passé Composé* and *Imparfait*.

One marker mentioned the need to read titles carefully to respect instructions given and in so doing not go out of point.

The format of a task is important. Some candidates started their essay with *Bonjour classe* showing that they did not know how to start an article. In an article one would at least expect to see a title at the beginning, and possibly an indication of the identity of the author; even a simple *Salut chers professeurs et élèves! Je m'appelle Anna et je vais parler de l'amitié.* would suffice.

Candidates should be reminded of the importance of planning their writing in both the *Tâche* and the *Message*. There was evidence of candidates not doing so. In addition to disordered, untidy work, some candidates started writing and stopped abruptly because they had reached the requested number of words without having tackled the entire question.

Unfortunately, as in previous years, the usual mistakes cropped up once again in this year's examination. What follows is not a comprehensive list, however, such grammatical errors at Form 5 should be considered unacceptable: the incorrect use of *est/et/es*, and of *a/à*; incorrect knowledge of *beaucoup des*; incorrect use of gender in the simplest cases: *un personne/une grande chanteur*; incorrect agreement of adjectives even in basic cases – *il est anglaise, il est grande*; incorrect use of verbs like *être* and *avoir* – *Il est vingt ans*; incorrect use of the negative; incorrect use of the infinitive with consecutive verbs – *Il aime chante, Il danser et chanter*. What is worrying about these errors is that these concepts are all covered by the end of Form One. Markers also commented on the absence of punctuation including capital letters and full stops, and on the absence of paragraphing.

Examiners remarked that a considerable number of candidates tried to copy phrases from the *Comprehension de l'Écrit* and ended up talking about *harcèlement*; such candidates wrote about how their friend or favourite personage hated bullying, fought against bullying, formed part of a group against bullying, or gave other versions related to the subject of bullying. Candidates should be warned that this practice does not work in their favour or reflect well on their performance; neither does it help them gain marks.

Markers confirmed the impression that many candidates had forgotten how to describe a person, even in a very simple manner. With description being a common element in such an exam, failure to give it importance is unfortunate.

### 3. **General Comment**

The performance of candidates sitting for SEC French in 2015 followed the pattern that has been established over the past years. Candidates are consistently showing that they have a relative mastery of receptive skills but can still go much further in improving their production.

It is rather regrettable to note that the weak performance in production is not only due to lack of knowledge or insufficient practice, but due to a decline in standards of attention to detail. Candidates are consistently losing marks due to carelessness.

Review of marking and of the type of errors that are consistently turning up confirm that issues, once covered for example in Form One, are far from cognitively “owned” by candidates. Only regular revision of what are considered to be the “basic” issues can bring about further improvement at this point.

*Chairperson  
2015 Examination Panel*