UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

GERMAN

MAY 2016

EXAMINERS' REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE

EXAMINATIONS' BOARD

SEC GERMAN
MAY 2016 SESSION
EXAMINERS' REPORT

Introduction

A total of 417 candidates sat for SEC German in May 2016. When one compares the numbers over the last four years, one can see an increase in the number of candidates sitting for SEC German, especially in those sitting for Paper 2A.

This year 301 candidates registered for Paper 2A while 116 candidates registered for Paper 2B.

Table 1 shows the number of candidates that registered for SEC German from 2010 to 2016 according to the paper they selected.

Table 1: Number of registrations for SEC German Paper 2A and Paper 2B between 2010 and 2016

Year	Total	Paper 2A	Paper 2B
2016	417	301	116
2015	288	196	92
2014	378	262	116
2013	346	216	130
2012	378	236	142
2011	469	295	174
2010	473	259	214

The examination kept the same format over the past five years. All the written sections in Paper 2A and Paper 2B were marked separately by two different markers and the final mark in each case was calculated taking both marks into consideration. In cases where a discrepancy was noted, the opinion of a third marker was decisive.

Overall Performance

Table 2 below outlines the distribution of grades obtained by the candidates in the May 2016 session.

Table 2: Distribution of Grades in May 2016

GRADE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	ABS	TOTAL
PAPER A	35	73	98	54	23			16	2	301
PAPER B				25	33	24	16	14	4	116
TOTAL	35	73	98	79	56	24	16	30	6	417
% OF TOTAL	8.39	17.51	23.50	18.94	13.43	5.76	3.84	7.19	1.44	100

Table 3 outlines a comparison of grades attained between 2011 and 2016.

Table 3: Grades obtained between 2011 and 2016

	Grade	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	Abs	Total
2016	I & IIA	35	73	98	54	23	-	-	16	2	301
	I & IIB	-	-	-	25	33	24	16	14	4	116
	Total N	35	73	98	79	56	24	16	30	6	417
2015	I & IIA	21	24	42	32	41	-	-	35	1	196
	I & IIB	-	-	-	9	27	24	15	16	1	92
	Total N	21	24	42	41	68	24	15	51	2	288
2014	I & IIA	25	34	47	45	56	-	-	53	2	262
	I & IIB	-	-	-	11	33	29	17	25	1	116
	Total N	25	34	47	56	89	29	17	78	3	378
2013	I & IIA	18	27	40	35	48	-	-	45	3	216
	I & IIB	-	-	-	10	24	34	37	25	0	130
	Total N	18	27	40	45	72	34	37	70	3	346
2012	I & IIA	20	35	37	39	47	-	-	55	3	236
	I & IIB	-	-	-	11	25	37	33	30	6	142
	Total N	20	35	37	50	72	37	33	85	9	378
2011	I & IIA	30	36	44	35	75	-	-	70	5	295
	I & IIB	-	-	-	12	30	34	52	38	8	174
	Total N	30	36	44	47	105	34	52	108	13	469

The chairperson, setters and reviewer checked all papers to ensure that they abided by the syllabus criteria and that questions were not repeated from previous years.

Part 1

Spoken Interaction

As in previous years the oral examination consisted of three parts. In the first part, candidates had to demonstrate their ability to introduce themselves. In the second part candidates had to show that they could interact in a role-play with the help of stimuli, and by asking questions to the partner-candidate and answering questions asked by the partner-candidate. In the third part candidates had to hold a conversation/interview on a given topic with the help of stimuli.

There was a broad performance spectrum among the candidates who sat for the examination. There were candidates who had prepared themselves very well for the examination and who could speak confidently and fluently. These used a wide range of vocabulary and could produce grammatically correct or quasi grammatically correct sentences. On the other hand there were less well-prepared

candidates who either gave short answers, gave grammatically incorrect sentences or else refrained from speaking.

In the first part of the examination, most of the candidates were able to talk about themselves, their hobbies, favourite food, sports, dreams, etc. There were candidates who seemed to have learnt chunks by heart. There were other candidates who were able to give more detailed descriptions, used an impressive range of vocabulary and had an excellent pronunciation.

Both during the role play as well as during the third part of the examination, well-prepared candidates were able to complete all the tasks. They seemed to be familiar with such tasks and could carry out a natural conversation. Other candidates were able to carry out the task with some guidance, while others struggled or were unable to respond or react to the questions posed by the other candidate.

It is to be noted that candidates need to learn how to express opinions. A number of candidates lacked the ability to use expressions like: *Ich bin der Meinung, dass … / Ich finde, dass …/ Ich glaube, dass … /*.

Listening Comprehension

As in previous years, the listening comprehension was presented in recorded format. The topics chosen were familiar to and suitable for the candidates. The listening comprehension consisted of three parts. The first task was a multiple-choice exercise in which the candidates had to indicate which of the four statements corresponded to the information in the announcement. The second part was a true or false exercise, while the third part required candidates to provide short answers to the questions given.

This year many candidates who sat for Paper 2A responded very well to the listening passages. It seems that they read the questions carefully before listening to the text. Candidates who sat for Paper 2B performed best in the true or false exercise and poorly in the third part where they were expected to write a short answer. Some recurring mistakes: Many candidates showed that they did not quite understand the difference between past *früher* and present *heutzutage*. Importance should be given to the comprehension of the word *nur* because candidates who do not know its meaning tend to make mistakes when questions include it (for example numbers 12 and 14).

Paper 1 – Grammar (Sprachbausteine and Satzbau)

This section of the paper had four different parts.

As in previous years, this part of the examination, which carried 40 marks, proved to be the most difficult part of the examination. The examiners remarked that although this year the exercises were more student friendly, many candidates did not do well. On the whole, one could notice that

candidates who sat for Paper 2B found Paper 1 quite challenging and encountered major difficulties particularly in Parts 3 and 4.

In the first part of this component, candidates were instructed to choose a fitting word or phrase out of three suggested ones, all three of which had different grammatical functions. Some candidates were completely unaware of the meaning of the verbs *verlieren*, *verpassen* and *verkaufen*. Others had not yet mastered the prepositions. Some still had not learnt simple expressions like *um 11 Uhr*.

In the second part candidates were asked to insert the correct word or phrase given in an adjoining list. Examiners noticed that some of the candidates did not seem to understand what type of word was needed in each blank. For example, where a verb should have been inserted, a noun or an adjective was chosen instead. Whilst many managed to do well in this task, there were others who inserted many words in the incorrect place resulting in a text which did not make sense.

In the third part candidates were given a cloze text in which they were expected to insert appropriate words or phrases. This proved to be a taxing exercise for many candidates. Even though the exercise was of an appropriate level and the topic was familiar to them, many candidates inserted words inadequately. There were candidates who filled all the blanks with an article or a preposition.

In the last exercise the candidates had to compose six sentences to form a paragraph which made cohesive sense. Again here many candidates were not able to form a grammatically correct sentence. In comparison to the previous years, the candidates had the advantage that the given words were already in the correct order and several articles were given in the correct case. Whilst several candidates showed that they had a clear idea of the *Präteritum*, there were others who not only got the verbs wrong but also showed that they did not know how to form a sentence in German with the verb in the second place in a main clause and in the last place in a subordinate clause, etc.

Recurring errors in this last exercise:

- Präteritum (no difference between regular and irregular verbs / irregular form unknown – Peter sehte instead of Peter sah)
- Subject/Verb agreement (alle fuhr instead of alle fuhren)
- Modal Verbs + Infinitive at the end (wollten machen eine Party instead of wollten eine Party machen)
- Word order after weil and after als
- Confusion of prepositions
- Gender (der/die Wetter instead of das Wetter)
- Cases
- Adjective Endings (viele schön Geschenke instead of viele schöne Geschenke)

Paper 2A and Paper 2B

Paper 2A and Paper 2B each consisted of a reading comprehension section and a written section.

Reading Comprehension

The reading comprehension section consisted of a number of exercises. This section carried a total of 60 marks. The texts chosen were varied, authentic and suitable to the candidates' age and interests. It was very positive to notice that the majority of the candidates could understand the texts given and answer the questions correctly.

The only part in Paper 2A which proved to be somewhat more challenging seemed to be Part 1d where the candidates had to complete a cloze text. Mistakes were particularly made in number 17 and number 19 where the candidates did not realise that in the summary, the adjective ending, unlike in the passage, was not needed.

In a similar manner, exercise 1c in Paper 2B seemed to be challenging for the candidates. In this exercise, the candidates needed to deduce information from the timetable / page of a diary given. Mistakes were particularly made in numbers 22, 25 and 30. In some instances, with respect to numbers 25 and 30, although the candidates understood that they had to use a verb and which verb to use, they did not conjugate the verb correctly, even in the Present Tense. (*Am Montag um 18.30 Uhr* ***spielen*** *(25) Christa Tennis gegen ihre Freundin Martina* instead of ***spielt****. / Christa* ***tanzen*** *(30) gern und deshalb geht sie am Freitagabend in die Disco* instead of ***tanzt***.)

The open-ended questions in this task usually pose several difficulties to the candidates but the examiners noted with satisfaction that many candidates managed to understand the vocabulary of the questions well and hence the candidates had no difficulty in answering the questions.

Written Section

Candidates working on the written section of Paper 2A were assigned two tasks. The first task this year was an e-mail, in which candidates had to accept an invitation from a German friend, who invited them to go with him and his family on a camping holiday in Italy. The examiners remarked that the theme of this email was within the candidates' competence. The second part involved writing a report about a week spent in a hospital.

In the written section of Paper 2B, candidates had to write a letter and an SMS message. Both tasks were within the candidates' competence.

The examiners remarked that unfortunately many candidates lacked creativity. In spite of the points given, candidates found it difficult to come up with ideas.

Most candidates seemed to understand the points given quite well, but many seemed to find it difficult to express themselves as they lacked the relevant vocabulary and grammatical structures to do so. Some candidates resorted to using English words or else invented words.

The majority of the candidates covered all the points presented to them; others failed to do so and this led to them losing precious marks. Some candidates moved from one point to another without really taking the time to develop any of them. A few others who did not understand the task went out of point. Candidates are penalised for leaving out points set in the task. It is also important that candidates understand the rubric so that they know exactly what is expected from them in each and every task.

There was a small number of very well prepared candidates who obtained excellent marks in both writing tasks. These scripts were a real joy to read. The candidates could manipulate the language independently and fluently, whilst showing that they were not resorting to learning by rote. They were able to write beautiful sentences with two or more dependent clauses using a mixture of different subordinating and co-ordinating conjunctions. On the other hand, however, examiners also noted that there were candidates who learnt introductions and endings of letters by heart and then failed to write the rest of the email/letter clearly, cohesively and in a grammatically correct manner.

In both writing tasks, there were candidates who committed many mistakes when writing sentences. There were cases where so many mistakes were made that no marks were given for the task. At this level one expects candidates to know simple structures to be able to form a sentence which at least makes sense.

Recurring mistakes in the written tasks:

- Capital and small letters – many tend to forget that capital letters and small letters matter in German.
- Umlauts - some candidates either do not use them or use them indiscriminately.
- Word order in main and subordinate clauses – Many still have not mastered the correct sentence structure in the German language.
- Verbs and Tenses - Candidates seem to struggle with the Präteritum. In the Bericht (report), there were candidates who did not use it at all and instead used either the present tense or the perfect tense. Others used a mixture of all the tenses that they had learned. Some candidates invented their own tenses sometimes. Difficulties were also evident with verb endings (Mein Hals tunte so sehr weh / sie starbet / sie kommtet).
- Prepositions - Candidates encountered difficulties with the correct case after the preposition (mit ein fünfzehnjährig Jungen).
- Adjective endings (ein schlecht Ding).
- Separable verbs.
- Possessive Pronouns.
- Expressions of time (*im Montag* instead of *am Montag*, *am 11 Uhr* instead of *um 11 Uhr*, *in September* instead of *im September*).
- Phrases like *der ist* instead of *es gibt.*

In addition to this, candidates need to remember to write legibly.

Final comments and recommendations

Candidates need to read all rubrics carefully and to pay attention to what is required of them. They need to carry out examination practice tasks to feel more confident when sitting for the actual examination.

Candidates should have the possibility to use German as much as possible in the classroom as from the first year of learning the subject. Similar to the reading and writing components, the oral and listening components should be assessed throughout the years.

Candidates should be encouraged to listen to and read authentic material in German. This should not only help them understand the language better but should also help them to enrich their vocabulary.

Candidates would also benefit from tasks aimed at helping them develop the four learning skills as well as contributing to enriching their vocabulary.

With regard to grammar, examiners feel the need to emphasise the importance of knowing the basics. That being said, it is of utmost importance that the grammar is learnt in context and not out of context.

Furthermore, candidates need to play a leading role in their acquisition of the language. In this way they will take ownership of learning the language, reflect on what they have achieved and focus on what still needs to be done to achieve their goal.

Chairperson
2016 Examination Panel