



L-Università
ta' Malta

MATSEC
Examinations Board



Examiners' Report
SEC English Language

Main Session 2024

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A. STATISTICAL INFORMATION

In the Main Session 2024, a total of 4519 candidates registered for the SEC English Language examination. Of these, 3010 sat for Paper A and 1509 for Paper B.

Registrations

Year	Number of candidates	% Paper A	% Paper B
2024	4519	66.6	33.4
2023	4241	67.7	32.3
2022	4228	65.4	34.5
2021	4086	66.4	33.6
2020	1267	40.9	59.1
2019	4409	64.7	35.3

Table 1: Percentage of candidates registering for Paper A and Paper B

Absences

Of the 4519 candidates registered, 178 (3.9%) were absent for all the components of the examination. Of the 3010 Paper A candidates, 42 (1.4%) were absent, whereas 136 (9.0%) of Paper B candidates were absent.

Year	Paper A		Paper B		Total	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
2024	42	1.4%	136	9.0%	178	3.9%
2023	40	1.4%	130	9.5%	170	4.0%
2022	48	1.7%	177	12.7%	225	5.3%
2021	44	1.6%	126	9.2%	170	4.2%
2020	76	14.6%	90	12%	166	13.1%
2019	79	2.8%	143	9.0%	222	5.0%

Table 2: Number and percentage of absentees for Paper A and Paper B

Grade distribution

The overall performance of candidates who sat for the English Language examination in the Main Session 2024 is indicated below:

GRADE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	U	ABS	TOTAL
PAPER A	167	531	897	587	529	0	0	257	42	3010
PAPER B	0	0	0	178	303	273	177	442	136	1509
TOTAL	167	531	897	765	832	273	177	699	178	4519
% OF TOTAL	3.7	11.8	19.8	16.9	18.4	6.0	3.9	15.5	3.9	100

Table 3: Distribution of grades for SEC English Language Main Session 2024

B. GENERAL REMARKS

Paper 1 Part 1: Listening and Speaking (50 marks)

a. Listening Comprehension (30 marks)

In this component of the examination which is designed to test the receptive skill of listening, candidates are required to listen to two recorded texts and answer questions about them. The texts carry equal weighting and together they account for 15% of the total mark. The tasks set on both texts tested the candidates' ability to listen for gist and specific information as set out in the syllabus. Moreover, writing was kept to a minimum for validity's sake.

Candidates in both sessions listened to two different texts which were comparable in length and difficulty. They were then required to complete two tasks on the first text and three tasks on the second.

Text A

In both sessions, candidates listened to a podcast about the history of a popular pastime. One was about kite flying and the other about jigsaw puzzles. Comprehension was then assessed by means of a matching task which tested candidates' ability to listen for specific information. The second task required candidates to mark eight statements true or false and to support their choice with a reason.

The matching task was within the grasp of most candidates and many scored full marks here. Although underlining the statement True or False in the second task was not problematic for many, providing a satisfactory reason was difficult mainly because they failed to narrow down their focus to prove the statements accordingly.

In Session 1, the questions in task 1 (a) and (g) posed no problem to many candidates with only a few giving the correct reason in the latter but marking the statement true. In (b), marks were lost for failing to point out that kites were used for both art and science. Similarly, in (c) candidates did not specify that Marco Polo saw the kites during his travels and in (d), a good number of candidates referred solely to the fact that a kite was used to conduct electricity with no reference to the discoveries being groundbreaking. Many provided the correct answer in (e), however, others lost marks because they latched on to the wrong clue, deeming kite festivals a global phenomenon when this epithet was used to describe kite flying. Many forfeited the mark in (f) since they did not identify *vibrant canvas* as the answer and simply repeated the statement given.

In Session 2, most candidates obtained the marks for questions (a) and (g). A good number of candidates also gave the correct answer in (c) and those who did not, lost the mark because they made no reference to technology in the reason provided. Many stumbled in (d) because they failed to state that there is a renewed interest in jigsaw puzzles amongst teenagers, while in (e) those who simply copied the statement forfeited the mark. In (f), a good number of candidates identified the *unravelling or solving of a mystery* but stopped short of adding the joy or satisfaction of doing so.

Performance

Overall, candidates performed well with Paper A candidates generally obtaining slightly higher marks than those sitting for Paper B. In both sessions, candidates fared better in the matching task than in the True or False one since proving the statements was difficult for some.

Text B

In sessions 1 and 2, candidates listened to a factory manager explaining how orange juice and ketchup are made respectively. Comprehension was tested by means of three tasks: fill in the missing information, put in the correct order and multiple choice. The three tasks tested candidates' ability to listen for gist and for specific information.

Text B was well received in both sessions with scores of both Paper A and Paper B candidates obtaining very high or full marks. In Session 1, some candidates lost a mark in the first task in (f) because they mistakenly provided *trees* as an answer. The second and third tasks posed no problem to most candidates with only a few losing a mark for choosing option i) in (a) and iii) in (b).

In Session 2, candidates who failed to score full marks in the first task did so in (e) because they failed to identify the exact location of the pump while in the second task some candidates swapped (a) and (h). Most candidates obtained full marks in the last task.

Performance

In text B, the majority of candidates performed very well in all three tasks demonstrating a very good understanding of the gist of the talk as well as the specific details it contained.

b. Speaking (20 marks)

Speaking is weighted at 10% and in this component of the examination, candidates are presented with two tasks which are based on one of the thematic areas in the syllabus to assess their competence. The first task consists of a visual prompt accompanied by a set of questions and the second task is a role play.

Speaking – Visual Prompt (10 marks)

Candidates were presented with two prompts: a picture of teenagers in their free time and a bar graph showing teenagers' preferences of musical instruments, food and careers. These aimed to serve as a springboard for discussion and in no way were they a test of how well candidates can spot and describe detail. All candidates were asked the first three questions about the visual prompts while four questions from the second set were selected by the examiner for candidates to answer. The question types of the second set varied from opinion questions to hypothetical ones thus giving candidates the opportunity to make use of a variety of structures and a wide range of vocabulary.

Performance

Candidates fared well in this task as many were able to produce speech which was fluent and accurate. Overall, they were articulate, made use of multi-word chunks and fixed idiomatic expressions. Those who fared less well produced short, often single-word responses with heavy L1 interference.

Speaking – Role Play (10 marks)

In the second task, candidates were presented with a short description of a situation involving a rescue of an animal or a person. They were then required to take on a role following the six prompts given to engage in a conversation with the examiner.

Performance

In general, candidates performed adequately in this task and were able to adopt the correct tone to carry out the conversation. Those who fared less well did so because they lacked the competence to produce the language required by the prompts and gave responses which contained grammatical and lexical errors.

General comments

Candidates performed well in this component of the examination. Overall, language was used effectively and appropriately to complete both tasks successfully. Examiners noted instances of highly competent candidates but also others of candidates who found great difficulty expressing themselves due to their poor command of the language as well as heavy L1 interference.

Paper 1 Part 2: Language Use (50 marks)

Grammatical and socio-linguistic competence is assessed in this component which carries a 25% weighting. In this write-on paper, candidates are tested on accuracy as well as on their ability to produce appropriate language as used in a variety of contexts in everyday situations. It is worth emphasising that spelling and punctuation errors are penalised in all tasks in this paper.

The Language Use paper presented candidates with nine contextualised tasks thus ensuring that what is being tested is their ability to use language in context. These tasks required them to fill in the gaps, choose the correct option and complete sentences.

The following items were tested by means of gap-fill tasks:

- Prepositions
- Question tags
- Reported speech
- Word formation
- Verb tenses
- Phrasal verbs

The candidates' ability to handle sentence structure, make use of the correct punctuation and spelling was tested by means of sentence completion while their socio-linguistic competence was tested by means of a multiple-choice task.

Performance

In general, Paper A candidates scored higher marks than Paper B candidates in this component. Many fared quite well, demonstrating competence in handling the language accurately and appropriately. This included making use of the correct spelling and punctuation, especially capital letters, commas and full stops.

Exercise 1 tested candidates' knowledge and use of prepositions and generally, their performance was average. Those who fared well were able to produce commonly used prepositions other than *in, on, to* and *at*. The most problematic was (c) where candidates wrote *on* instead of *onto*.

Exercise 2 tested the correct use of question tags, and this proved to be a stumbling block for many with only a few scoring full marks. Notwithstanding the fact that the rubric clearly stated what was required and that an example was given, candidates filled in the blanks with a continuation of the dialogue. Those who fared well here were able to produce the correct question tags using accurate spelling and punctuation.

Exercise 3 required candidates to rewrite a short dialogue in reported speech after selecting the correct introductory verb from the word bank given. Those who struggled did not change the tense correctly, misspelt the reporting verbs or ignored them completely. Instances of candidates who included speech marks in their reported speech or wrote a completely different dialogue were noted.

Exercise 4 tested the candidates' knowledge of collocations by means of a multiple-choice task. This was well within the ability of most candidates with many obtaining full marks here. Those who fared less well did so mainly in (f) where they clearly lack familiarity with the phrase *up and running* and (k) in which the collocation *a racing mind* was beyond them.

In Exercise 5, word formation was tested and in general, candidates fared well. However, marks were forfeited for incorrect spelling especially in (g) where *bordem* and (k) *dareing* abounded. Items (c) and (i) proved to be challenging with many failing to produce *depictions* and *supremacy*.

This task tested candidates' knowledge and use of tenses within a context. Getting the tense right was problematic with the use of the perfect in items (j) and (k) proving to be a pitfall for many. Also, the irregular past in (e) *sought* was a stumbling block and many gave *seeked* instead.

Exercise 7 was a cloze passage in which candidates were required to read carefully and make use of the context to fill in the missing words which proved difficult for many. A considerable number of candidates failed to produce the correct word with common errors in (c) being *also* and *unknowingly*. Although many came up with *it's* in (i), the mark was forfeited because *its* was required. Another error commonly noted by examiners was in (j) where candidates misread *too* at the beginning of the sentence and wrote a verb such as *release*, for example.

In Exercise 8, candidates were required to fill in the missing blanks with a phrasal verb formed from the words provided in the word bank. The most challenging item was (a) with many candidates failing to put the verb in the present perfect followed by (h) and (k) which were separable and proved difficult for some candidates.

Exercise 9 tested sentence rewriting in a context such that the meaning was retained. This task proved challenging to many, with tenses, spelling and punctuation being the most common areas in which errors were made. Marks were also forfeited by candidates who did not adhere to the requirement of writing between 3 to 5 words. One item which proved difficult was (c) in which candidates gave different versions of *speaks volumes about him* e.g. *says volumes about him, volumes him up, volumes about him*. Candidates who fared well were able to handle the language and produce *couldn't be prouder* in (f) rather than *couldn't not be prouder* which examiners noted came from weaker candidates.

General Comments

The cloze passage and sentence rewriting were the most challenging to candidates across the board. In the former, candidates' expectancy grammar was tested and only those who were able to make use of contextual clues completed the task successfully. In the latter, structurally incorrect responses cost many candidates marks as did inaccurate spelling and punctuation. Throughout this component, poor spelling and punctuation was noted together with illegible handwriting. Examiners pointed out the deterioration of these important skills which are at risk of being lost completely. It was also noted that capital letters were either left out altogether or else used throughout with no distinction.

Paper 2 Question 1: Writing (40 marks)

All three titles in Paper A and Paper B were attempted by candidates, albeit to varying degrees. This is illustrated in the percentages shown below.

Task type	Paper A %	Paper B %
Short story	41.3	37.9
Article	46.9	26.0
Report	11.8	
Email		36.1

Table 4: Percentages of titles chosen in Paper 2 Question 1 for Paper A and Paper B

In this section, candidates were required to select a title and to write fluently and accurately within the word limit. The word limit for Paper A candidates was between 320 and 350 words while that for Paper B candidates was between 180 and 200 words. Candidates were instructed to pay attention to aspects of vocabulary, paragraphing, layout, grammar, spelling and punctuation. The choice of titles allowed candidates to show their ability to narrate, describe, persuade, argue, and give their views, as set out in the syllabus. Their performance is discussed in the sections below in terms of task achievement and relevance as well as fluency and accuracy.

Task Achievement and Relevance

Candidates forfeited marks for writing which was partly or completely irrelevant to the task set. Examiners noted that in general, candidates had difficulty focussing their writing on what is required in the rubric and as stated in previous reports, time should be invested in reading the titles carefully. This was overwhelmingly evident in the articles chosen both by Paper A and Paper B candidates. Scores of candidates lost marks for task achievement and relevance for not heeding the rubric which specified that they were required to express their opinion.

In Paper A, candidates were asked to *Write a short story to be published on the school website entitled 'Untraceable'*. Those who fared well explained the chain of events that led to the protagonist becoming untraceable and also maintained suspense throughout their story. On the other hand, many candidates simply recounted a story about a robbery in which the culprit was caught at the end, thus rendering it irrelevant. Several candidates got lost in the intricacies of the plot and ended by drily informing the reader that the culprit was never found.

The second title on offer to Paper A candidates read, '*Young people nowadays are being influenced by the wrong role models. Write an article to be published in the school magazine in which you express your opinion on this.*' This was the most popular choice with instances of candidates who understood what was required and expressed their opinion about the deleterious effects of idolising of famous people whose values leave much to be desired. However, marks were forfeited by many who wrote an argumentative article about social media influencers and failed to express their opinion. Once again, the importance of reading the rubric carefully cannot be emphasised enough.

The third title presented to Paper A candidates was '*As a member of the Student Council, you would like to suggest a day's visit to your school by a well-known local sportsperson. Write a proposal report to Ann Walls, the Head of School, in which you include information about the Council's plans for this visit.*' While the small percentage of candidates who attempted this found little difficulty with relevance, the majority of them flouted the conventions of a report with many omitting subheadings altogether and making use of the email format instead. Others turned this into a biography of the local sportsperson once again ignoring what was specified in the rubric, i.e., to include information about the Council's plans for the visit. This cost candidates marks for not achieving the task at all or in part.

The first title, '*Write a story to be published on the school website entitled, 'The Roommate''*. was chosen by the greatest percentage of Paper B candidates. Many managed to compose acceptable story arcs within the word limit and these varied from bad personal hygiene to roommates who possessed superpowers. Marks were forfeited for pieces of writing which failed to tell a story and only contained a description of the roommate, or which outlined the advantages and disadvantages of having a roommate.

The second title offered to Paper B candidates was '*Homework is a necessary evil.*' Write an article to be published on the school website in which you express your opinion on this'. Candidates who fared well adhered to the style of an opinion essay, making their views which were rooted in personal experience amply clear. Many, however, seemed to lack understanding of the expression 'necessary evil' and presented arguments in favour and other against being assigned homework.

The third title required Paper B candidates to write a formal email to the Head of their school recommending a new place for the school-leaving ceremony to take place and giving reasons for this. Those who fared well fulfilled the purpose of the email by making a clear recommendation and providing reasons for their choice. They also addressed the recipient correctly, i.e., *Dear Ms Simpson*, and not *Dear Head*, or *Dear Ms Sandy Simpson*, and made use of a formal tone throughout. Similarly, the salutation of those who achieved marks in this section was in line with the conventions of this text type. Marks were lost by those candidates who displayed an inappropriate jovial camaraderie with the Head of School e.g. *hope you're having a great time*. In addition, examiners noted instances of candidates who mistakenly wrote to inform the Head of School that the hall would be unavailable and therefore did not achieve the task.

Fluency and accuracy

Despite the fact that candidates were specifically advised to pay attention to grammar, spelling and punctuation, accuracy suffered across the board. Inaccuracies in all three areas were widespread with examiners noting mistakes in tenses, sentence structure and at times, a complete disregard for punctuation.

Candidates lost marks considerably due to their inability to be consistent in the use of tenses. Even otherwise competent writers seemed to struggle with this especially when making use of the present simple to create a sense of immediacy in a narrative. Similarly, the use of the perfect, past or present was often ignored. Subject-verb agreement was often incorrect as was the formation of adverbs with the dropping of the suffix -ly missing, e.g., *The sun was shining bright*. In addition, the use of *as* and *when* to introduce adverbial clauses were used incorrectly resulting in incomplete sentences. Examiners noted several recurring syntactical errors with *Me and my friends* being one of the most used.

Spelling and punctuation were two areas in which candidates lost marks and rarely did examiners come across flawless writing. Candidates misspelt both high and low frequency words. As stated in last year's report, although there seems to be an effort to include punctuation in their writing, candidates have still not mastered its use with precision resulting in some loss of communication in the message they are trying to convey. Instances of candidates who wrote lengthy paragraphs without a single comma or full stop were noted. The use of the comma in non-defining clauses and before and after linking words such as *however* is still conspicuous by its absence.

The use of vocabulary and idiomatic language was another area in which candidates struggled to obtain high marks. Many lost marks for incorrect use of vocabulary especially when formal language was required. Similarly, there were many instances of colloquial expressions which were out of place in a formal piece of writing. Examiners also noted the use of idiomatic expressions which candidates seemed to have wrestled into their writing just for the sake of it. This results in a style that leaves much to be desired.

Many candidates' writing lacked coherence and cohesion due to their inability to link ideas effectively both at sentence and paragraph level. The success of the writing tasks depended on well-organised ideas and the judicious use of linking words with examiners pointing out a dearth in this regard. Moreover, an overuse of the simpler linking words or their omission altogether affected fluency in many instances. In general, paragraphing was seen to be weak with many simply ignoring this important signposting tool. Many candidates are not aware of the key elements that make up a paragraph and start a new one randomly rather than to help the reader see a shift in perspective or a change in action.

General comments

This part of the examination evaluates how well candidates can write with a specific purpose and audience in mind and therefore candidates should take greater care when reading what is required of them in order to fulfil the task completely. The use of well-structured, accurately written paragraphs that are both coherent and cohesive is crucial for the written piece to communicate its message effectively.

Paper 2 Question 2: Reading and Writing (60 marks)

This component of the examination, weighted at 30% of the total mark, tests reading and writing skills by means of reading comprehension, a summary and a short read-and-respond task. The skills tested in both Paper A and Paper B are similar, as are the question types. Both papers include two reading texts, comparable in length and difficulty, and aimed at ensuring a fair assessment of the candidates' reading skills. The skills tested range from reading for gist and for detail to working out the meaning of vocabulary items from the context, and summarising information. The questions were set to test the candidates' ability to

read, understand, evaluate, and interpret the information in the texts and they consisted of multiple-choice, short answer, inference questions as well as others requiring the locating of specific information.

Performance

Question 2: Reading and Writing in Paper A

Text 1 was an article about the effects of climate change on tourists' choice of travel destinations.

Question 1 tested the candidates' ability to read for detail by identifying the frequency with which Lori Zaino and her husband spent their holidays in Alicante. This was generally well answered by most candidates although many chose option a) showing that they overlooked the significance of the word *almost*.

Question 2 tested the understanding of *a heatwave scorched southern Europe* in line 5. Candidates who fared well focussed their answers on the key word *scorched* with *the temperatures were very high* being among the most common. On the other hand, answers which simply reworded the statement e.g., *a heatwave hit southern Europe* cost candidates' marks.

Question 3 required candidates to provide a reason in their own words to explain why the Zainos felt that their 2023 holiday was different to their previous one. Examiners noted that although many candidates were able to home in on the correct reasons in the text, only few managed to paraphrase.

Questions 4 tested candidates' ability to locate a phrase of four words showing that the frequency of heatwaves is expected to increase. This was largely done correctly with only a few instances of *continue to see more heatwaves* which was marked incorrect.

Question 5 was a listing task requiring candidates to mention four consequences of carbon emissions in the Mediterranean apart from heatwaves. Many were those who obtained full marks here, although answers lacking in detail such as simply *jellyfish* or *diseases* cost candidates marks.

In question 6, candidates were asked to explain the phrase *against a backdrop*. Candidates were awarded one mark for identifying the correct idea from the text and one mark for rephrasing. Only a few were able to obtain both marks with scores who vaguely hinted at the consequences of climate change awarded half a mark.

Identifying one word from the text was the requirement in question 7 and many obtained the mark by writing the word *flocked* from the text.

Question 8 was a two-part question in which candidates were required to explain a couple of phrases, namely *with means* and *lolling around*. Marks were lost here because many candidates failed to pick up the notion of wealth in the first one and could not explain the idea of relaxation in the second.

Question 9 presented candidates with four statements which they had to mark as true or false and provide a reason to back their choice. While candidates generally found little difficulty doing so in (a) and (b), the same cannot be said of (c) and (d). In the former, many candidates showed that they did not know the meaning of the expression *tightening their belts*, while in the latter the word *anecdote* proved a stumbling block for many. Here many candidates stated that it was never mentioned in the text.

Question 10 tested candidates' summarising skills by requiring them to write about the ways in which tourism in the Mediterranean can adapt to the reality of climate change, according to Bart Amlang. While

some candidates were able to identify the salient points, paraphrase them and present them in an accurately written, cohesive paragraph, examiners noted that many struggled somewhat. Examiners noted the following as the main problems:

- inability to identify the four suggestions given by Bart Amlang
- inability to paraphrase the key elements of the four suggestions
- inaccurate use of language including numerous spelling mistakes and poor use of punctuation
- poor organisation and structure because of a lack of cohesive devices such as linking words
- not adhering to the word limit
- failure to write the summary in one paragraph.

Question 11 tested four items of reference and overall, candidates were correct in their responses showing an understanding of cataphoric and anaphoric references in the text. Many found difficulty with (c) not so much because candidates did not understand that it referred to people in general, but because the possessive form was not pointed out. Answers considered correct included *people's* or *readers'* whereas answers that simply referred to *people* and failed to indicate possession were marked incorrect.

Question 12 was a wh- question requiring candidates to infer meaning in the last paragraph. Many struggled with this because they failed to produce answers that referred to the benefits of going on holiday during the shoulder months or that it is not necessary to do so during the summer months.

Question 13 required candidates to underline the most appropriate answer in order to show their understanding of the gist of the text. The majority of candidates found no difficulty drawing the connection between *improving tourism in the Mediterranean* and countries' ability to *adjust to climate change*.

Text 2 was a first-person account of a trip to the Camargue on the south coast of France.

Question 1 tested candidates' understanding of a description of the Camargue landscape, and most did well here.

Question 2 was straightforward in that it asked candidates to pick a single word from the text to show that Saint-Marie is near the sea. Most candidates had no problem choosing the word *coastal*, although examiners noted that many made spelling errors.

Question 3 had candidates list four characteristics belonging to the Camargue horse. While most were able to point out that it has a small frame, white coat and thick mane, some floundered and misread the fourth feature in the sentence *He's white but until they are six years old, they are all black or brown*. Many lost the mark because they thought that Camargue horses are born white and then change into black and brown when they are six years old.

Question 4 required candidates to define the phrase *stretching the horizon* and while a good number were able to infer the idea of the landscape being endless and stretching as far as the eye could see, very few pointed out the unchanging nature of the landscape.

Question 5 tested comprehension at word level and although a good number of candidates correctly stated that the writer had trouble classifying the plant life as either terrestrial or marine, the question also required

candidates to use their own words. Therefore, whenever answers were directly lifted from the text, no marks were awarded.

Question 6 asked candidates to define the writer's reaction to the sight of the flamingos, with most correctly choosing (b), *impressed the writer*.

Question 7 required candidates to explain why the writer says *I don't blame them* and answers which included a reference to the flamingos as well as the beauty of the landscape were awarded the mark.

Question 8 tested the candidates' understanding of the comparison between the *gardian* and the cowboy made in the text. Many were those who thought that this comparison rested on the idea that the traditional cottage of the *gardian* resembled a loaf of bread topped with a pilgrim hat that is similar to the hat worn by cowboys.

Question 9 asked for two characteristics of the mosquitos that are perfectly encapsulated in the phrase *in whining clouds*. Many answered this correctly by referring to number and sound.

Question 10 focussed on the two reasons why visitors to Laure Vadon's farm enjoy interacting with the horses. Here, a good number targeted the two correct reasons with only some focussing exclusively on frivolous actions like *brushing the horse* and *riding the horse* which are certainly not exclusive to Laure Vadon's farm.

Question 11 tested candidates' ability to explain the meaning of a phrase as used in the text. Most candidates produced a partially correct answer to this question by stating that the horses could fend for themselves. The notion of *semi-feral* was misunderstood by many.

Question 12 was a wh- question requiring candidates to provide a reason and this proved straightforward to most.

Question 13 had candidates explain the meaning of six words as used in the text. A number of these proved difficult, *flitting* and *primeval* in particular.

In question 14, candidates were asked to mention the similarity between the bulls and the horses of the Camargue. A considerable number of candidates lost marks for simply lifting chunks from the text and failing to focus their answer on the similarity as required.

Question 15 was about identifying two phrases from the text in order to demonstrate understanding. A number of candidates forfeited the marks either because they provided incorrect answers or because they did not adhere to the number of words stated in the question.

After answering a yes/no question, question 16 required candidates to locate two pieces of evidence from all the text to determine whether the writer had a well laid out plan. Those who got this first part wrong lost all the marks as they demonstrated lack of understanding. On the other hand, a considerable number provided the correct answer with many managing to obtain half the marks for one correct piece of information.

Read-and-respond task

The short read-and-respond task required candidates to write a response email about the best time of year to organise a school trip to Malta. Those who fared well produced a very good response which was characterised by relevant content, accurate use of language and expression in terms of spelling, sentence structure and punctuation as well as coherence through good use of linking words and last but not least, the use of formal register and tone. However, many produced poor responses and marks were forfeited for not fulfilling the task in terms of the situation given, inaccurate sentence structure, lack of cohesion as well as for adopting an informal style. Candidates who went over the word limit stipulated were penalised.

Question 2: Reading and Writing in Paper B

Text 1 was a first-person account of a visit to a residential library in Wales.

Question 1 was a multiple-choice question intended to test the gist of the text and most candidates answered it correctly.

Question 2 required candidates to locate specific information in the text by writing a part-sentence. Many earned the mark here, but the most common mistake was Gladstone's *Library is the United Kingdom's only residential library* which did not provide an explanation. Answers which did not adhere to the number of words required were also penalised.

In question 3, candidates were required to explain who the *ideal setting* was for, and this was well within the ability of most candidates.

Question 4 was a multiple-choice question which required candidates to choose the correct meaning for imposing stone building and although many found no problem doing so, some chose (b).

Question 5 had candidates write a reason and many stumbled because they gave vague answers.

Question 6 required candidates to make use of their own words to describe the layout of the ground floor and this proved to be challenging for many. Answers which emphasised that it was the main attraction and which included its furnishings abounded.

In question 7, candidates were required to find evidence in the text and although many did so comfortably, others lost the mark because they failed to focus their answers adequately.

Question 8 required candidates to locate specific information in the text by quoting two consecutive words. Although a good number managed to pick the correct words, others quoted longer phrases and therefore forfeited the mark.

In question 9, candidates were asked to paraphrase two reasons to explain why spending the night at the library was considered special. The main difficulty encountered by candidates was making use of their own words.

Question 10 required candidates to explain a phrase as used in the text. The main pitfall here was that many candidates failed to explain the word *local* and simply repeated what was being asked in the question.

Question 11 had candidates make a comparison between dining before and after the pandemic. Many struggled with this because they failed to explain clearly and therefore, the mark was forfeited.

Question 12 first required candidates to infer why there was no television in the bedrooms and many answered this correctly. The second part of the question required them to explain the writer's feelings and again, many managed this comfortably.

Question 13 was a straightforward question aimed at testing candidates' ability to locate information in the text. Many were able to do so while others forfeited the mark for providing incomplete answers.

Question 14 tested six referents and in general, candidates were able to show their understanding of both anaphoric and cataphoric references in the text. The items which proved most problematic were (b), (d) and (h) with many failing to indicate the possessive.

Question 15 assessed the candidates' ability to identify information in the text and many were able to provide the three things visitors could do.

Question 16 required candidates to choose the correct answer in order to show that they understood the writer's purpose with the majority doing so successfully.

Text 2 was an informative article about killer whales.

Question 1 tested candidates' ability to understand the gist of the text by choosing the correct title. Many answered this correctly.

In question 2, candidates were tested on their comprehension at word level, and this posed no problem to the majority of them.

Question 3 required candidates to scan the text to identify four facts about killer whales. While many were able to do so, incomplete answers cost other candidates marks.

Question 4 had candidates list the three stages of the killer whales' attack in the correct order. Marks were lost here by those candidates who failed to identify the first stage as *circling the boat*.

Question 5 required candidates to explain in their own words the change in Victoria Morris's feelings. Those who fared well demonstrated that they were able to read the text closely and explain the change clearly and in their own words.

Question 6 required candidates to find evidence in the text to confirm that the hostility of the whales is unusual. Many fared well here.

In question 7, candidates were required to locate specific information in the text by quoting a single word. Although a good number managed to select the correct term, others provided *overfishing* or *food shortages* and lost the mark.

Question 8 presented candidates with four statements which they had to mark as true or false and those who fared well were able to support their choice with a reason from the text which was not simply a repetition of the statement given.

Question 9 required candidates to show their understanding of the text at paragraph level by means of a matching task and most were able to do so successfully.

Question 10 tested candidates' summarising skills and while some identified the main points correctly, many were unable to include and paraphrase them all within the word limit. Moreover, a considerable number of candidates forfeited marks for writing which was poorly organised and replete with inaccuracies.

Read-and-respond task

The read-and-respond task required candidates to write a comment with suggestions for making the local library more appealing to residents. Those who fared well produced clear, relevant comments using appropriate language and the correct tone. Scores were low, however, when responses were irrelevant, lacked cohesive devices and contained many inaccuracies. Many were those who forfeited marks for going over the word limit.

C. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

This year's examination assessed candidates on their performance in listening, language use, reading and writing and therefore, the concluding comments are based on these components.

Candidates' performance in the listening component was satisfactory. However, based on their marking of 4519 scripts, the examiners have observed that in the remaining components, the use of accurate and fluent English at this level needs improvement. Yet again, this was most evident in the writing component of the paper which was characterised by weak syntax, poor grammar and lack of organisation. Therefore, it bears repeating that exposure to authentic English through the receptive skills is essential if learners are to be equipped with the language necessary to communicate effectively. Finally, the importance of providing ample opportunity to practise the productive skills in a meaningful way as well as paying closer attention to instructions and rubrics, cannot be emphasised enough if learners are to reach full competence in the language and perform well in the examination.

Chairperson
Examination Panel 2024