CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK

MATSEC FIRST/MAIN EXAMINATION SESSION

2018

L-Università ta' Malta

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A. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

MATSEC's post-examination survey was sent to all 2018 Main/First session candidates before the results for the First/Main session were published. A total of 1594 participated in the survey, which is roughly equivalent to 17.8% of registrations. Of the respondents, 65.3% were female while 60.6% registered for SEC examinations.

Comparing this year's feedback about examination centres and invigilation with that obtained through earlier post-examination surveys suggests an improvement in respondents' opinion. Although changes are sometimes small and must be evaluated with caution, it seems that the work that MATSEC has done in collaboration with the Examinations Department with regard to examination centres and invigilation is being fruitful. At face value, it seems examination centres were better maintained, quieter, and that invigilation staff was more on the lookout for malpractice. In fact, the cases of malpractice reported to MATSEC has increased considerably in 2017 and 2018 when compared to previous years. A number of respondents complained about rooms with no working clock, noisy fans, excessive heat, wobbly tables, inadequate leg space, and noise (order indicates frequency).

Respondents' views about invigilators' professionalism remain the worst in the section about examination centres. Besides, there was a decrease in the number of respondents saying that instructions were read to them before every session. This last change can be associated to a change in invigilation forms: while 2017 forms had brief notes to be read to candidates before the examination, the 2018 forms make reference to the guidebook, a copy of which was provided by MATSEC to all invigilation staff attending MATSEC training.

A number of respondents argued that some candidates are keeping their mobile phones in their pockets and going to the bathroom with them, with little to no action taken. A considerable number of respondents complained how some invigilators chatted amongst themselves or played on mobile phones.

The change in the typeset used for examination papers, following research carried out by MATSEC in 2017, seems to have been well-received by candidates. An encouraging 95.5% feel that the font used is clearly readable. A few respondents complained about the printing quality of some examination papers, most notably those including pictures.

As indicated in last year's survey, candidates were not informed of MATSEC's candidate guidebook. Virtually all candidates use past examination papers to prepare for examinations while about two thirds use past marking schemes. A large number of respondents lamented about the lack of marking schemes available on the MATSEC website.

The use of e-mail and telephone remain the two most used means of contacting MATSEC. The vast majority (87.1%) of respondents who sought help from MATSEC were satisfied. This marks an increase over the 81.7% and 80.4% reported in 2017 and 2016 respectively.

Respondents held more positive views towards the use of recorded audio for aural examinations than their 2017 counterparts. However, most respondents claim to prefer live speakers rather than recorded audio, mostly fearing inaudibility as speculated in different mass media in 2017. Most respondents held positive views about oral examinations reporting professional examiners and appropriate centres.

Similar to their 2016 and 2017 counterparts, survey respondents expressed their agreement with the inclusion of Group 1, 2, and 3 subjects in the matriculation certificate while disagreeing with systems of knowledge as a requirement to be awarded this certificate. Rather than arguing for a different set of themes in the subject, respondents argued for increased contextualisation and a pedagogy that allows for discussions and participation. When respondents were asked whether systems of knowledge should be marked through project work only, most responded negatively seeing more value in MATSEC's

system of giving weight to both coursework and centralised examination. A number of participants reported problems with the subject's coursework, claiming plagiarism and unreliability across teachers and schools. A notable number of respondents argued that the subject would be more fairly assessed by examination only.

Similar to previous years, respondents had mixed feelings about the preparation gained through SEC examinations for further studies at matriculation level. SEC examinations are considered of good preparation because they introduce candidates to MATSEC and the structure of high-stakes examinations. The experienced gap between a subject at SEC level and IM/AM level is more personal, although numerous respondents referred to large gaps between SEC mathematics and IM/AM pure mathematics. The science subjects, especially chemistry, were also mentioned. Other respondents argued such gaps are only natural.

The majority of respondents (80.0%) would like to have coursework contribute to the final mark in all SEC subjects as they believe this would make it easier to pass examinations (80.5%) and reduce stress and anxiety (57.1%), even though increasing subjectivity due to different marking practices across teachers/schools (70.1%). This contradicts the outcome of the 2016 survey, in which most respondents had opposed the use of coursework to inform grade setting and hit out angrily at coursework as a source of stress. Older participants agree less with the introduction of coursework in all subjects at SEC level than younger participants. Male respondents also agree less with the statements than female respondents.

Most respondents agree that SEC vocational subjects offer a more hands-on route to learning (90.5%) and are a good addition to the range of subjects at SEC level (90.4%). Respondents argued that vocational subjects are easier to pass than other SEC subjects (67.7%) with respondents who have studied vocational subjects agreeing more with this statement (79.1%). Respondents claim that a summative examination should be introduced in vocational subjects as per other SEC subjects (75.2%), although those who have studied vocational subjects were less likely to agree (53.2%).

Responses on Examination Access Arrangements also mark ameliorated candidate perceptions. The clear majority (86.6%) claimed that the provided EAAs were fair. All arrangements were deemed to be either helpful or very helpful by most respondents, although a considerable number of candidates qualifying for reader, prompter, and/or supervised rest break claimed to not have used the arrangement. Of eligible respondents, 9.7% claimed that different EAA staff provided them with different levels of access, which is considerably less than the 22% reported last year.

B. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the views of a sample of MATSEC 2018 candidates in a bid to stimulate the continuous process of development within MATSEC. This is the fourth year that a post-examination survey has been sent to all MATSEC candidates, although the 2015 survey is considered a pilot project. This year's post-examination survey has parts which are in common with past surveys allowing for comparison when analysing responses to some items.

Following standardisation of examination paper layout in previous sessions, examination papers for the 2018 session have been further improved in terms of accessibility. All SEC examination papers are now printed on light coloured paper while, following research carried out by MATSEC in 2017, the font for all examination papers at all levels has been changed to Verdana. Both changes aid readability, especially for candidates with learning difficulties.

The use of live speakers in past aural examinations at SEC level, where the number of candidates tend to be larger than those at IM and AM level, made it necessary to accommodate candidates at different times and with different examination papers. The use of recorded audio for SEC aural examinations started in 2016 with small entry subjects (German, Arabic, and Spanish). The 2018 session is the first session in which all candidates sitting for any SEC foreign language subject listened to the same audio and sat for the same aural examination paper. However, widely reported accusations of poor sound quality in 2017 is expected to still tarnish candidates' views about the use of recorded audio in aural examinations.

The 2018 session is the first session in which AM Theatre and Performance and SEC Ethics were offered. Besides, there were a total of 543 results for SEC vocational subjects in 2018, a sharp increase from the 92 of 2017. Of these, 78.5% were awarded Grades 1-5 while 85.8% were awarded Grades 1-7. A considerable number of the candidates who remained unclassified were candidates who, for some reason, dropped the subject even though decent, and sometimes high, marks were being obtained in the first units. A total of 56 out of the 72 candidates who remained unclassified (U) did not attempt a unit or part of a unit.

Collaboration with the Examinations Department on further improving the running of examination centres and invigilation has continued. MATSEC has published clearer guidelines for the running of centres, further facilitated the reporting of malpractice, and offered training to the Examinations Department's invigilation staff. Invigilation forms have been further updated.

Candidate feedback about examination access arrangements offered by MATSEC and the Access Disability Support Committee (ADSC) was collected and evaluated through a 2016 study by MATSEC. Questions from this study have become a part of MATSEC's post-examination survey as from 2017.

C. METHODOLOGY

The data presented in this report was collected through an online survey which was distributed to all candidates via e-mail on the 6th July. Candidates had up to the 13th July noon to answer the survey. Thus, all feedback was collected from candidates before the results of the Main/First sessions were published on that same day. This practice is identical to that of 2017. Candidates were reminded to answer the survey via MATSEC's official Facebook page. All responses were anonymous and treated with confidentiality; however, participants had the option to provide their phone number in case some of their responses prompted further questioning.

D. RESULTS

Descriptive Information

There were 1,594 responses, 45 more than the number in 2017. This amounts to about 17.8% of 2018 registrations. Similar to previous post-examination surveys, 65.3% of respondents were female while most respondents registered for SEC examination (60.6%). Of the male respondents, 67.5% registered for SEC examinations and 32.5% for AM/IM examinations. Of the female respondents, 56.6% registered for SEC examinations and 43.4% for AM/IM examinations.

Table 1: Information on participants

		2016		2017		2018	
		N	**% (from total)**	**N**	**% (from total)**	**N**	**% (from total)**
	Total	1367		1549		1594	
Gender	*Response Rate*		*97.6*		*99.4*		*99.0*
	Male	447	32.7	544	35.1	548	34.7
	Female	887	64.9	996	64.3	1030	65.3
Age	*Response Rate*		*94.4*		*91.8*		*92.5*
	15	10	0.7	12	0.8	19	1.3
	16	381	27.9	670	43.3	737	50.0
	17	123	9.0	119	7.7	105	7.1
	18	463	33.9	364	23.5	386	26.2
	19	172	12.6	86	5.6	56	3.8
	20	33	2.4	31	2.0	23	1.6
	20+	109	8.0	140	9.0	148	10.0
Examinations Applied for in 2016	*Response Rate*		*99.4*		*100*		*100*
	At least 6 subjects at SEC level (O' levels)	355	26.0	622	40.2	728	45.7
	Individual AM (A' level) examinations	215	15.7	174	11.2	379	23.8
	Individual IM (Intermediate) examinations	80	5.9	70	4.5		
	Individual SEC (O' level) examinations	113	8.3	291	18.8	238	14.9
	Matriculation Certificate	596	43.6	392	25.3	249	15.6

It is interesting to note that more respondents registered for single AM/IM examinations rather than for examinations to obtain the whole matriculation certificate. Statistics published by MATSEC show that only 776 of the 3804 First session candidates registered to sit for the examinations required to obtain

the matriculation certificate. This suggests that candidates sitting for examinations to obtain the matriculation certificate are overrepresented in the survey. However, some respondents might have classified themselves in this group because of examinations they sat for in past sessions. In this year's survey, the options 'Individual IM examinations' and 'Individual AM examinations' were amalgamated.

The largest two age groups are 16 (50.0%) and 18 (26.2%) years old, which are the ages at which candidates usually sit for SEC and matriculation level examinations respectively. It is also worth noting that 19 candidates claim to be 15 years old, at which age candidates should only be allowed to sit for SEC examinations if they have completed secondary education or if they attain the age of 16 by the end of 2018. A total of 148 (10.0%) respondents claim to be at least 21 years old.

Examination Centres, Invigilation and Cheating

The first part of the survey sought to gather general impressions about examination centres. Respondents were asked to mark their level of agreement with seven statements, which are shown in Table 2 along with the number of respondents selecting each option. The response rate for each item is also shown. The information is represented graphically in Figure 1.

Table 2: Response to questions about examination invigilation and centres

|		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
The examination centres were clean and well maintained	N	537	928	110	12	1587
	%	33.8	58.5	6.9	0.8	99.6
The noise levels in examination centres were adequate.	N	324	903	314	46	1587
	%	20.4	56.9	19.8	2.9	99.6
The examination invigilators were professional.	N	294	810	370	108	1582
	%	18.6	51.2	23.4	6.8	99.2
The examination centres were fit for purpose.	N	447	961	155	22	1585
	%	28.2	60.6	9.8	1.4	99.4
It is difficult to cheat during MATSEC examinations.	N	612	625	262	88	1587
	%	38.6	39.4	16.5	5.5	99.6
Instructions were read to candidates before the start of every examination.	N	658	580	273	71	1582
	%	41.6	36.7	17.3	4.5	99.2
Invigilators were on task to ensure no copying or collusion took place.	N	593	777	182	32	1584
	%	37.4	49.1	11.5	2.0	99.4
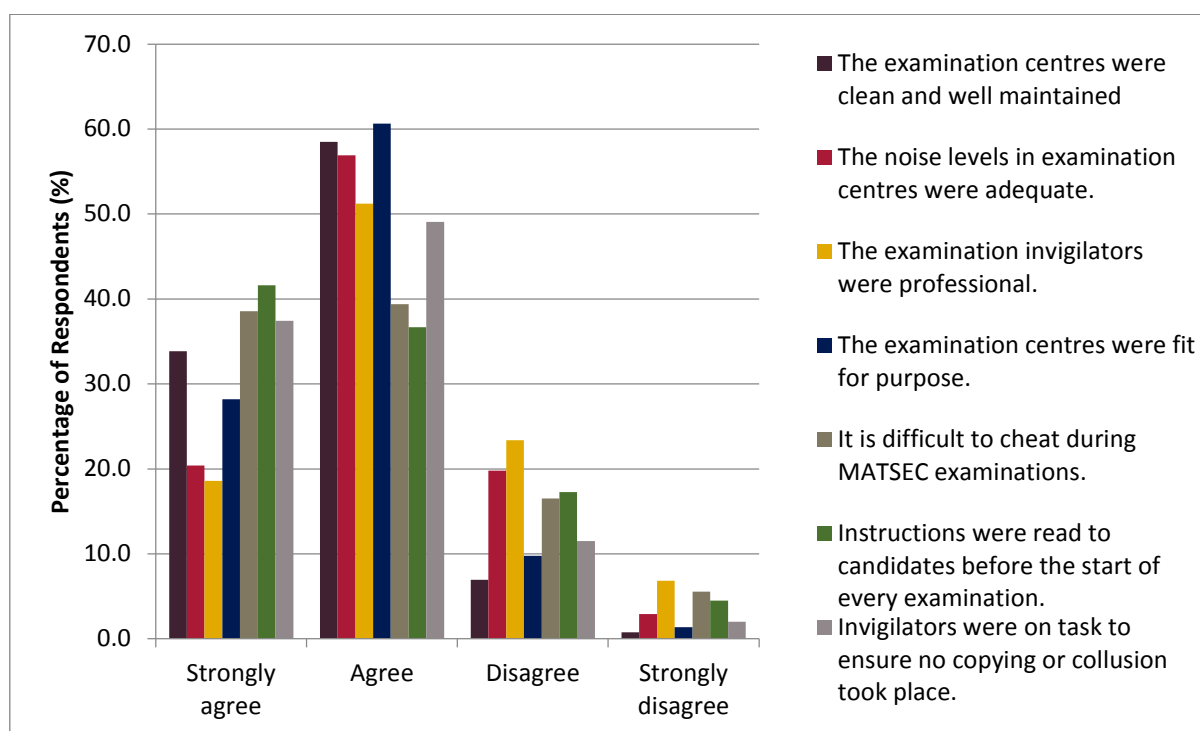
Figure 1: Response to questions about examination invigilation and centres

Candidates, in general, agree with all the presented statements. They agree mostly with the statement regarding examination centres being clean and well-maintained (92.3%) and fit for purpose (88.8%). Nevertheless, a number of respondents note limitations in the suitability of some centres, such as:

- clocks which were not working;
- noisy fans;
- excessive heat;
- wobbly tables;
- inadequate leg space especially for tall candidates;
- noise due to rehearsals, sports, or mass being held at or next to the centre.

Opinions about invigilation staff varied. Although 86.5% believe that invigilators were on task to ensure that no copying took place, 78.3% recall them reading instructions before every examination. A respondent claimed that "about half of the invigilators read the instructions before the exam". A total of 69.8% believe that invigilators were professional. This latter percentage is the smallest in this section. On sifting through comments it is easy to speculate a reason: a large number of respondents complain about invigilators talking amongst themselves. Others note how invigilation staff used their mobile phones during the examination, with one respondent claiming the invigilator was playing a game with the sound on. Arguably, some invigilators left the room unattended; could not speak or read in English; did not know rules for examinations (art and mathematics were specifically mentioned multiple times); and – three separate respondents claim – had an argument while candidates were sitting for an examination.

A number of responses complain about AM biology and/or chemistry practical examinations. Some complain of over-crowdedness in laboratories while another remarks on inferior quality of equipment in one centre (UM) compared to another (JC). A few participants complained about having to wait before starting the examination (second session candidates). The following anecdote was collected:

In one of my practical exams, the person next me had a leaking sink thus he had to move to another station. A plumber was brought in mid-exam thus making a lot of noise, his phone kept ringing during the exam, too. The person on my right side had a faulty Bunsen burner. The

invigilator that was with us did not know the protocol of a chemistry practical, tried to tell a student we only had 1 bottle of distilled water, did not know what to do if a solution is finished, tried to pick up acid and glass with her bare hands (…)

77.9% believe that it is difficult to cheat during MATSEC examinations. This percentage is similar to that of 2017, which marked an increase over 2016. However, several respondents argue that it is fairly easy to copy, mentioning copying from phones and notes being kept either under the desk or used in the bathrooms: "It is not fair on us who do not cheat, others take their mobiles in their clothes" and go "to the bathroom with them". Another respondent suggested searching candidates for mobile phones before examinations commence.

Table 3 shows the percentage of respondents who agree with each statement regarding examination centres and invigilation in this and past post-examination surveys. This data suggests that overall views about examination centres and invigilators are improving.

The only marked deterioration from 2017 is in the percentage of respondents saying that invigilators read instructions to them before every session. While the 2017 examination invigilation form designed by MATSEC (Form B) had these instructions written on the form, the 2018 form makes reference to the guidebook for these instructions. Although directing invigilators to the guidebook could have been a possible drawback in this regard, the guidebook also contains subject specific regulations which are impossible to reproduce in a single form. Some examinations, such as art, have very specific regulations. Although these regulations are brought to the attention of invigilation staff through (i) subject specific notes printed on each pack of papers as from 2018; (ii) notes to head of centres and (iii) the invigilators' guidebook, some respondents still note that invigilators were "clueless" on these subject specific rules.

Table 3: Response to questions about examination invigilation and centres, by Year of Survey

	2018		2017		2016	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
The examination centres were well maintained.	33.8	58.5	20.0	67.1	17.5	68.1
	92.3		87.1		85.6	
The noise levels in examination centres were adequate.	20.4	56.9	14.9	55.6	20.9	56.3
	77.3		70.5		77.1	
The examination invigilators were professional.	18.6	51.2	16.0	51.5	16.0	53.6
	69.8		67.5		69.5	
The examination centres were fit for purpose.	28.2	60.6	23.0	60.5	21.2	64.1
	88.8		83.5		85.3	
It is difficult to cheat during MATSEC examinations.	38.6	39.4	35.1	42.1	32.9	41.2
	77.9		77.2		74.1	
Instructions were read to candidates before the start of every examination.	41.6	36.7	49.4	33.5		
	78.3		82.9			
Invigilators were on task to ensure no copying or collusion took place.	37.4	49.1	36.0	48.9		
	86.5		84.9			

Printing and Font Clarity

Given changes in the font used for examination papers and that new printing machines were used for these examination sessions, an item on each was set. In total, 89.7% of respondents feel that printing of examination papers was clear. Moreover, a reassuring 95.5% feel that the font used was clearly readable.

Table 4: Response to questions about examination paper printing and font clarity

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Total Responses*
Printing of examination papers was clear.	N	726	698	144	19	*1587*
	%	45.7	44.0	9.1	1.2	*99.6*
The font used was clearly readable.	N	878	633	66	5	*1582*
	%	55.5	40.0	4.2	0.3	*99.2*

In 2018 there were some hiccups regarding printing. There were a number of examination papers which were distributed to candidates with missing pages, smudged text, or other form of printing errors. A few respondents remark on these mishaps. Moreover, several replies complain about the printing quality of pictures, with a number of candidates making reference to (SEC) Biology examinations. MATSEC is informed of the mishaps, likely caused by a combination of changes: new printing machines, changed printing procedures, and some new staff.

Materials used by Candidates in Preparation for Examinations

Participants were given a list of materials available on the MATSEC website and asked (i) whether they were informed of the availability of materials by their respective school and (ii) which of these materials they used to prepare for examinations. Data for both items is presented in the table that follows.

Table 5: Response to questions about MATSEC materials used in preparation for examinations

		Which of the following materials have you used during your studies and/or preparation for examinations?		If you are a school candidate, were you informed by the school/teachers about the availability of these materials on the MATSEC website?	
		I made use of this material.	I did not make use of this material.	I was informed this was available	I was not informed this was available
Candidate guidebook	N	578	974	556	887
	%	37.2	62.8	38.5	61.5
Conduct and regulations	N	760	778	748	688
	%	49.4	50.6	52.1	47.9
Past examination papers	N	1553	25	1414	38
	%	98.4	1.6	97.4	2.6
Past marking schemes	N	1022	517	1111	327
	%	66.4	33.6	77.3	22.7
Sample examination papers	N	996	559	991	456
	%	64.1	35.9	68.5	31.5
Examiners' reports	N	810	724	914	527
	%	52.8	47.2	63.4	36.6

The trends obtained from responses to the two items were very similar, suggesting that respondents used the materials of which they were informed. Responses corroborate an outcome from last year's survey: candidates are not informed of MATSEC's candidates' guidebook. Virtually all respondents used past examination papers in preparation for examinations. Marking schemes were used by about two thirds of respondents.

A respondent suggests that registrants are informed by e-mail of the resources which are available on the MATSEC website. Others note how different teachers prepare candidates differently for examinations, with some comparing their school teachers with their private tuition ones. The vast majority of qualitative responses to this item lament about the lack of available marking schemes on the MATSEC website.

Help from MATSEC

Respondents were asked whether they sought help from MATSEC and, if they did, to rate the assistance received. In contrast to the item used in past surveys, this year's item did not have the 'others' option. This is because some respondents were listing sources such as school councillors, student political organisations, and unofficial MATSEC Facebook pages even though clearly instructed otherwise in the item text.
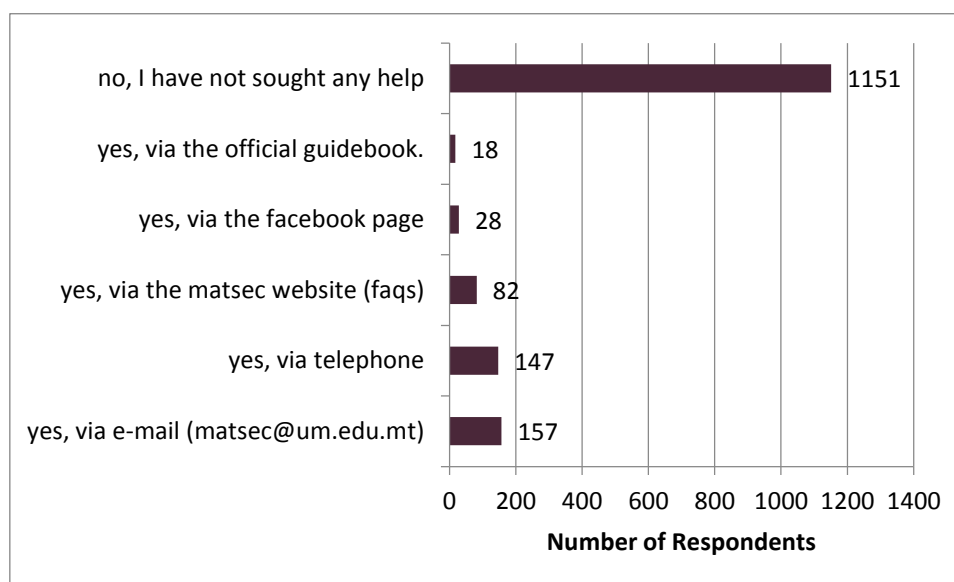

Figure 2: Response to questions about help sought from MATSEC

This year, 72.2% of respondents did not seek help from MATSEC. This is similar to the percentages in the 2017 and 2016 post-examination reports, which stood at 73.8% and 69.3% respectively. The use of e-mail and telephone remain the two most used means of contacting MATSEC. The vast majority (87.1%) of respondents who sought help from MATSEC are satisfied with the assistance. This marks an increase over the 81.7% and 80.4% reported in 2017 and 2016 respectively. Moreover, the data in Table 6 shows that respondents are satisfied with the help received from MATSEC irrespective of the channel used.

When asked what other services could be provided by MATSEC, many of the suggestions presented are not part of MATSEC's remit. These include revision classes, notes, or to end the scholastic year on the same day for different schools. Others suggest that exams be held within the candidates' schools and to make social media more reachable through, for example, live chats or replying to Facebook messages. A number of participants lamented that a fixed date is not set for publication of results while the lack of marking schemes was frequently mentioned.

Table 6: Response to questions whether help provided by MATSEC was helpful

Channel		2018			2017		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
e-Mail	N	135	17	157	126	33	159
	%	86.0	10.8		79.2	20.8	
Telephone	N	129	11	148	120	20	140
	%	87.2	7.4		85.7	14.3	
Facebook Page	N	23	2	28	31	5	36
	%	82.1	7.1		86.1	13.9	
MATSEC Website (FAQs)	N	73	3	82	35	5	40
	%	89.0	3.7		87.5	12.5	
Official Guidebook	N	16	2	18	7	0	7
	%	88.9	11.1		100	0	

Coursework Interviews

A total of 98 (6.1%) of respondents claim attending a coursework/project interview at MATSEC. Nearly half of these (41) were called for an interview regarding IM systems of knowledge, which is a subject with a large number of private candidates. A number of other subjects were mentioned, as shown below. Some responses were ignored because they indicate a subject which is not offered by MATSEC, does not have a coursework component, or do not specify the level even if the item clearly indicates that this should be stated.

Table 7: Subjects in which respondents were called for a coursework interview

Subject	Number of respondents
IM SOK	41
SEC Computing	9
SEC Biology	4
SEC Environmental Studies	4
AM Computing	4
IM Computing	3
AM Computing	3
SEC Physics	2
SEC European Studies	2
SEC Home Economics	2
AM Home Economics	1
AM Information Technology	1
IM Information Technology	1
SEC PE	1

Data in the tables below suggests that respondents' view of coursework interviews is predominantly positive. Overall, respondents feel that examiners were professional and asked questions relevant to the coursework. Where possible, respondents suggesting otherwise were contacted for clarifications. A contacted respondent claimed that interviewers giggled amongst themselves and made comments when she could not answer certain questions. This case dated September 2016 and was difficult to investigate. Other contacted respondents provided no salient data. For instance, a candidate who was

asked about the length of the presented project felt that this was a personal or unrelated question to ask.

Table 8: Response to items about coursework interviews

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Total Responses*
Examiners were professional.	N	40	48	10	0	98
	%	40.8	49.0	10.2	0.0	
I was asked personal questions which were unrelated to the subject.	N	2	18	47	29	96
	%	2.1	18.8	49.0	30.2	
Interviews are a good way of assessing the veracity of a project.	N	21	46	28	3	98
	%	21.4	46.9	28.6	3.1	
The questions asked were relevant to the submitted coursework.	N	33	47	12	6	98
	%	33.7	48.0	12.2	6.1	

Table 9 shows the data obtained from the same items in 2017 along with the data provided by respondents who attended interviews for IM systems of knowledge. Results obtained in 2018 are more affirmative than those of 2017. It is also interesting to note that respondents who sat for coursework interviews in IM systems of knowledge hold more negative views than other candidates. It should be noted that IM systems of knowledge is a high stakes subject, being one of the requirements for the Matriculation Certificate. In addition, many candidates sit for examinations in the subject prematurely without having completed the two-year course.

Table 9: Response to items about coursework interviews, by year

	2018		2017		2018 IM SOK Responses	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
Examiners were professional.	40.8	49.0	39.8	46.2	31.7	51.2
	89.8		86.0		82.9	
I was asked personal questions which were unrelated to the subject.	2.1	18.8	8.7	12.0	0.0	30.0
	20.9		20.7		30.0	
Interviews are a good way of assessing the veracity of a project.	21.4	46.9	23.7	36.6	9.8	51.2
	68.3		60.3		61.0	
The questions asked were relevant to the submitted coursework.	33.7	48.0	36.6	41.9	26.8	46.3
	81.7		78.5		73.1	

Oral and Aural Examinations

This was the first year that one audio track and one examination paper were used in any one SEC foreign language subject aural examination. This follows the use of recorded audio for small entry foreign language subjects in 2016 and for larger entry foreign language subjects in 2017. This practice promotes uniformity across examination rooms and halls.

While in recent years complaints were received claiming unclear speech or unnatural accents from live speakers, now complaints are received by candidates claiming inaudible recorded audio. None of the complaints received in 2018 were backed up by other evidence or confirmed by various MATSEC staff present in examination centres. Aural examinations at intermediate and advanced level use live speakers.

A total of 1306 (81.9%) respondents claimed to have sat for listening and/or speaking examinations in the Main/First 2018 session. Survey respondents were asked whether aural examinations should be carried out using recordings or live speakers. Most participants expressed their belief that aural examinations should be carried out using live speakers, rather than recorded audio.

The table below shows that the percentage of respondents who agree that aural exams be carried out using recordings stands at 37.6% while 81.6% believe that live speakers should be used. In 2017, these figures stood at 34.7% and 75.5% respectively meaning that 2018 respondents are more for recordings than the 2017 participants. A total of 256 (approx. 20.8%) respondents agreed with both statements and 26 disagreed with both. Further analysis shows that SEC respondents held more positive views towards both live speakers and recordings. This contradicts findings in the 2017 post-examination report where SEC candidates held more negative views towards the use of recorded audio than candidates sitting for IM and/or AM examinations.

Table 10: Response to items about the use of recorded audio or live speakers for aural examinations

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Listening comprehension examinations should, as much as possible, be carried out using recordings.	N	161	301	452	316
	%	13.1	24.5	36.7	25.7
Listening comprehension examinations should, as much as possible, be carried out using live speakers (persons).	N	640	366	166	60
	%	51.9	29.7	13.5	4.9

Respondents were asked a set of questions about oral examinations. The majority of responses state that examiners were professional (92.0%) and did not ask personal questions which were unrelated to the examination (85.1%); the place for examination was fit for purpose (91.8%); the structure of the examination was as per syllabus (93.1%); and waiting times were adequate (88.8%). This is the first year that this information about oral examinations has been collected.

Table 11: Response to items about oral examinations

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Total Responses*
Examiners were professional.	N	540	656	87	17	*1300*
	%	41.5	50.5	6.7	1.3	
I was asked personal questions which were unrelated to the subject.	N	50	143	702	400	*1295*
	%	3.9	11.0	54.2	30.9	
Interviews are a good way of assessing the veracity of a project.	N	397	793	94	12	*1296*
	%	30.6	61.2	7.3	0.9	
The questions asked were relevant to the submitted coursework.	N	510	697	72	18	*1297*
	%	39.3	53.7	5.6	1.4	
Waiting times were adequate.	N	508	644	111	35	*1298*
	%	39.1	49.6	8.6	2.7	

Matriculation Certificate

Structure of the Matriculation Certificate

Respondents who claimed to have registered for matriculation level examinations were directed to a section of the survey discussing the structure of the matriculation certificate (MC). Currently, for a candidate to be awarded the certificate, one must obtain a total of 44 points in a total of six subjects – two AM subjects and four IM subjects one of which must be systems of knowledge. Moreover, candidates must have a pass in a subject from each of Groups 1, 2, and 3 and obtain these requirements over a period of five years.

Respondents were asked whether they agree with the compulsory groups and systems of knowledge. Most respondents seem to support the idea that in order for one to obtain the MC, they should show competence in a range of subjects. This is because most respondents agree that passes in Group 1 (92.3%), Group 2 (85.6%), and Group 3 (81.8%) subjects should be required to qualify for the MC. On the other hand, 43.2% of respondents feel that systems of knowledge should be a compulsory component of the MC. These results are summarised in Table 12.

This item featured in the 2016 and 2017 surveys. Results from these sessions are shown in Table 13. It is interesting to note that in all three years respondents were most likely to agree with the importance of a Group 1 (language) subject as part of the MC while reservations were expressed about the inclusion of systems of knowledge.

Table 12: Response to items about groups and subjects making up the Matriculation Certificate

The Matriculation Certificate should require a pass in:		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Total Responses*
a Group 1 subject.	N	322	232	29	17	*600*
	%	53.7	38.7	4.8	2.8	
a Group 2 subject.	N	275	238	68	18	*599*
	%	45.9	39.7	11.4	3.0	
a Group 3 subject.	N	291	195	71	37	*594*
	%	49.0	32.8	12.0	6.2	
systems of knowledge.	N	102	154	144	192	*592*
	%	17.2	26.0	24.3	32.4	

Table 13: Response to items about groups and subjects making up the Matriculation Certificate, by year

The Matriculation Certificate should require a pass in:	2018		2017		2016	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
a Group 1 subject.	53.7	38.7	49.2	39.8	48.3	43.0
	92.4		89.0		91.3	
a Group 2 subject.	45.9	39.7	36.0	43.8	28.3	49.0
	85.6		79.8		77.3	
a Group 3 subject.	49.0	32.8	41.7	34.4	37.8	40.4
	81.8		76.1		78.2	
systems of knowledge.	17.2	26.0	13.7	23.1	11.6	26.5
	43.2		36.8		38.1	

Systems of Knowledge

Respondents were asked which themes, from a list, they would like to see included in systems of knowledge. A number of these themes are already represented in the subject syllabus. For all themes, the majority of respondents agreed that they should be included in systems of knowledge. 'Understanding of democracy' (84.7%) and 'education for the environment and sustainable development' (82.8%) were the two most well-received while 'appreciation of modern European art and culture' (61.9%) received less votes. These three themes are all somewhat represented in the current systems of knowledge syllabus. Qualitative comments concerning these themes, however, suggest that the way themes are being presented should be rethought to emphasise the local context and application of knowledge.

> *I feel an immense amount of disgust towards the current system, whereby students are being trained to regurgitate syllabi on an examination paper, possibly worth their career/future. The*

learning experience should not be present solely in preparation for exams, it should be present to equip students holistically and to expand their knowledge, in preparation for life in general.

Amongst the other themes mentioned by respondents, an understanding of ethics, economics, and law are common suggestions. Local realities are frequently mentioned and two responses mention how the subject should deal with human trafficking, racism, and immigration amongst other current issues, while others argue for the importance of Maltese history, art, and culture. Context seems to be important for a number of participants.

Most qualitative responses, however, focused on 'life skills'. These included how to: pay taxes; apply for schools/work; manage one's own time; etiquette; face and tackle problems; be happy; sit for an interview; live independently; take care of one's own health, including mental health; use loans and insurances; apply first aid. A respondent noted that these skills are "lacking in formal education (… because they are) expected to be taught, but not often done, by families".

Table 14: Response to items about the inclusion of new and existing themes in systems of knowledge

Which of the following themes would you like to be included in SoK?		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Total Responses*
Research skills	N	176	241	103	49	*569*
	%	30.9	42.4	18.1	8.6	
Communication in English	N	166	232	120	56	*574*
	%	28.9	40.4	20.9	9.8	
Communication in Maltese	N	151	216	138	62	*567*
	%	26.6	38.1	24.3	10.9	
Understanding of democracy	N	199	274	64	34	*571*
	%	34.9	48.0	11.2	6.0	
Appreciation of modern European art and culture	N	137	216	126	91	*570*
	%	24.0	37.9	22.1	16.0	
Education for the environment and sustainable development	N	224	264	52	36	*576*
	%	38.9	45.8	9.0	6.3	
Education about science and technology	N	162	247	100	64	*573*
	%	28.3	43.1	17.5	11.2	
Community work	N	145	239	125	63	*572*
	%	25.3	41.8	21.9	11.0	

Other respondents argue that the "irrelevance" of the subject is not due to the topics, but pedagogy and course structure. A number of participants stated they were never taught how to argue or debate, with content being presented to them in a purely theoretical perspective. "The themes should aim to stimulate a discussion rather than being done just for the exam".

> I think SoK should include group discussions and group assignments related to current affairs such as illegal immigration, economic immigrants, extremism, national security, minorities such as LGBT etc... Such discussions on these affairs which are impacting our world today may provide not only communication skills to the students, but will broaden their minds and will help them develop their own opinions on these issues.

Respondents were asked whether the scheme of assessment for systems of knowledge could change to, for example, "coursework only: community work with a 4,000 word essay". Out of a total of 338 respondents who responded to this item, only 88 supported such change. The majority – 139 respondents – expressed their belief that MATSEC's procedure, to give weight to both coursework and a summative examination, is better than considering coursework only. When suggesting a change in percentage weighting, most suggested a decreased percentage awarded to coursework.

A considerable number of respondents shared negative experiences with coursework, mentioning how (other) candidates did not do the project themselves, lied in the journals, and copied essays or whole projects from those submitted in previous years or other schools. Others expressed fears of marker unreliability, arguing that "projects are unfairly marked across different schools". One respondent complains how two candidates did the same experience and got very different marks for variety of experience. Another reply recounts having submitted the same essay to two teachers to get two very different marks. Other respondents claim other issues of unfairness, mostly different help from different teachers, especially private tutors. Another respondent argues how "some job overseers would rather have the student do the dirty work rather than experience difference aspects of the job, and there's little the student can do about it."

Although some respondents do suggest increasing the percentage weighting attributed to the project, there are more respondents who suggested the opposite. Nevertheless, a number of these respondents mention the advantages of the project over an examination: allowing them to apply what they learnt and as "an important tool for me to expand my research skills and grow". Respondents who were for coursework argue either that it would be easier for candidates to pass, or that coursework, spanning over a number of weeks, is a more valid assessment tool than a 3-hour examination.

These two suggestions were the most common because they were the ones stated in the item. Apart from these, however, 25 participants suggested that systems of knowledge be assessed through final examination only. Others claimed that they agree with MATSEC's scheme besides that one is required to pass both components (12 respondents). Other respondents argued that the subject could be marked based solely on small coursework tasks, such as group work and presentations (9 respondents); attendance (4 respondents); and assignments and centralised exams spread over the whole course (4 respondents). Three respondents argued that the exam paper would be more valid had it to ask long paragraph type questions on various parts of the syllabus, rather than a single essay type question for each theme.

SEC exams as a preparation for matriculation level examinations
Of the 593 respondents to this question, 252 (42.5%) respondents believe that SEC subjects offered a good foundation for subjects studied at IM or AM level while 53 (8.9%) believe they did not. However, the majority of candidates (288, 48.6%) chose to remain impartial.

A distillation of respondents' comments suggests that SEC examinations are a good preparation because candidates are introduced to MATSEC and high-stakes examinations. The structure of examinations adopted by MATSEC at the two levels is very similar, and thus SEC examinations offer a good preparation in this regard.

Some SEC subjects were of a good preparation for further studies in the subject, however, the differences experienced in other subjects were, arguably, too large. The difference between SEC mathematics and IM/AM pure mathematics was the most frequently mentioned case, being referred to by a total of 41 separate respondents. The science subjects, especially chemistry, were also mentioned numerous times: Science subjects in general 13 times; chemistry 14 times; and biology and physics 11 times each. Other subjects were mentioned but occurrences were always smaller than ten.

A number of respondents claimed that one must forget knowledge learnt at SEC level sciences. Interestingly, two separate respondents spoke of the importance given to laboratory skills in SEC chemistry compared to AM chemistry. They argued that laboratory work as adopted for SEC subjects does little to emphasise the importance of the practical side of chemistry as done in the subject at AM level.

Some responses do argue that the science subjects at SEC level provide enough scaffolding to commence studies at AM/IM level. Of course matriculation examinations are going to be difficult than SEC examinations. However, virtually none of the candidates speak of mathematics as providing a solid foundation for AM/IM pure mathematics with one respondent noting that AM/IM pure mathematics is a new subject altogether.

A few respondents argue that some subjects at AM/IM level repeat knowledge and skills learnt at SEC level, in what they deemed "a waste of time". Other respondents focused their discussion on subjects which they studied at SEC level but did not choose to study at IM/AM level, deeming these as irrelevant. One respondent, for example, argues that people who study languages need no concepts of SEC mathematics. Such argument is made by a few respondents in each year's survey and contradicts the philosophy underpinning the matriculation certificate.

SEC Examinations

Coursework in SEC Examinations

All respondents were given a number of statements about coursework in SEC assessments and asked for their level of agreement with each statement. The results are summarised in Table 15. Questions on coursework featured in the 2016 post-examination survey but did not feature in last year's survey.

The majority of respondents (80.0%) would like to have coursework contribute to the final mark in all SEC subjects while 23.3% believe coursework should not contribute to the final grade. Most respondents believe that coursework makes it easier to pass examinations (80.5%) and reduces stress and anxiety (57.1%). However, most respondents (70.1%) believe that coursework is unfair because different schools/teachers mark the work unreliably, as argued independently by some replies to the earlier section. This contrasts heavily with the data collected in 2016. An excerpt of the 2016 report is reproduced below:

> *The majority (68.8%) of respondents would not like to have a coursework component in every subject. More than half the respondents (51.9%) believe that this could give an unfair advantage for some candidates, while the vast majority of respondents believe that having a coursework component in every subject would increase stress and anxiety (72.5%) and their workload throughout the year (85.4%). Difference between respondents by level of examination was minimal, although SEC candidates were more likely to agree with the introduction of coursework component in all subjects (36.4%) as opposed to Matriculation candidates (28.5%).*

Table 15: Participants' agreement with statements about coursework in SEC examinations

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Total Responses*
Coursework should contribute to one's final mark in all SEC subjects	N	538	635	227	67	*1467*
	%	36.7	43.3	15.5	4.6	*92.0*
Coursework should not contribute to the final SEC Grade	N	106	230	715	394	*1445*
	%	7.3	15.9	49.5	27.3	*90.7*
Coursework makes it easier to pass from an exam	N	356	818	253	31	*1458*
	%	24.4	56.1	17.4	2.1	*91.5*
Coursework makes it harder to pass from an exam	N	48	202	874	320	*1444*
	%	3.3	14.0	60.5	22.2	*90.6*
Coursework is unfair because different schools/teachers mark work differently	N	381	637	356	78	*1452*
	%	26.2	43.9	24.5	5.4	*91.1*
Coursework reduces stress	N	280	554	463	163	*1460*
	%	19.2	37.9	31.7	11.2	*91.6*
Coursework increases stress	N	213	432	610	192	*1447*
	%	14.7	29.9	42.2	13.3	*90.8*

Response to this item was marked by differences across exam level (SEC or MC), age, and gender. Table 16 shows differences by exam level and gender.

As in the 2016 survey, older candidates agree less with the inclusion of coursework for grading in national examinations, being more likely to see it as a source of unfairness and subjectivity. They are also more likely to see coursework as a source of stress which actually makes it harder to pass an examination. This is in line with arguments propelled by respondents in an earlier section discussing systems of knowledge. Here, most respondents claimed they would like to see less, rather than more, importance given to coursework.

Female respondents are more likely than males to agree with the inclusion of coursework in all subjects at SEC level which, they are more likely to agree, makes it easier to pass an examination. Female participants are also more likely to agree that coursework reduces fairness in grading. Such differences cannot be accounted for by participants' age: the percentage of female and male respondents sitting for IM/AM examinations is of 43.4% and 32.5% respectively. Thus, the response of female candidates would have been expected to be closer to that of the older candidates, rather than vice versa.

Table 16: Participants' agreement with statements about coursework in SEC examinations, by exam level and gender

	SEC Candidates		MC Candidates		Male Candidates		Female Candidates	
	Strongly Agree	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**	**Agree**
Coursework should contribute to one's final mark in all SEC subjects	39.4	44.5	32.3	41.4	35.5	41.5	37.3	44.0
	83.9		73.6		77.0		81.3	
Coursework should not contribute to the final SEC Grade	7.0	16.6	7.9	14.8	9.2	15.9	6.4	15.7
	23.6		22.7		25.1		22.1	
Coursework makes it easier to pass from an exam	25.6	57.2	22.6	54.3	23.8	52.9	25.0	57.3
	82.8		76.9		76.8		82.3	
Coursework makes it harder to pass from an exam	3.4	13.0	3.2	15.5	3.8	16.3	3.1	12.7
	16.4		18.8		20.2		15.8	
Coursework is unfair because different schools/teachers mark work differently	23.7	41.9	30.3	47.0	25.1	40.5	26.8	45.8
	65.7		77.2		65.7		72.6	
Coursework reduces stress	21.1	38.0	16.1	37.9	19.7	39.4	18.9	37.1
	59.1		53.9		59.0		56.1	
Coursework increases stress	14.6	28.3	15.0	32.3	13.3	27.1	15.7	31.1
	42.9		47.3		40.4		46.7	

Different respondents might have contrasting ideas of the term coursework, having experienced it differently according to their personality, level, subjects studied, schools, and/or teachers. Such subjectivity should not be overlooked and, along with the contrasting findings of 2016, advise caution when analysing responses to this section.

SEC Vocational Subjects

The year 2018 is the second year in which certificates for SEC vocational subjects were awarded. The number of candidates registering for SEC vocational subjects increased six-fold from 92 in 2017 to 543. SEC vocational subjects are assessed differently than other SEC subjects:

- the majority of the mark (60%) originates from school based assessment;
- the rest of the mark (40%) originates from centrally set tests which are carried out in the candidates' schools at the end of each year;
- there are three yearly assessments, each assessing particular learning outcomes from the unit. Once a learning outcome is assessed, it is not assessed elsewhere.

A total of 185 respondents claim to have studied a SEC vocational subject, of which seven participants studied more than one SEC vocational subject. This makes up 19.1% of the SEC respondents to this questionnaire. Vocational subjects registered for by participants are shown in the table below:

Table 17: SEC vocational subjects studied by respondents

Subject	Number of respondents
Agribusiness	4
Engineering Technology	16
Information Technology	85
Health and Social Care	40
Hospitality	47
Total (without duplicates)	*185*
None	*1296*

Table 18 shows respondents' level of agreement with seven statements about SEC vocational subjects. Most respondents believe that SEC vocational subjects offer a more applied route to learning (90.5%) and are a good addition to MATSEC's range of subjects at SEC level (90.4%), even though some subjects overlap considerably with existing SEC subjects (59.1%). Moreover, most participants believe that SEC vocational subjects are easier to pass than other SEC subjects (67.7%) and should have a final, summative examination like other SEC subjects (75.3%).

Responses, however, varied considerably between participants depending whether they had studied SEC vocational subjects or not. Table 19 illustrates this. Respondents with a first-hand experience of SEC vocational subjects are more likely to agree that the subjects offer a hands-on route to learning (+3.8%) and are a positive addition to the existing range of SEC subjects (+7.5%). Most respondents disagree that SEC vocational subjects have no place in 'normal' academic school (75.5%), with respondents who have studied SEC subjects being more likely to do so (+9.7%). Respondents who have not studied any vocational subject are more likely to agree with the introduction of a summative examination for vocational subjects (+27.0%) even though candidates who have studied vocational subjects are more likely to agree that SEC vocational subjects are easier to pass (+13.8%). A respondent who studied a vocational subject argued for the scheme adopted in vocational subjects to be adopted across the board:

> I found it a lot easier and more interesting than other subjects, as the student is more involved, and is given more time to complete tasks. Also, the fact that all topics are assessed helps improve the overall quality of the mark given to the student over a standard exam. Hence, I believe that in the future, all subjects should make use of this format.

Table 18: Participants' agreement with statements about SEC vocational subjects

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	*Total Responses*
SEC vocational subjects offer more applied and hands-on learning than other SEC subjects	N	256	640	83	11	*990*
	%	25.9	64.6	8.4	1.1	*62.1*
It is easier to pass a SEC vocational subject rather than other SEC subjects	N	180	475	291	21	*967*
	%	18.6	49.1	30.1	2.2	*60.7*
It is harder to pass a SEC vocational subject rather than other SEC subjects	N	28	179	617	129	*953*
	%	2.9	18.8	64.7	13.5	*59.8*
SEC vocational subjects are a good addition to MATSEC's range of subjects	N	287	571	78	13	*949*
	%	30.2	60.2	8.2	1.4	*59.5*
SEC vocational subjects have no place in normal, academic schools.	N	47	184	513	197	*941*
	%	5.0	19.6	54.5	20.9	*59.0*
SEC vocational subjects should have a final examination covering most of the syllabus, like other SEC subjects.	N	204	509	177	57	*947*
	%	21.5	53.7	18.7	6.0	*59.4*
Some SEC vocational subjects are very similar to other SEC subjects.	N	68	483	329	52	*932*
	%	7.3	51.8	35.3	5.6	*58.5*

Table 19: Participants' agreement with statements about SEC vocational subjects, by subjects studied

	Voc Candidates		Other Candidates	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
SEC vocational subjects offer more applied and hands-on learning than other SEC subjects	49.7	43.9	20.8	69.0
	93.6		89.8	
It is easier to pass a SEC vocational subject rather than other SEC subjects	34.9	44.2	15.1	50.2
	79.1		65.3	
It is harder to pass a SEC vocational subject rather than other SEC subjects	2.3	12.9	3.1	20.1
	15.2		23.1	
SEC vocational subjects are a good addition to MATSEC's range of subjects	51.4	45.1	25.5	63.5
	96.5		89.0	
SEC vocational subjects have no place in normal, academic schools.	3.0	13.6	5.4	20.9
	16.6		26.3	
SEC vocational subjects should have a final examination covering most of the syllabus, like other SEC subjects.	17.0	36.3	22.6	57.6
	53.2		80.2	
Some SEC vocational subjects are very similar to other SEC subjects.	11.8	44.1	6.3	53.5
	55.9		59.8	

Examination Access Arrangements

A total of 244 survey respondents claim to have qualified for Examination Access Arrangements (EAAs). This amounts to 15.3% of participants, which is remarkable given that approximately 10% of candidates apply for EAAs in SEC examinations[1]. Although more than half of the replies do not specify on which condition EAAs were granted (127, 52.0%), the most stated conditions are SpLD / Dyslexia and ADD / ADHD, in line with data published yearly on MATSEC SEC Statistical Reports. Respondents could select more than one condition and most respondents did so. While 43 participants claim one condition, 75 stated multiple conditions. Data on the conditions stated by candidates is shown in the table below.

Table 20: Conditions on which Respondents were Granted Examination Access Arrangements

Condition	Respondents	
	N	%
ADD / ADHD	20	8.2
Autism Spectrum Disorder (Including Asperger's Syndrome)	12	4.9
Hearing Impairment	9	3.7
Last Minute Injuries	9	3.7
Medical Conditions (Including Diabetes, IBS, ME, Fibromyalgia, Systemic/Discoid Lupus Erythematosus)	10	4.1
Mental Health (Including Anxiety, OCD, Bipolar Disorder, Depression)	14	5.7
Mobility Problems (Including Cerebral Palsy)	1	0.4
SpLD / Dyslexia	32	13.1
Stammer	4	1.6
Visual Impairment	4	1.6
DCD / Dyspraxia	3	1.2
No Reply	*127*	*52.0*

Table 21 shows the EAAs which respondents qualified for. Other specific arrangements were quoted by participants, including enlarged script, use of word processor, special seating for certain examinations, and special considerations for certain examinations. The data in the table also shows that most respondents were given multiple arrangements. Only 52 of the 244 respondents (21.3%) marked one EAA only. Extra time is the most common EAA.

Table 21: Conditions on which Respondents were Granted Examination Access Arrangements

Condition	Respondents		
	As the only EAA	Total	%
Prompter	3	35	14.3
Reader	4	27	11.1
Room with few Candidates	6	60	24.6
Extra Time	35	94	38.5
Supervised Rest Breaks	4	28	11.5

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[1] This percentage is considerably higher for SEC vocational subjects.

Respondents were then asked about the level of usefulness of the EAA/s they qualified for. The option 'Not Used' should have been reserved for respondents who qualified for the arrangement but did not use it. Thus, responses of individuals who claimed not to have qualified for the EAA in the previous item were manually removed. Results are shown in the table below and summarised in the figure that follows.

Table 22: Usefulness of Examination Access Arrangements

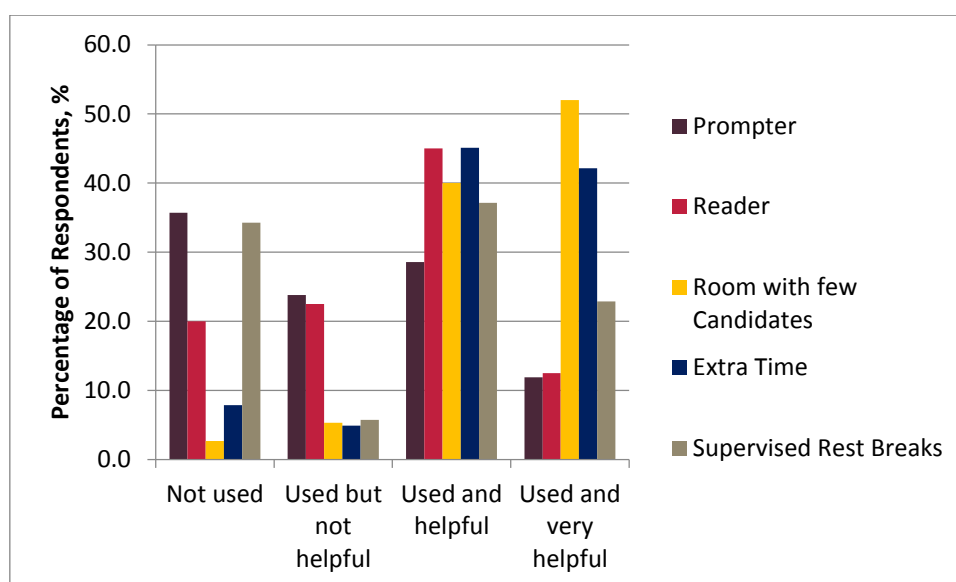|	Prompter		Reader		Room with few Candidates		Extra Time		Supervised Rest Breaks	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Not Used	15	35.7	8	20.0	2	2.7	8	7.8	12	34.3
Used but not Helpful	10	23.8	9	22.5	4	5.3	5	4.9	2	5.7
Used and Helpful	12	28.6	18	45.0	30	40.0	46	45.1	13	37.1
Used and Very Helpful	5	11.9	5	12.5	39	52.0	43	42.2	8	22.9
Total Responses	*42*		*40*		*75*		*102*		*35*	

Figure 3: Usefulness of Examination Access Arrangements

This data compares well with that of last year with a few differences. Supervised rest breaks, prompter, and reader are the three EAAs which a considerable fraction of respondents claim to not have used. Prompter and reader remain the two EAAs receiving most reviews of being 'not helpful' while room with a few candidates and extra time are the arrangements marked mostly as 'very helpful'.

Respondents were asked to agree with one of three statements regarding the equality of access arrangements when these were offered by different persons. A total of 10 from the 103 responses to this survey item (9.7%) claimed that different personnel provided them with different levels of access, which is considerably less than the 22% reported last year.
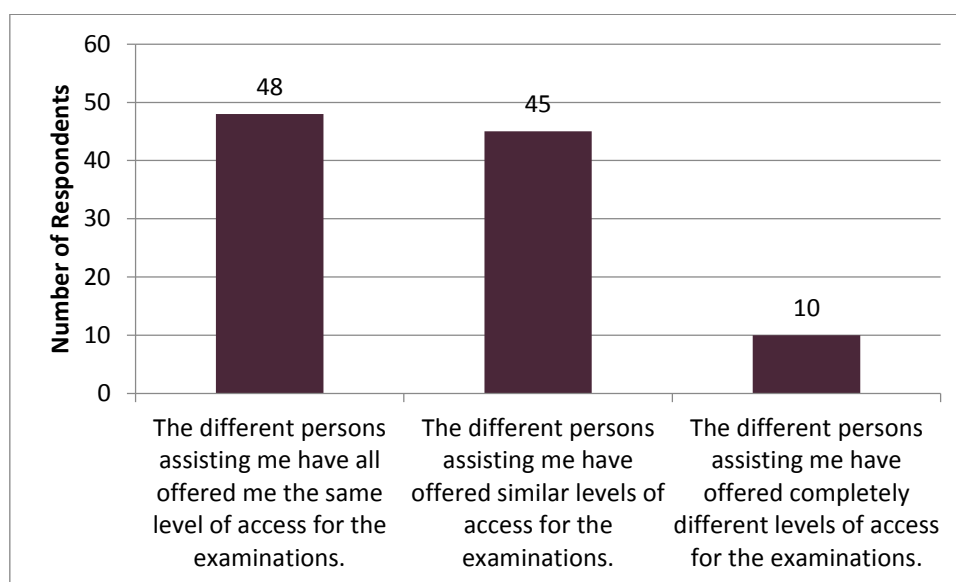
Figure 4: Equality of Access Offered by Different Access Personnel

When asked whether EAAs were fair, most participants (86.6% of the 134 responses to this item) responded positively. Comments from those who do not agree complain of not being given the EAA/s they thought they should have qualified for. Others criticised how the EAA was implemented or the EAA support staff:

- not being given a reader for language examinations;
- not being given as much EAAs as the school does;
- reader did not turn up;
- the quiet room was not quiet due to other candidates who misbehaved;
- my prompter didn't care, other prompters were playing on the phone.

Other participants noted how EAAs are tailor-made for each individual candidate and appreciated the help and support they received from MATSEC and the ADSC. Others noted how EAAs allow candidates with specific conditions to express their skills without being given an unfair advantage over other candidates.

General Comments

A variety of comments were collected from respondents and these were included in the relevant sections of this report. The illicit use of mobile phones amongst invigilation staff and candidates seems to be a problem, as reported by participants. Respondents would like to see examinations taking place in centres closer to their home (although the Examinations Department should already be taking measures to ensure this) or within their own schools. Others argued that examinations test too much recall, and should place more emphasis on application of knowledge while others argued for increased measures to ensure fair marking across different teachers/schools. Marking schemes are used by candidates in preparation for their examinations, most probably as an 'answer sheet' and many respondents grumbled about the lack of available marking schemes on the MATSEC website.

E. Conclusion

MATSEC is always on the lookout for informed criticism as an opportunity to further improve its practices. This is the fourth report to collate candidates' feedback on the MATSEC examinations they just sat for. Candidate perceptions are a valuable piece of information which can provide a more detailed, or even an alternative, description of current practices.

Comments on this report and any recommendations on improving this or similar documents published by MATSEC are welcome. These are to be addressed to Mr. Gilbert John Zahra, Principal Assessment Research and Development Officer, MATSEC Support Unit, University of Malta via email: gilbert.j.zahra@um.edu.mt.