



L-Università  
ta' Malta

MATSEC  
Examinations Board



## Candidate's Feedback

Special Sessions in light of COVID-19 Pandemic

2020

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## CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2020): MATSEC SPECIAL SESSIONS IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

### Executive Summary

MATSEC examinations for 2020 were very particular due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The MC Main Session was postponed to a September Special Session. A resit session was also held in December. The SEC First session was cancelled: School students were issued a predicted level of attainment and all SEC candidates could re-register for a September Special Session.

The predicted level issued to SEC school candidates was based on a standardization exercise of their marks obtained during their respective schools' mock examinations. Candidates who passed were awarded either Level 3 or Level 2. Level 3 was equivalent to the Grades 1-5 while Level 2 was equivalent to Grades 6-7. All candidates who had registered for the SEC Main session of examination could apply and sit for subjects they had registered for in the September Special Session, whose results would be issued in the usual Grades.

All registrations for the MC First Session were moved to the Special September Session. These candidates could apply to add new subjects, and candidates who did not apply for the original First Session could apply for the Special September Session. Candidates could re-sit subjects they had originally applied for in a December Resit Session.

MATSEC's post-examination survey was sent to all 2020 September Special Session candidates before this session's results were published. There were 852 participants, from 7,765 distinct candidates providing 7,357 unique e-mail addresses, or 11.0% of the candidates to which the survey invite was sent. The lower percentage of participants is directly linked to the lower SEC registrations: Only 2,892 of the original 5,158 SEC candidates registered for any subject during the September Special Session.

Participants who were SEC school candidates had generally a negative opinion of the predicted levels. Of these, 81.0% indicated that it was impossible to compare results from different schools, as these were too dependent on schools and/or teachers' subjectivity. Furthermore, 81.8% indicated feeling that levels were too generalized and did not reflect a candidate's true capability, with almost three-quarters of SEC school respondents (69.6%) indicating feeling that the exercise should not have been carried out at all. More participants (36.9%) would have preferred if the level had been based on the marks of the final three years of school, rather than on the final mark received during the mock exam (20.4%). However, SEC school candidates sitting for the Special September Session can be considered to be those who preferred Grades (rather than levels) or those who wished to improve the issued level, so it is to be expected that their remarks about the predicted level would be rather negative.

Although negative feedback about the Predicted Level Exercise was expressed by a number of SEC respondents, in contrast, many respondents who were either SEC private candidates or MC candidates expressed their disappointment that no equivalent exercise had been carried out for them. Penultimately, participants indicated being of the opinion that the levels given were generally fair. More than half the respondents claimed that the predicted levels were fair in 26 of the 30 subjects, with this rating being higher than 75% in 12 subjects. Only four subjects: Textiles and Design, Commerce, Arabic and Ethics received a negative rating.

Feedback regarding the examination centres was also taken into consideration, including the mitigation measures taken to avoid the spreading of COVID-19. The majority of respondents agreed that sufficient mitigation measures were published by the Ministry for Health to minimize the spread of COVID-19 (87.7%) and that these measures were properly adopted by examination centres (88.1%). However, less respondents (67.1%) agreed that candidates were observing the measures to minimise the transmission of COVID-19, with many not wearing their masks properly and grouping together outside examination centres. Several respondents argued that candidates should not have been left waiting outside; that entering and exiting examination centres should have been better controlled to avoid candidates getting caught in bottleneck; and that older participants should have been placed in separate rooms. A total of 74.9% of the respondents agreed with the removal of the oral, listening comprehension, and practical

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components to limit the risk of transmission, although 59.3% of the respondents felt that removing these components makes the assessment unfair in those particular subjects.

More than half of the respondents (63.8%) agreed that examinations should have been held in May as was initially planned, citing in their comments that the rate of infections was lower in May and that the excessive waiting time increased uncertainty and candidates' anxiety. Many complained that exams should have been held online, similar to the method adopted by the University of Malta, or that written examinations are an obsolete method of assessing performance.

Respondents' opinion of examination centres is similar to that expressed in past Candidate Feedback reports, if not better. Participants agree that examination centres were well-maintained and fit for purpose. Respondents were especially positive towards noise levels around examination centres, with 88.3% deeming these as adequate, a decisive improvement over the 69.3%, 77.3% and 70.5% reported in the past three years respectively. The majority of the participants (81.0%) agreed that the invigilators were sufficiently informed to assist candidates with any queries, while also agreeing (87.0%) they were at hand to ensure no copying and/or collusion took place. In fact, most candidates (86.7%) also agreed that it was difficult to cheat during the examinations. All three latter statements suggest a continued improvement over the past few years. However, there was a significant drop in participants agreeing that instructions were read to the candidates before every examination, with 62.2% indicated so when compared to the 74.5%, 78.3% and 82.9% reported in the previous three years. However, several complaints are repeated yearly for some specific subjects, mainly those subjects which have special requisites.

This year more participants (49.2%) claimed to have sought help from MATSEC. This is a considerable leap from the previous three years where in each, roughly only a quarter of the participants did so. The use of e-mail and telephone remain the two most used means of contacting MATSEC. The majority (64.0%) of respondents who sought help from MATSEC were satisfied with the assistance provided, although this was lower than the previous year (78.9%). However, from qualitative survey responses, many participants (85.3% of the comments) were satisfied with the responses received from MATSEC and many thanked MATSEC Staff in their comments for being very supportive and informative during these uncertain times, and that the published guidelines and FAQs were very concise and helpful.

The University of Malta's proposed changes for the Matriculation Certificate have informed some of the questions in this survey. Similar to previous years, respondents agree with the compulsory nature of each of Groups 1, 2 and 3, with the highest level of agreement being with the compulsory nature of Group 1 subjects (87.0%). As in past reports, most respondents (59.5%) disagree that IM Systems of Knowledge is required for one to be awarded the MC. This is not because candidates despise the subject per se: in many of the comments, participants were favourable towards the subject claiming to have had a positive experience of SoK. These participants argued that it is the high stakes nature of the subject, rather than its content, which make it stressful and daunting. Several participants stressed in their comments that the MC should comprise of subjects relevant to their career path, rather than mandatory passes from unrelated groups.

Participants for both MC and SEC subjects were majorly in favour (74.4% and 60.5% respectively) that coursework be compulsory and have an effect on the final grade awarded by MATSEC. These are split between participants preferring that coursework has a small effect on final grade (51.2% and 36.6% respectively) and those preferring that coursework be the main determiner of the final grade (23.2% and 24.9% respectively). For both SEC and MC, participants were least likely to agree that coursework be entirely the teacher/school's decision and not affect the MATSEC grade (13.4% and 21.4% respectively) or that it be compulsory to ensure hands-on learning, but not affect the MATSEC grade (12.2% and 17.2% respectively). This feedback is similar to last year's feedback, where 77.3% indicated preferring that CW affects the MATSEC grade. However, difference between MC and SEC respondents is more pronounced.

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Participants were asked whether the final grade should be based on coursework or written examinations, and, if examinations, whether these should be held at the end-of-course, yearly, or both. Most participants prefer written examinations, as only 11.6% of MC participants and 14.4% of SEC participants, would like MATSEC to base their grade only on CW. Of the respondents preferring written examinations, the majority (43.4% of MC participants and 35.8% of SEC participants) indicated preferring that the grade awarded by MATSEC is based solely on the examination held at the end of the course. Thus, the preference for summative assessments is more pronounced amongst MC participants. More SEC candidates prefer examinations to be held yearly, and these can be roughly equally split between those who would like these to be the only means of assessment (26.4%) or to accompany and end-of-course assessment (23.4%). Among MC participants, these percentages stand at 23.4% and 21.6% respectively.

This year, coursework interviews for MC subjects were held online to minimise physical interaction. The majority of respondents indicated that they were called for an online interview for IM Systems of Knowledge (84.8% of those indicating being called for an interview). The majority of the participants indicated that questions asked were relevant to the submitted coursework (80.4%) and that interviews are a good way of assessing the veracity of the project (69.6%). Most participants agree that coursework assessment should be held online in future sessions, even after the pandemic (63.0%), with this being preferred over interviews in person (56.5%). When these two statements were closely evaluated, more candidates (26.1%) strongly agreed that coursework interviews continue to be held online rather than being held in person (15.2%). However, several of the complaints received regarding online interviews concerned difficulty to connect to Zoom or excessively high pitched or distorted sound.

Candidate feedback about examination access arrangements (EAAs) offered by MATSEC through the Access Disability Support Committee (ADSC) was also collected and evaluated. More participants indicated making use of EAAs (29.8% when compared to last year's 13.9%). Respondents' perceptions toward EAAs remain positive, with all arrangements deemed to be either helpful or very helpful (85.1%), with participants noting that EAAs are tailor-made for each individual candidate. However, respondents were more critical of the professionalism of invigilation staff assigned to EAA candidates. Although coloured paper is used in MATSEC examinations to aid readability, some respondents complained about these arguing they have the opposite effect on them. However, a specific question about this was asked in this year's survey and 77.5% agreed that the printing of SEC examination papers in light colours were beneficial in making reading easier.

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### A. Introduction

On 28<sup>th</sup> March 2020, the Minister for Education and Employment, the Hon. Minister Dr. Owen Bonnici, addressed a press conference and provided details in view of the situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic. The MATSEC Examinations Board cancelled the SEC Main Session of the examinations, however, school candidates who were due to sit for their SEC examinations would be receiving a predicted level of achievement based on school mock examination results instead of grades. MATSEC communicated with the school candidates' schools to collate information deemed pertinent in predicting the candidates' level of achievement had the SEC Main Session taken place, including the mock examination papers, several of candidates' marked scripts, and whether different teachers marked different groups of candidates. MATSEC organised panels of subject experts to analyse school mock examination papers and their marking. Ultimately, 29,386 individual results for a total of 3,767 school candidates were published (5,223 candidates had registered for the Main Session of examinations). All candidates were given the opportunity to re-register for their examinations during the September Special Session.

The MC First session of examinations was postponed to September. All registrations were automatically moved to September Special Session. MC candidates who had originally planned to sit for examinations during the Second Session were also given the opportunity to register and sit for their planned exams during the September Special Session.

All aural, oral and practical components were not held and instead candidates sitting for the September Special Session received full marks for these components, at either SEC or MC. Some coursework interviews for private candidates were held online using Zoom.

This report presents the views of a sample of MATSEC September Special Session 2020 candidates in a bid to stimulate the continuous process of development within MATSEC.

This is the sixth year that a post-examination survey has been sent to MATSEC candidates. The survey has parts which are in common with past surveys allowing for comparison when analysing responses to some items. Other items focus on the mitigation measures which were adopted due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as the Predictive Level Exercise and the different conditions adopted for the September Special Session.

There are no new subjects which are being assessed in the 2020 session. Nevertheless, the 2020 session is particular as coursework interviews were conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, oral and practical examinations were not conducted, and mitigation measures as published by the Ministry for Health were to be adopted in examination centres. The reform happening at SEC level and the University of Malta's proposed reform for the Matriculation Certificate have also influenced the questions in this survey. Thus, questions on coursework are included in this survey.

Candidate feedback about examination access arrangements offered by MATSEC through the Access Disability Support Committee (ADSC) of the University of Malta 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 and feature in this year's survey. Most of these items are unchanged.

### B. Methodology

The data presented in this report was collected through an online survey which was distributed to all candidates who sat for examinations during the September Special Session, via e-mail on the 9<sup>th</sup> October 2020. A total of 8,438 e-mails were sent. Candidates had up to the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2020 to answer the survey. Thus, all feedback was collected from respondents before the results of the September Special Session were published on the 6<sup>th</sup> November., which practice is identical to that adopted for the past three years since 2017 for the Main/First Session. 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.

## C. Results

### Descriptive Information

There were 7,765 individual registrations for SEC and/or MC examinations in 2020 for the September Special Session providing 7,357 non-duplicate<sup>1</sup> e-mail addresses to which an invitation to participate in this survey was sent. The number of individual registrations is lower than that of previous years. This could be due to fear of the COVID-19 pandemic or that SEC school candidates were satisfied with the level awarded through the Predicted Level. In fact, only 2,892 out of the 5,158 original SEC candidates (57.5%) opted to sit for the September Special Session.

There were 852 responses. Thus, the number of responses is equal to 11.6% of the number of e-mails sent (including those which were not delivered) and 11.0% of the total number of candidates. These percentages are 7 percentage points lower than those reported in 2019. This might be due to a number of reasons, such as registrants not attending examinations due to fear of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As opposed to previous years, more respondents sat for AM/IM subjects (52.1%) rather than SEC (47.1%). However, this is expected as while 40% of the original SEC candidates chose not to sit for the examinations they had registered for, candidates who had planned to sit for the Second Matriculation Session were allowed to sit during the September Special Session with the candidates who had registered for the First Session. Thus, a much higher ratio of MC candidates than in previous years was observed in 2020. Similar to previous post-examination surveys, the majority of respondents were female (64.3%). Also similar to last year's cohort, a larger percentage of the male respondents sat for SEC examinations (53.3% of males as compared to 44.2% of females).

More respondents claim to have registered for enough subjects to be awarded the Matriculation Certificate (MC) than for single AM/IM examinations. This is interesting given that statistics published by MATSEC show an ever-decreasing number of candidates who apply for the six subjects required to obtain the MC in these examinations. However, it is to be noted that candidates who were planning to stagger their examinations between the two normal sessions (First and Second sessions), as well as new candidates who were planning to sit for the Second Session, sat for all the subjects during the September Special Session. Otherwise, some respondents might have classified themselves in this category because they sat for examinations in past sessions, intend to sit for more examinations in coming sessions, or otherwise misunderstood the question.

The largest two age groups of respondents are 16 (34.2%) and 18 (28.3%) years old, which are the ages at which candidates usually sit for SEC and MC level examinations respectively. The percentage of 18-year-olds is larger than in previous years. This is probably because of the reasons stated earlier: Less candidates sitting for the SEC and more candidates sitting for MC compared to 2019 First/Main examination sessions.

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<sup>1</sup> Some candidates might register for both SEC and MC examinations. These are considered as two separate registrations. The candidate will likely provide the same e-mail address for both registrations. In addition, some guardians who register their dependents for examinations might also provide the same e-mail address for the registrations of different candidates.



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Table 1: Information on participants – gender, age, and examination applications

		2017		2018		2019		2020	
		N	% (from total)	N	% (from total)	N	% (from total)	N	% (from total)
<b>Total</b>		1549		1594		1671		852	
<b>Gender</b>	Response Rate	99.4		99		99.4		98.4	
	Male	544	35.1	548	34.7	549	33.1	302	35.7
	Female	996	64.3	1030	65.3	1112	66.9	543	64.3
<b>Age</b>	Response Rate	91.8		92.5		89.1		94.4	
	15	12	0.8	19	1.3	19	1.3	9	1.1
	16	670	43.3	737	50	799	53.7	287	34.2
	17	119	7.7	105	7.1	110	7.4	115	13.7
	18	364	23.5	386	26.2	315	21.2	237	28.3
	19	86	5.6	56	3.8	65	4.4	66	7.9
	20	31	2	23	1.6	24	1.6	11	1.3
	20+	140	9	148	10	157	10.5	113	13.5
<b>Examinations Applied for in 2020</b>	Response Rate	100		100		100		100	
	At least 6 subjects at SEC level (O' levels)	622	40.2	728	45.7	820	49.1	127	14.9
	Individual AM (A' level) examinations	174	11.2	379	23.8	265	15.9	201	23.6
	Individual IM (Intermediate) examinations	70	4.5						
	Individual SEC (O' level) examinations	291	18.8	238	14.9	308	18.4	275	32.3
	Matriculation Certificate	392	25.3	249	15.6	278	16.6	248	29.1

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### SEC Predicted Level Exercise

This part of the survey sought to gather impressions about the Predicted Level awarded to SEC school candidates.

Only 309 respondents (36.3% of total respondents) indicated being school candidates who received a Predicted Level, with the rest being 93 private candidates sitting for SEC subjects to whom a Predicted Level could not be issued, and 449 candidates sitting for Advanced and/or Intermediate subjects. A corresponding predicted level exercise for MC level subjects was not carried out. For the purpose of this part of the survey, only replies from these 309 respondents were analysed (see Table 2).

*Table 2: How many of the participants were SEC school candidates who were awarded a predicted level*

		Yes	No	Replies
<b>Were you a SEC school candidate who was given a predicted level in your school subjects?</b>	N	309	542	851
	%	36.3	63.7	

Most (69.6%) respondents agree that the Predictive Level Exercise should not have been carried out as it does not accurately reflect differences in achievement between students who will be competing for the same schools and workplaces. However, 83.8% of the same respondents also indicated that the issuing of predicted levels to SEC candidates was a good initiative to reduce candidates' stress and workload during this time of uncertainty with 81.8% agreeing that a similar exercise should have been carried out for MC candidates. Then again, 72.2% felt that this initiative allowed individuals to work less and still get results.

Several measures were taken by MATSEC when comparing examination results from different schools, examination papers, and teachers. Given the apparent differences between schools, it was decided that levels of attainment be issued rather than SEC grades as in previous years. A predicted Lv3 is equivalent to SEC Grades 1 to 5, while Lv2 to SEC Grades 6 and 7. Although, the majority of the respondents (81.0%) agree with the statement that it is impossible to obtain fair results by comparing results from different schools, a roughly similar percentage of the same group (81.8%) also pointed they would have preferred being issued Grades rather than Levels.

From responses to these multiple-choice questions, it is unclear whether respondents were positive or not towards the predicted level exercise or not, as respondents at times agreed to rather opposite statements. Similarly, more than half respondents agreed with statements that the predicted level should have been based on the mock examination only (58.3%) and, at the same time, that the predicted level should have been based on the last three years of secondary schooling (66.0%). While 20.4% of the respondents strongly agreed that the Predicted Level should have been based on the final mark of Form 5/Year 11, 36.9% strongly agreed that the predicted level should have been based on the results obtained by candidates in all of the last three years of secondary schooling.

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Table 3: Response to questions about the SEC predicted level exercise

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Replies
<b>It is impossible to compare results from different schools. This exercise gives unfair results.</b>	N	125	125	54	5	309
	%	40.5	40.5	17.5	1.6	100
<b>Candidates should have been awarded a Grade (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 or U).</b>	N	150	103	47	9	309
	%	48.5	33.3	15.2	2.9	100
<b>Giving a predicted level to SEC candidates was a good initiative at reducing candidates' stress and workload in a time of uncertainty.</b>	N	116	143	32	18	309
	%	37.5	46.3	10.4	5.8	100
<b>A predicted level should have been given to MC candidates as well.</b>	N	82	171	50	6	309
	%	26.5	55.3	16.2	1.9	100
<b>The predicted level exercise should not have been done. It does not accurately show differences in achievement between students, and is unfair when students compete for the same schools and workplaces.</b>	N	99	116	79	15	309
	%	32.0	37.5	25.6	4.9	100
<b>The predicted level exercise was an initiative to allow individuals to work less and still get results.</b>	N	90	133	72	14	309
	%	29.1	43.0	23.3	4.5	100
<b>The predicted level should have been based on the final mark of Form 5/Year 11 (mock examinations).</b>	N	63	117	88	41	309
	%	20.4	37.9	28.5	13.3	100
<b>The predicted level should have been based on the results obtained by candidates in all of the last three years of secondary schooling.</b>	N	114	90	62	43	309
	%	36.9	29.1	20.1	13.9	100

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt that the Level they received for each individual subject was fair or otherwise. Results are summarised in the table below.

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Table 4: Was the predicted level awarded in individual SEC subjects fair?

	Was Fair		Was not Fair		Total
	N	%	N	%	
<b>Accounting</b>	42	59.2	29	40.8	71
<b>Arabic</b>	2	40.0	3	60.0	5
<b>Art</b>	22	61.1	14	38.9	36
<b>Biology</b>	60	54.5	50	45.5	110
<b>Business Studies</b>	6	50.0	6	50.0	12
<b>Chemistry</b>	41	60.3	27	39.7	68
<b>Commerce</b>	1	33.3	2	66.7	3
<b>Computer Studies</b>	35	76.1	11	23.9	46
<b>Economics</b>	28	58.3	20	41.7	48
<b>English Language</b>	200	78.7	54	21.3	254
<b>English Literature</b>	112	70.0	48	30.0	160
<b>Environmental Studies</b>	73	76.8	22	23.2	95
<b>Ethics</b>	6	46.2	7	53.8	13
<b>European Studies</b>	12	70.6	5	29.4	17
<b>French</b>	60	78.9	16	21.1	76
<b>Geography</b>	15	100	0	0.0	15
<b>German</b>	38	70.4	16	29.6	54
<b>Graphical Communications</b>	20	100	0	0.0	20
<b>History</b>	19	63.3	11	36.7	30
<b>Home Economics</b>	19	63.3	11	36.7	30
<b>Italian</b>	78	80.4	19	19.6	97
<b>Maltese</b>	158	67.5	76	32.5	234
<b>Mathematics</b>	164	64.8	89	35.2	253
<b>Music</b>	6	75.0	2	25.0	8
<b>Physical Education</b>	24	70.6	10	29.4	34
<b>Physics</b>	139	68.5	64	31.5	203
<b>Religion</b>	131	75.7	42	24.3	173
<b>Social Studies</b>	29	74.4	10	25.6	39
<b>Spanish</b>	17	85.0	3	15.0	20
<b>Textiles and Design</b>	1	8.3	11	91.7	12

Respondents were overwhelmingly of the opinion that the predicted level awarded to them for that particular subject was not fair in only four subjects. Moreover, there were few responses for most of these. The most problematic is, arguably, the response to Textiles and Design where only one of the 12 responses thought the predicted level was fair. In 26 of the thirty subjects listed, at least half of the participants sitting for that particular subject indicated being satisfied with the predicted level awarded. In ten subjects, more than 75% of responses were positive.

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### Examination Centres

This part of the survey sought to gather general impressions about examination centres during the September Special Session that was held in lieu of the postponement of the First/Main Session 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic mitigation measures were adopted. These were issued by the Ministry for Health and included measures such as a two-meter distance between candidate tables, masks worn by invigilation staff, temperature checks of candidates upon entering the centres, and masks worn by candidates when moving in common areas (candidates were not expected to keep their masks on for the duration of the examination). Therefore, additional centres and invigilation staff than are typically used in standard sessions had to be utilized.

Respondents were asked to mark their level of agreement with statements concerning COVID-19 mitigation measures, examination centres, and invigilation. The table that follows shows six of the statements related to COVID-19 mitigation along with the number of respondents selecting each option. The response rate for each item is also shown.

*Table 5: Response to questions about COVID-19 mitigation measures*

		<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>
<b>Sufficient mitigation measures to minimise the spread of COVID-19 during examinations were published by the Ministry for Health.</b>	N	309	437	72	33	851
	%	36.3	51.4	8.5	3.9	99.9
<b>Mitigation measures to minimise transmission of COVID-19 were in place INSIDE the examination centres.</b>	N	337	413	86	15	99.9
	%	39.6	48.5	10.1	1.8	99.9
<b>Mitigation measures to minimise transmission of COVID-19 were observed by candidates before and after examinations.</b>	N	208	369	204	70	851
	%	24.4	43.4	24	8.2	99.9
<b>Examinations should have been held in May as initially planned.</b>	N	346	197	208	100	851
	%	40.7	23.1	24.4	11.8	99.9
<b>The removal of oral, listening and practical components was needed to limit risk of transmission.</b>	N	361	276	148	66	851
	%	42.4	32.4	17.4	7.8	99.9
<b>The removal of oral, listening and practical components makes the assessment unfair in those particular subjects.</b>	N	252	253	264	82	851
	%	29.6	29.7	31	9.6	99.9

The majority of the respondents (87.7%) agreed that sufficient mitigation measures were published by the Ministry for Health to minimize the spread of COVID-19, with 88.1% of the respondents agreeing that these measures were successfully implemented inside the examination centres. However, a smaller percentage of respondents (67.1%) agreed that candidates themselves were observing the measures to minimise the transmission of COVID-19.

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Many cited students not wearing their masks properly or not wearing one at all and congregating in large groups before and after the examination. Several respondents cited that candidates should not have been left waiting outside, and that both when entering and exiting the examination centres, the entry of group of students should have been staggered so as to avoid bottlenecks and crowding at the main doors. Some respondents argued that the tables were spaced too closely together. Additionally, older participants stated that they should have been placed in separate rooms than the younger candidates.

Some of the qualitative responses were rather contradictory. While complaints of hot classrooms are received in every report, this year there were more such reports as windows had to be left open and fans not directed at candidates. Some failed to see this as a mitigation measure and argued the contrary. Then again, participants in other classes complained that fans were actually directed towards candidates, increasing the risk of transmission.

Most respondents (74.9%) agreed that the removal of oral, aural and practical components was needed to limit the risk of transmission, though 59.3% of the respondents also agreed that removing these components made the assessment unfair in those particular subjects. In their comments, some suggested that oral examinations should have taken place with mitigation measures, such as increased distance, better timetabling of the examination, and masks worn by both examiners and candidates. In retrospect, most respondents (63.8%) also agreed that examinations should have been held in May as was initially planned, citing in their comments that the rate of infections was lower in May and that the excessive waiting time increased their anxiety.

In comments, several candidates complained that alternative methods to perform the examinations should have been adopted, citing the University of Malta where many of the examinations were held online. However, it is to be noted that the reality at the rest of the University of Malta, of which MATSEC forms part, is different than that of MATSEC: students have their own individual accounts with the University of Malta, lecturers have the option to give assignments as summative assessments to award the final grade, logistical issues of MATSEC examinations would be different due to the high number of candidates and high stakes nature of the examinations.

Table 6 shows the three statements specifically related to the examination centres for the September Special Session along with the number of respondents selecting each option. The response rate for each item is also shown. Where applicable, this data is compared with those of previous Candidate Feedback reports. This table will only show the percentage of respondents in each year who agreed with a statement. Information about the other items will be presented in the same manner in the respective sections.

*Table 6: Response to questions about examination centres*

		<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>
<b>The examination centres were clean and well maintained</b>	N	398	416	28	2	844
	%	47.2	49.3	3.3	0.2	99.1
<b>The noise levels in examination centres were adequate.</b>	N	338	407	83	15	843
	%	40.1	48.3	9.8	1.8	98.9
<b>The examination centres were fit for purpose.</b>	N	349	419	62	13	843
	%	41.4	49.7	7.4	1.5	98.9

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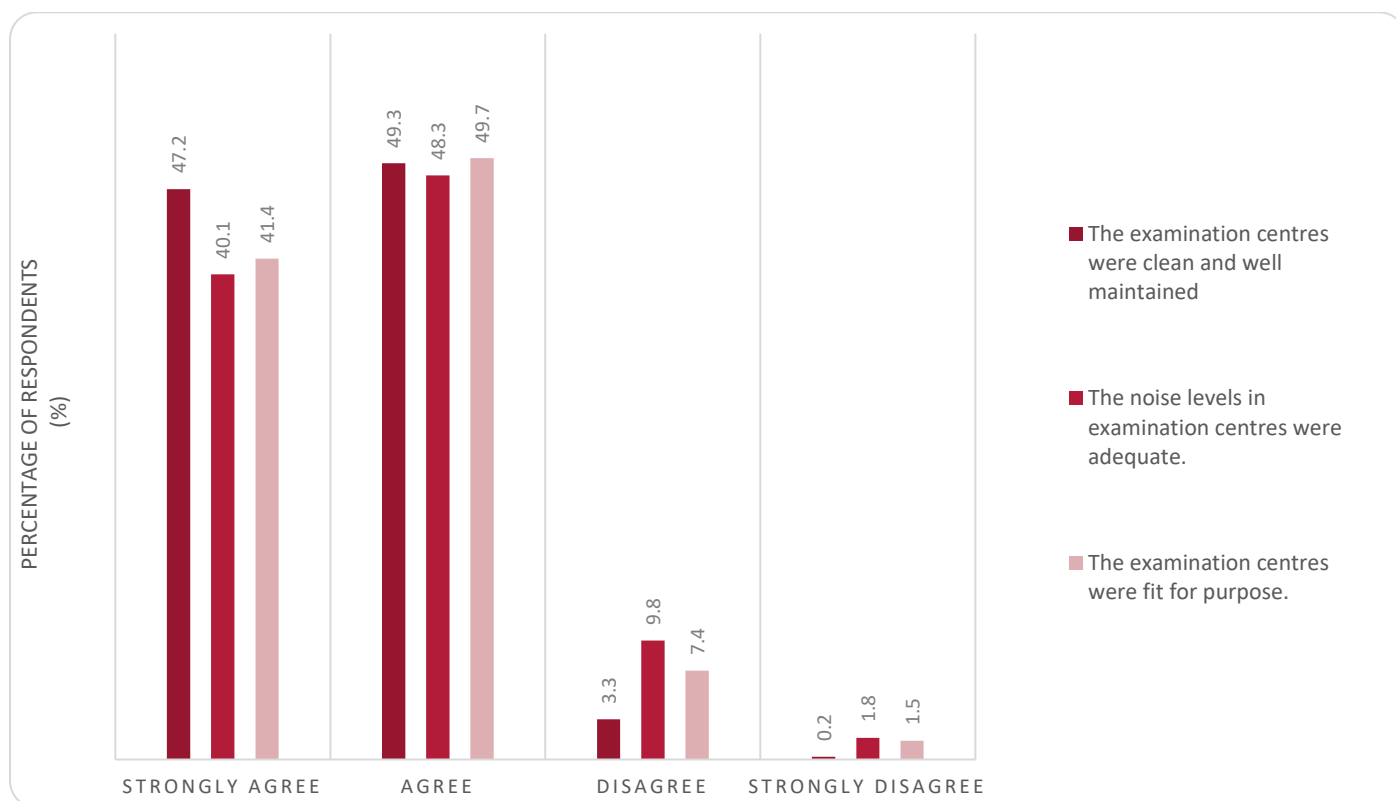


Figure 1: Response to questions about examination centres

Table 7: Response to questions about examination centres, by Year of Survey

Year	2020		2019		2018		2017	
Response	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
The examination centres were well maintained.	47.2	49.3	39	56.2	33.8	58.5	20	67.1
	96.5		95.2		92.3		87.1	
The noise levels in examination centres were adequate.	40.1	48.3	15.2	54.1	20.4	56.9	14.9	55.6
	88.3		69.3		77.3		70.5	
The examination centres were fit for purpose.	40.1	48.3	32.5	57	28.2	60.6	23	60.5
	88.4		89.6		88.8		83.5	

Respondents, in general, agree with all the presented statements. They agree mostly with the statement regarding examination centres being clean and well-maintained (96.5%) and were also very positive in stating that the centres were fit for purpose (88.4%). These results are similar to the previous years.

A noticeable improvement can be noted in the statement that noise levels were adequate for examinations, with 88.3% of the respondents being very positive about the noise levels. This is a vast improvement over the previous year where only 69.3% agreed with the same statement. This year's qualitative comments did not mention parties or sporting events happening next to examination centres, but some argued that bells were left on and were too loud. The main source of noise appeared to be other candidates who, once finished from their examinations, gathered outside the examination centre. This disrupted the concentration of candidates who were still in the examination

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rooms. As reported earlier, this also concerned respondents because of their peers' ignorance towards social distancing measures.

A number of candidates complained about the distances they were required to travel to their respective centres, especially if they had more than one examination during that particular day. This year, due to the increased number of centres utilized as part of the mitigation measures against COVID-19, less candidates could have been accommodated in their nearest centre. Other respondents grumbled about a clock not being made available in some examination rooms, or not being visible to candidates at the back.

This part of the survey typically also includes comments on oral, listening comprehensions and practical components with regards to examination centres. However, as part of the mitigation efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, these components were not held and candidates received full marks instead.

### Invigilation, Examination Regulations and Cheating

Results showing respondents' views about invigilation during examinations are shown below. This is also shown graphically in the figure that follows. These questions were used in previous reports, however one item has been changed from "The examination invigilators were professional" to "Invigilation staff were sufficiently informed to direct candidates with any difficulty they had". Results to this section are compared to those of previous years in Table 8. It is to be noted that due to the increased number of centres utilized due to the COVID-19, more invigilators were employed during this session than is standard.

*Table 8: Response to questions about examination invigilation*

		<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Total Responses</b>
<b>It is difficult to cheat during MATSEC examinations.</b>	N	415	314	85	27	841
	%	49.3	37.3	10.1	3.2	100
<b>Instructions were read to candidates before the start of every examination.</b>	N	224	301	217	102	844
	%	26.5	35.7	25.7	12.1	100
<b>Invigilators were on task to ensure no copying or collusion took place.</b>	N	346	400	86	12	844
	%	41.0	47.4	10.2	1.4	100
<b>Invigilation staff were sufficiently informed to direct candidates with any difficulty they had.</b>	N	254	426	128	32	840
	%	30.2	50.7	15.2	3.8	100



## CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2020): MATSEC SPECIAL SESSIONS IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

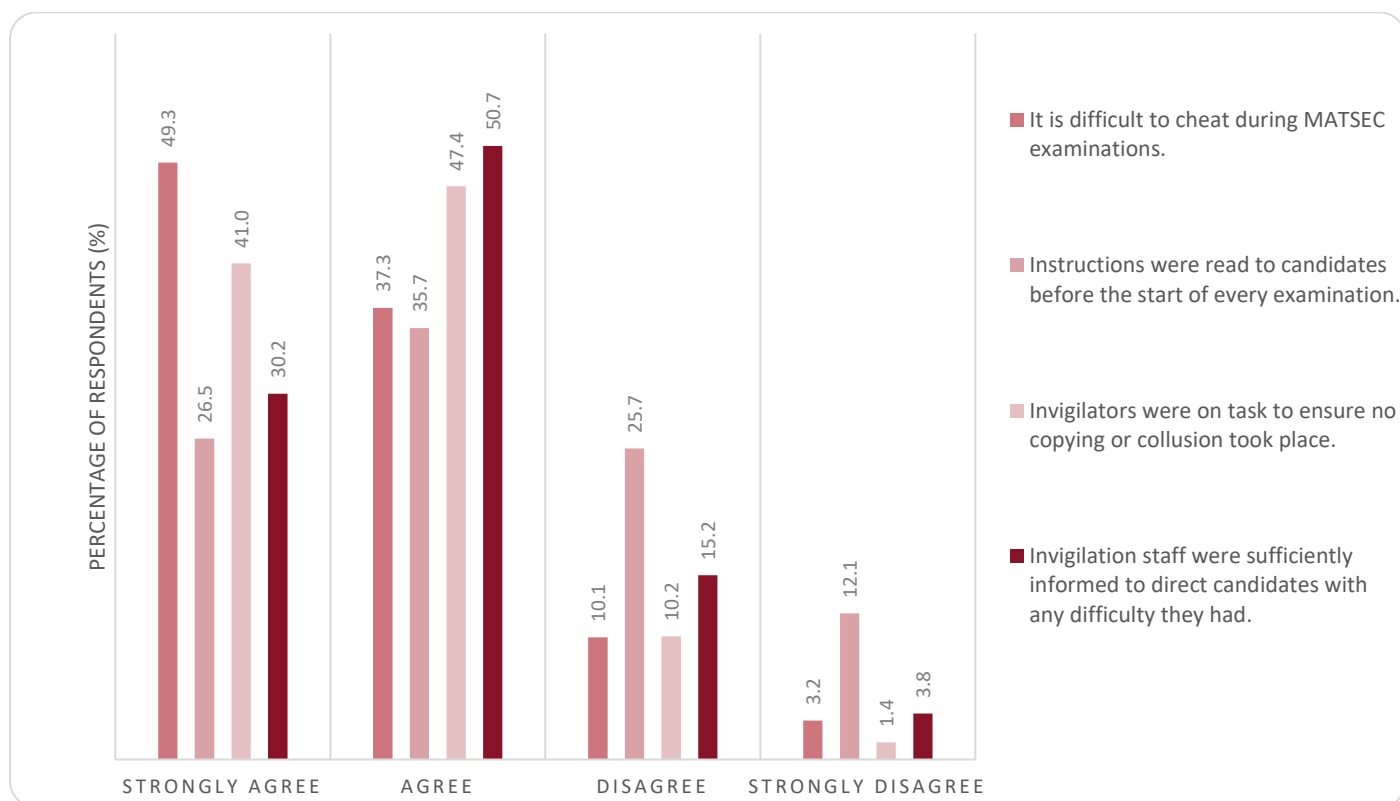


Figure 2: Response to questions about invigilation

Table 9: Response to questions about examination invigilation, by Year of Survey

	2020		2019		2018		2017	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
<b>Invigilation staff were sufficiently informed to direct candidates with any difficulty they had.<sup>2</sup></b>	30.2	50.7	22.6	55.1	18.6	51.2	16.0	51.5
	81.0		77.8		69.8		67.5	
<b>It is difficult to cheat during MATSEC examinations.</b>	49.3	37.3	37.8	37.4	38.6	39.4	35.1	42.1
	86.7		75.2		77.9		77.2	
<b>Instructions were read to candidates before the start of every examination.</b>	26.5	35.7	40.8	33.8	41.6	36.7	49.4	33.5
	62.2		74.5		78.3		82.9	
<b>Invigilators were on task to ensure no copying or collusion took place.</b>	41.0	47.4	34.5	50.1	37.4	49.1	36.0	48.9
	87.4		84.6		86.5		84.9	

<sup>2</sup> This read "The examination invigilators were professional" in previous years.

## CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2020): MATSEC SPECIAL SESSIONS IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The vast majority (81%) of participants agreed that invigilators were sufficiently informed about the various examinations to be able to direct candidates with any difficulties that they had. This survey had the highest positive response for invigilator professionalism within the last four years, continuing the trend of increasing positive response by participants over the past four years. Nevertheless, through qualitative comments, several respondents, similar to previous years, indicated a number of shortcomings:

- removed their masks when talking;
- kept talking between themselves;
- hurried up candidates at the end of the examination;
- argued in front of the candidates;
- were inattentive;
- used or even answered mobile phones;
- asked the candidates what must be done;
- had lunch.

Similar to last year, a number of comments specifically targeted Art. Even though subject specific regulations are noted in the guidebook produced for invigilation staff, invigilators are claimed to be ignorant of these. According to claims received this year,

- a model who was supposed to pose with a book, started reading from it rather than standing still;
- invigilation staff did not know that hair dryers could be used to dry the painting.

Although invigilation staff is given instructions to read to candidates before each and every examination, the percentage of candidates who agree that this is done stands at 62.2%, an alarming decline from when this practice was first enforced by MATSEC three years ago, and a sharp decline from last year where 74.5% of the participants agreed that instructions had been read. There were complaints that instructions were issued only in Maltese while other instructions were poorly explained. This is the statement which received the lowest positive rating regarding invigilation within the survey this year, as well as for the past four years.

The majority of participants agreed that it was difficult to cheat during the examinations (86.7%) and that invigilation staff were attentive to ensure that no copying or collusion took place. These values are higher than last year. This could be an improvement or it could be caused by the difference in the population of respondents. Comments about high incidence of cheating are also lacking this year, although some pointed out that masks offered an additional medium for note hiding.

### Printing Clarity

In recent years, MATSEC did several changes to its examination papers to increase their readability. These included the adoption of the font Verdana in all papers following research carried out by MATSEC, adopting a common standard of paper layout across all subjects and all levels (except for vocational subjects), and printing on light coloured paper. Feedback collected in previous candidate post-examination surveys was overwhelmingly positive – for instance, last year the majority of survey participants (96.7%) indicated that the font was clearly readable (96.7%) and that printing was clear (87.2%) – and this year these questions were dropped. However, a handful of participants used to grumble, in qualitative responses, about printing on light-coloured paper. For this reason, this year's participants were asked to evaluate whether printing on light coloured paper, rather than on white colour, made reading easier. Although some qualitative comments complained about printing on coloured paper, most candidates indicated that they found

## CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2020): MATSEC SPECIAL SESSIONS IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

this beneficial (77.5%). However, respondents seem less positive towards printing on lightly coloured paper as opposed to other measures such as the font used.

Table 10: Response to questions about examination paper printing and font clarity

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
<b>Printing on lightly coloured paper (rather than on white paper) makes reading easier.</b>	N	264	398	152	37	841
	%	30.2	47.3	18.1	4.4	100

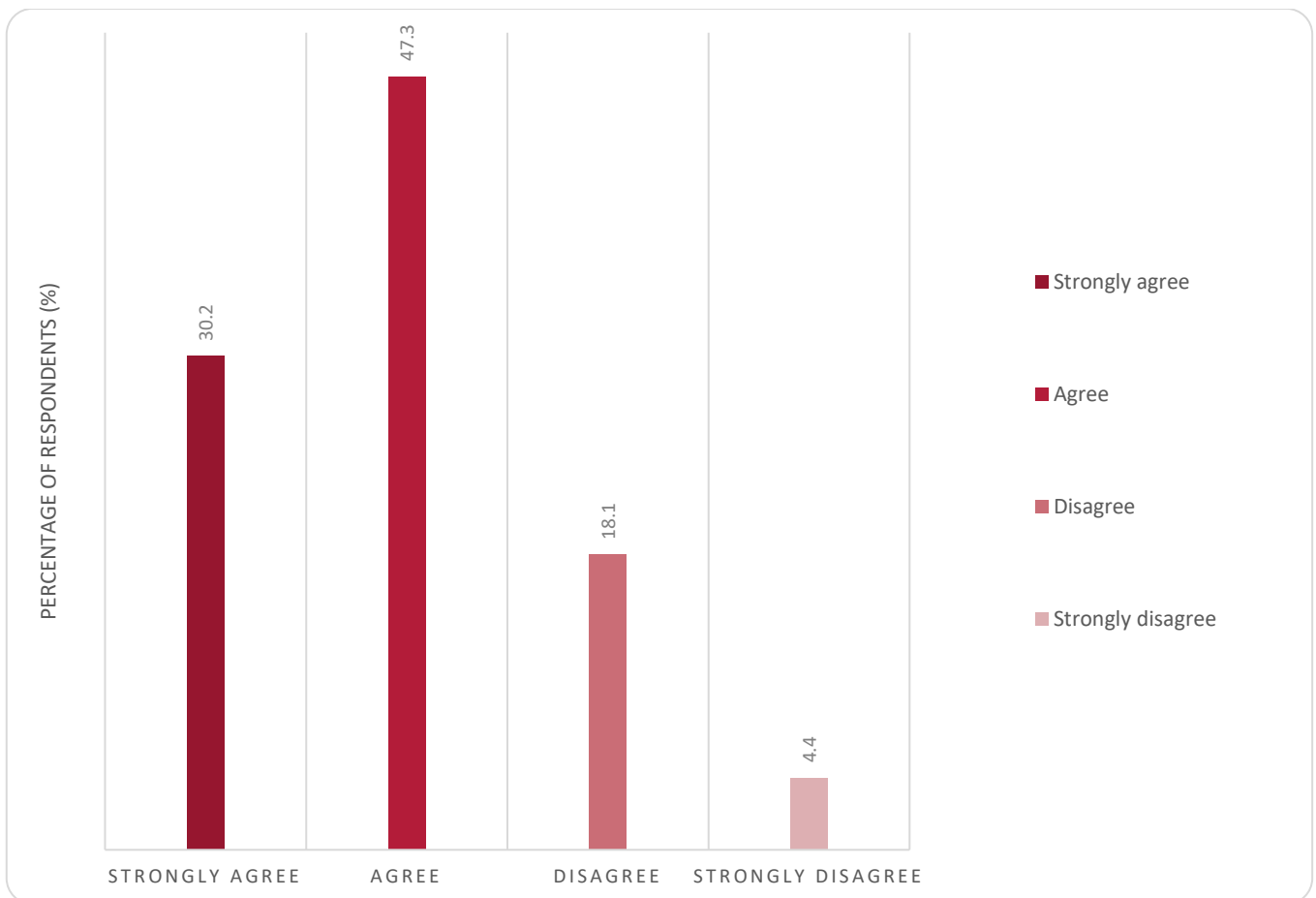


Figure 3: Response to questions about paper printing and font clarity

### Help from MATSEC

Owing to the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of queries that MATSEC received was considerably higher than previous years. Since the Main Session was cancelled, certain administrative tasks, like oral examinations or the inputting and vetting of examination marks, could not be carried out and additional MATSEC staff was assigned to assist in candidate queries, both via telephone and email.

Respondents were asked whether they sought help from MATSEC and, if they did, to rate the assistance received. Again, like last year's survey, the 'Other' option was not provided. This is because past respondents have used this to include irrelevant options like school counsellors, teachers, and student political organisations. This allows comparison of this year's survey with that of last year, but makes comparison to former surveys problematic.

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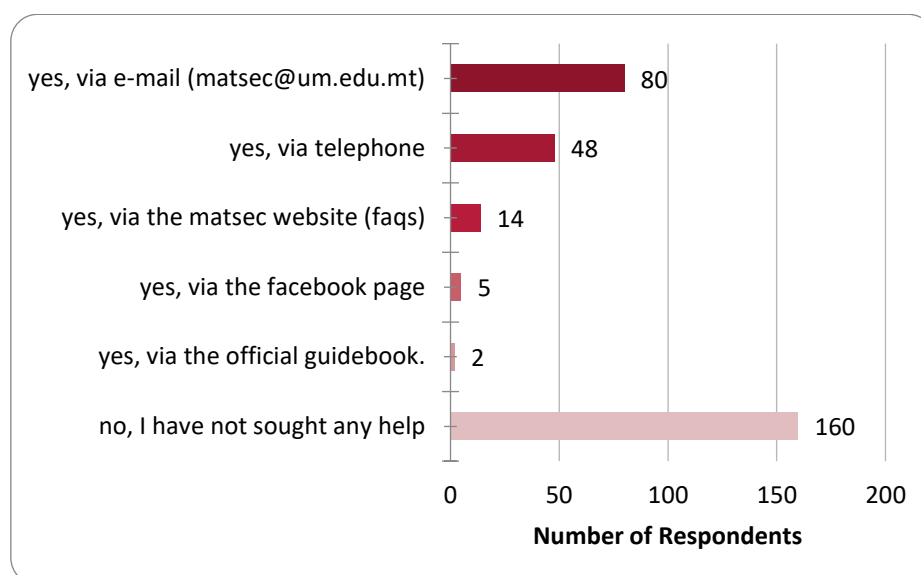


Figure 4: Response to questions about help sought from MATSEC

This year, 51.8% of respondents did not seek help from MATSEC. Participants were asked to refrain from commenting on complaints sent to bodies which are unrelated to MATSEC (e.g. newspapers, student organisations, school counsellors, etc) since these are NOT necessarily forwarded to the MATSEC and therefore did NOT qualify. This is far lower than the percentage quoted in previous reports, which stood at 76.5% (2019), 72.2% (2018) and 73.8% (2017). This was most probably due to candidates querying for clarifications regarding the predicted level exercises, the September Special Session and entry to post-secondary schools and University due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The use of e-mail and telephone remain the two most used means of contacting MATSEC. However, the difference between the two continues to increase along the years with more respondents claiming to use e-mail. The majority (64%) of respondents who sought help from MATSEC are satisfied with the assistance, although this is lower than the previous year, where 78.9% of respondents claimed to be satisfied. This could be due to the uncertainties caused by COVID-19.

Data in Table 11 shows that respondents are satisfied with the help received from MATSEC irrespective of the channel used, although those who used telephone or looked for information on the website were most satisfied. These differences are more pronounced than in previous years.

Table 11: Feedback on help provided by MATSEC, by type of assistance and by year of survey

Channel		2020			2019			2018			2017		
		Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Total
e-Mail	N	68	5	80	124	40	178	135	17	157	126	33	159
	%	85.0	6.3		69.7	22.5		86	10.8		79.2	20.8	
Telephone	N	37	3	48	98	8	109	129	11	148	120	20	140
	%	77.1	6.3		89.9	7.3		87.2	7.4		85.7	14.3	
Facebook Page	N	3	2	5	22	9	33	23	2	28	31	5	36
	%	60.0	40.0		66.7	27.3		82.1	7.1		86.1	13.9	
MATSEC Website (FAQs)	N	12	1	14	49	3	57	73	3	82	35	5	40
	%	85.7	7.1		86	5.3		89	3.7		87.5	12.5	
Official Guidebook	N	2	0	2	10	3	15	16	2	18	7	0	7
	%	100	0.0		66.7	20		88.9	11.1		100	0	

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From qualitative survey responses, it seems that many respondents were satisfied with the responses received from MATSEC. From the 75 comments received, 64 participants (85.3%) were very positive regarding the response received, and many thanked MATSEC Staff in their qualitative comments for being very supportive and informative during these uncertain times. Other comments stated that the published guidelines and FAQs were very concise and helpful. Qualitative responses were more positive than those of last year.

Asked what other services could be offered by MATSEC, a few respondents made their suggestions. These included:

- provision of answers to examination papers;
- e-assessment (online examinations);
- dispersing candidates who finish examinations, to mitigate both noise and the spread of COVID-19.

Other comments shed light on candidates' perceived difficulty in their commute to examination centres, suggesting free transport to centres and choosing centres which are closest to home.

### Matriculation Certificate

Candidates who applied for the MC First Session were automatically transferred to the Special September Session. A further registration period was opened for candidates who were planning to sit for MC subjects during the Second Session for them to sit for examinations in the Special September Session.

As in previous years, respondents were asked whether they agree with the compulsory nature of each group in the Matriculation Certificate. Subjects are divided into four groups of which students have to sit for subjects from the first three groups if they wish to be awarded the MC. Systems of Knowledge is also a compulsory component of the MC. Results to these items are summarised in the tables below, with the second table allowing for comparison with previous candidate feedback reports.

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

The Matriculation Certificate should require a pass in:		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total Responses
<b>a Group 1 subject.</b>	N	207	169	36	20	432
	%	47.9	39.1	8.3	4.6	
<b>a Group 2 subject.</b>	N	169	198	46	22	435
	%	38.9	45.5	10.6	5.1	
<b>a Group 3 subject.</b>	N	195	162	50	25	432
	%	45.1	37.5	11.6	5.8	
<b>Systems of Knowledge.</b>	N	55	126	94	161	436
	%	12.6	28.9	21.6	36.9	

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*Table 13: Response to items about groups making up the Matriculation Certificate, by year of survey*

The Matriculation Certificate should require a pass in:	2020		2019		2018		2017	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
<b>a Group 1 subject.</b>	47.9	39.1	48.0	41.9	53.7	38.7	49.2	39.8
	87.0		89.9		92.4		89.0	
<b>a Group 2 subject.</b>	38.9	45.5	36.5	44.1	45.9	39.7	36.0	43.8
	84.4		80.6		85.6		79.8	
<b>a Group 3 subject.</b>	45.1	37.5	40.6	38.9	49.0	32.8	41.7	34.4
	82.6		79.6		81.8		76.1	
<b>Systems of Knowledge.</b>	12.6	28.9	12.2	25.1	17.2	26.0	13.7	23.1
	41.5		37.3		43.2		36.8	

Similar to previous years, respondents agree with the compulsory nature of each of Groups 1, 2, and 3, with the highest level of agreement being with the compulsory nature of Group 1 subjects. Also similar to previous years, respondents disagree with the compulsory nature of IM Systems of Knowledge, with many stating that, while the subject content is interesting, it should not be a requirement for the award of the MC. As in previous reports, there is a considerable number of qualitative responses stating that candidates should be allowed to choose subjects relevant to their desired career path, rather than having to mandatorily pass from at least a subject from each group. This runs counter to the philosophy of the MC.

As part of the mitigation measures adopted by MATSEC to limit the spreading of COVID-19, coursework moderation was conducted online via Zoom Meetings. A total of 46 participants from the survey (5.4%) indicated being private candidates for advanced and/or intermediate subjects who had been called for interviews, who collectively made up 10% of all the MC respondents.

*Table 14: Whether participants were asked to sit for an online coursework interview, by year of survey*

		Yes	No	Total	% Yes	% Yes from MC respondents
<b>If you submitted coursework as a private candidate for any subject, were you called to sit for an interview (via Zoom)?</b>	N	46	403	447	5.4	10.2

## CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2020): MATSEC SPECIAL SESSIONS IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Table 15: Subjects for which participants were asked to sit for an online coursework interview*

		IM Systems of Knowledge	IM Computing	IM Information Technology	AM Information Technology	Other	Total
<b>For which subject/s were you called to sit for an interview (via Zoom) in 2020?</b>	N	39	2	2	1	2	46
	%	84.8	4.3	4.3	2.2	4.3	

The majority of the participants (80.4%) indicated that they agree with the statement that the questions they were asked were relevant to the submitted coursework. Most respondents (69.6%) indicated that interviews are a good way of assessing the veracity of the project, meaning as a method of assessing whether the project was truly their work. Furthermore, the majority of the participants (63.0%) indicated that coursework assessment should be held online in future sessions, even after the pandemic. In fact, this was indicated as being preferred over physical interviews (56.5%). When these two statements were closely evaluated, more candidates (26.1%) strongly agreed that coursework interviews continue to be held online rather than being held in person (15.2%). Nevertheless, a number of qualitative comments complained about the audio quality of online interviews arguing sound was too high pitched or distorted.

*Table 16: Response to items about online coursework interviews*

		Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Replies
<b>The questions asked were relevant to the submitted coursework.</b>	N	15	22	7	2	46
	%	32.6	47.89	15.2	4.3	100
<b>I was asked questions which were unrelated to the subject or project.</b>	N	8	9	22	7	46
	%	17.4	19.6	47.8	15.2	100
<b>Interviews are a good way of assessing the veracity of a project.</b>	N	8	24	10	4	46
	%	17.4	52.2	21.7	8.7	100
<b>Coursework interviews should continue being held online in future sessions (after the pandemic).</b>	N	12	17	12	5	46
	%	26.1	37.0	26.1	10.9	100
<b>Interviews should be held physically (in person) wherever possible.</b>	N	7	19	16	4	46
	%	15.2	41.3	34.8	8.7	100

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### Structure of Assessment: Summative Assessment and Coursework

Participants were asked to indicate which of four statements regarding the composition of examinations they preferred, ranging from completely based on examinations to completely based on coursework. Respondents were asked to indicate whether examinations should happen yearly or at the end of course, and if yearly, whether they should assess only material covered in that year. Results are differentiated by whether respondents sat for SEC or MC examinations.

Most participants prefer written examinations, as only 11.6% of MC participants and 14.4% of SEC participants, would like MATSEC to base their grade only on CW. Of the respondents preferring written examinations, the majority (43.4% of MC participants and 35.8% of SEC participants) indicated preferring that the grade awarded by MATSEC is based solely on the examination held at the end of the course. Thus, the preference for summative assessments is more pronounced amongst MC participants.

More SEC candidates prefer examinations to be held yearly, and these can be roughly equally split between those who would like these to be the only means of assessment (26.4%) or to accompany and end-of-course assessment (23.4%). Among MC participants, these percentages stand at 23.4% and 21.6% respectively.

*Table 17: Response to items about composition of MATSEC examinations*

Examinations should...		MC	SEC
<b>be held at the end of each year (i.e. Year 9, 10 and 11 for SEC; 1st and 2nd Years for MC) and assess only material of that particular year.</b>	N	105	106
	%	23.4	26.4
<b>be held both at the end of each year (i.e. Year 9, 10 and 11 for SEC; 1st and 2nd Years for MC) assessing material of that year AND at the end of course assessing all material. All these should be MATSEC designed and taken into consideration.</b>	N	97	94
	%	21.6	23.4
<b>be held once at the end of the course (i.e. 2nd Year for MC).</b>	N	195	144
	%	43.4	35.8
<b>not be held at all and grades informed based only on coursework.</b>	N	52	58
	%	11.6	14.4

Respondents were asked to select from four statements regarding coursework and its effect on the final grade received from MATSEC. These ranges from coursework being the sole responsibility of the school/teachers, with no effect on the MATSEC grade, to coursework being the main determiner of the grade. Results are differentiated by whether respondents sat for SEC or MC examinations.

The majority of respondents agree that coursework should be compulsory and affect the MATSEC grade. However, most participants agree that it should not be the main determiner of the grade. This preference towards coursework not being the main determiner is much more pronounced amongst MC respondents: with 51.2% agreeing to the statement as compared to 36.6% amongst SEC participants. SEC participants showed less preference towards the compulsory nature of coursework in this case: While roughly a quarter of the MC respondents (25.6%) were of the opinion that coursework should not affect the final Grade awarded from MATSEC, this percentage of SEC participants who believe so stands at 38.6%. Of those believing that coursework should not affect the MATSEC grade, most believed that coursework should be entirely the school/teachers' decision and not made compulsory by MATSEC (21.4% of SEC respondents and 13.4% of MC respondents).

Similar survey items on coursework featured in last year's survey indicated that most respondents (72.2%) believed that coursework is unfair because different schools/teachers mark the work unreliably, and this was argued independently by several replies in the section regarding the Predicted Level obtained during the Exercise which was carried out in lieu of the cancelled Main Session.



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Table 18: Response to items about Coursework's influence on MATSEC grade

Coursework should...		MC	SEC
<b>be compulsory and be the main determiner of the MATSEC grade (more than 50%).</b>	N	104	100
	%	23.2	24.9
<b>be compulsory and have a small effect on the MATSEC grade (less than 40%).</b>	N	230	147
	%	51.2	36.6
<b>be compulsory to ensure hands-on learning, but not affect the MATSEC grade.</b>	N	55	69
	%	12.2	17.2
<b>be entirely the teacher/school's decision and not affect the MATSEC grade.</b>	N	60	86
	%	13.4	21.4

SEC as a preparation for MC

As in all past surveys, MC respondents were asked whether SEC subjects are a good preparation for one to study the subject at a higher level. Of the 431 respondents to this question, 215 (49.9%) respondents believe that SEC subjects offered a good foundation for subjects studied at IM or AM level, while 36 (8.4%) believe they did not. Last year, 12.7% of the participants indicated that SEC subjects insufficiently prepare one for further studies. As in results of previous surveys, a large percentage of respondents (180, 41.8%) chose to remain impartial. These are illustrated in the figure that follows.

Comments provided by respondents are also similar to those of previous years and two arguments featured prominently:

- SEC examinations offer an adequate preparation for MC 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. Survey respondents of past reports argued that the differences experienced in other subjects were too large, however, such comments were less prominent in this year's survey.

Table 19: Were SEC subjects a good preparation for the MC?

		Yes	No	So and so	Replies
<b>Were SEC subjects a good preparation for the MC?</b>	N	215	36	180	431
	%	49.9	8.4	41.8	100

## CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2020): MATSEC SPECIAL SESSIONS IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

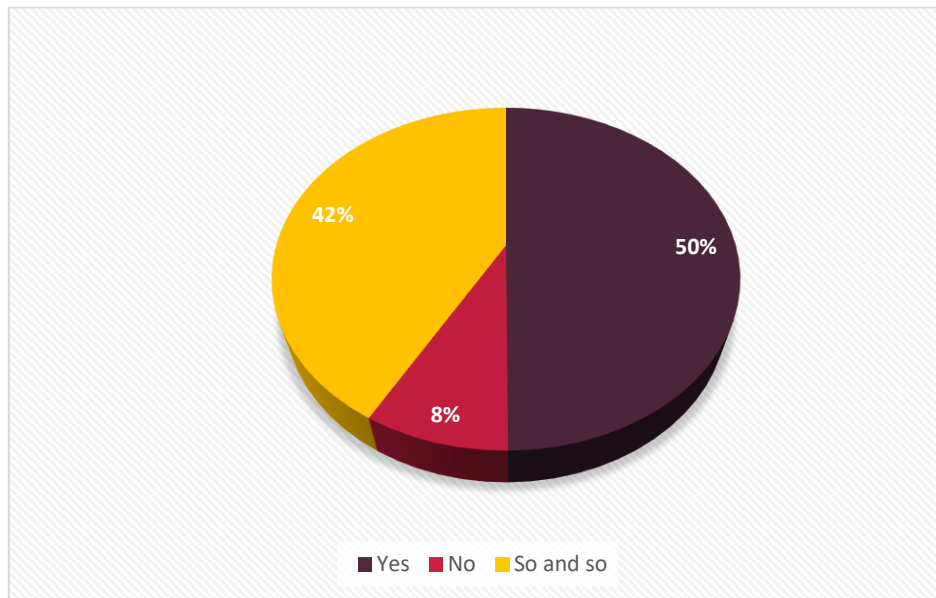


Figure 5: Where SEC subjects a good preparation for the Matriculation Certificate

### Examination Access Arrangements

A total of 280 survey respondents claim to have qualified for Examination Access Arrangements (EAAs). This amounts to 29.8% of participants, a considerably increase from the 13.9% reported in last year's feedback. Although 100 of the replies (35.7%) did not specify on which conditions EAAs were granted, the most stated conditions are ADD/ADHD (12.1%) and SpLD/Dyslexia (10.4%), similar to last year where 9.9% of the participants indicated being given EAAs for ADD/ADHD, and 12.9% for SpLD/Dyslexia. It has to be noted that more participants chose to specify for which condition EAAs were granted, since last year more than half the participants chose not to indicate for which condition arrangements were granted. ADD/ADHD and SpLD/Dyslexia are the most commonly cited conditions as shown in MATSEC SEC Statistical Reports for different years. Respondents could select more than one condition and many respondents did so. From the 180 participants to this item, 63 claim one condition while the rest stated multiple ones. Data on the conditions stated by participants is shown in the table below.

## CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2020): MATSEC SPECIAL SESSIONS IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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

Condition	Respondents	
	N	%
<b>ADD / ADHD</b>	34	12.1
<b>Autism Spectrum Disorder (Including Asperger's Syndrome)</b>	14	5.0
<b>Hearing Impairment</b>	8	2.9
<b>Last Minute Injuries</b>	5	1.8
<b>Medical Conditions (Including Diabetes, IBS, ME, Fibromyalgia, Systemic/Disoid Lupus Erythematosus)</b>	6	2.1
<b>Mental Health (Including Anxiety, OCD, Bipolar Disorder, Depression)</b>	10	3.6
<b>Mobility Problems (Including Cerebral Palsy)</b>	2	0.7
<b>SpLD / Dyslexia</b>	29	10.4
<b>Stammer</b>	3	1.1
<b>Visual Impairment</b>	2	0.7
<b>DCD / Dyspraxia</b>	8	2.8
<b>No Reply</b>	100	35.7

Table 21 shows the EAAs which respondents qualified for. Other specific arrangements were quoted by participants, including enlarged script, use of word processor, use of lift, close parking to centre, and special seating for certain examinations. There were 100 responses for this item, of which 37 selected one EAA.

Table 21: Examination Access Arrangements granted to respondents

Condition	Respondents		
	As the only EAA	Total	%
<b>Prompter</b>	0	25	8.9
<b>Reader</b>	3	23	8.2
<b>Room with few Candidates</b>	4	50	17.9
<b>Extra Time</b>	29	83	29.6
<b>Supervised Rest Breaks</b>	1	18	6.4
<b>Scribe</b>	0	3	1.1

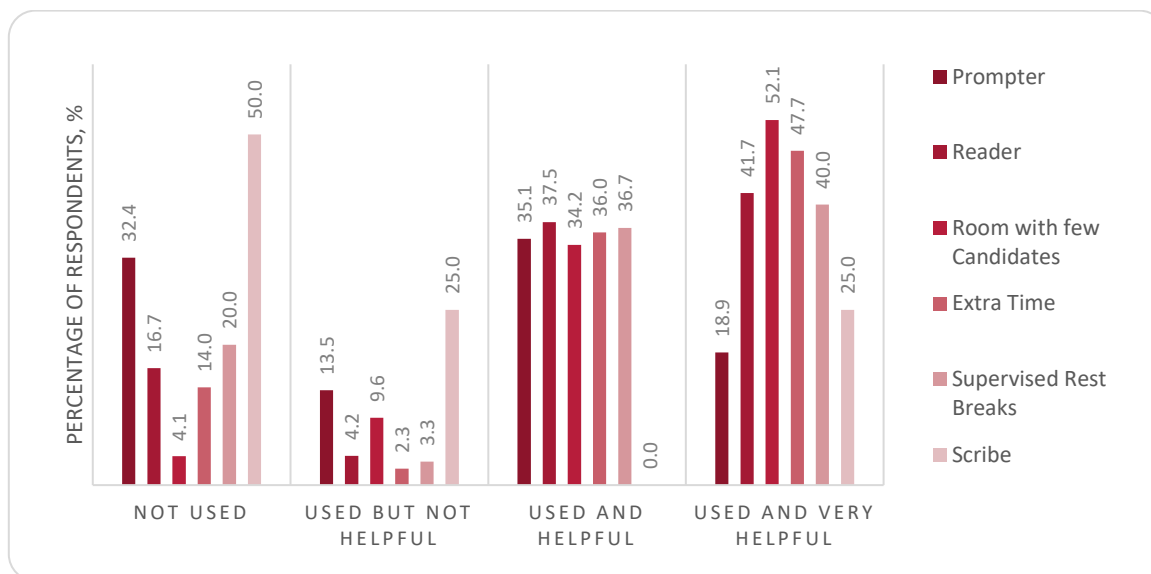
Respondents were then asked about the level of usefulness of the EAA/s they qualified for. The option 'Not Used' should have been reserved for respondents who qualified for the arrangement but did not use it. However, replies in this section show that respondents may have misunderstood this instruction as several replies to this question did not match the offered access arrangement as reported in Table 20 and Figure 8. For example, while only three respondents claimed to have been eligible for a Scribe (Table 20), 50 respondents later stated they were eligible for this arrangement but did not use it, while nine candidates claimed to have used this arrangement to varying degree of satisfaction. Furthermore, twenty-four candidates claimed not to have made use of the EAA Room with few Candidates. Candidates who qualify for this EAA are accommodated in rooms with fewer candidates and, therefore, they would have automatically used this arrangement if qualified for it.

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Last year, it was evident that some respondents misunderstood the question and indicated the term “not used” as meaning not having been given this access arrangement. This year, participants were specifically asked to answer only for the EAAs for which they qualified. However, participants still seem to have misunderstood the question. The raw data can be found tabulated in Table 22. The data was cleared up to match feedback for this question with the previous statement where they chose which EAA/s they were granted. This procedure is identical to that in last year’s report. Table 23 shows the fixed results.

*Table 22: Usefulness of Examination Access Arrangements (raw)*

		Not used	Used but not helpful	Used and helpful	Used and very helpful	Replies
<b>Prompter</b>	N	52	11	8	5	76
	%	68.4	14.5	10.5	6.6	
<b>Reader</b>	N	48	5	9	8	70
	%	68.6	7.1	12.9	11.4	
<b>Room with few Candidates</b>	N	24	9	24	33	90
	%	26.7	10.0	26.7	36.7	
<b>Extra Time</b>	N	34	5	21	43	103
	%	33.0	4.9	20.4	41.7	
<b>Supervised Rest Breaks</b>	N	47	5	12	5	69
	%	68.1	7.2	17.4	7.2	
<b>Scribe</b>	N	50	1	5	3	59
	%	84.7	1.7	8.5	5.1	



*Figure 6: Usefulness of Examination Access Arrangements (modified)*

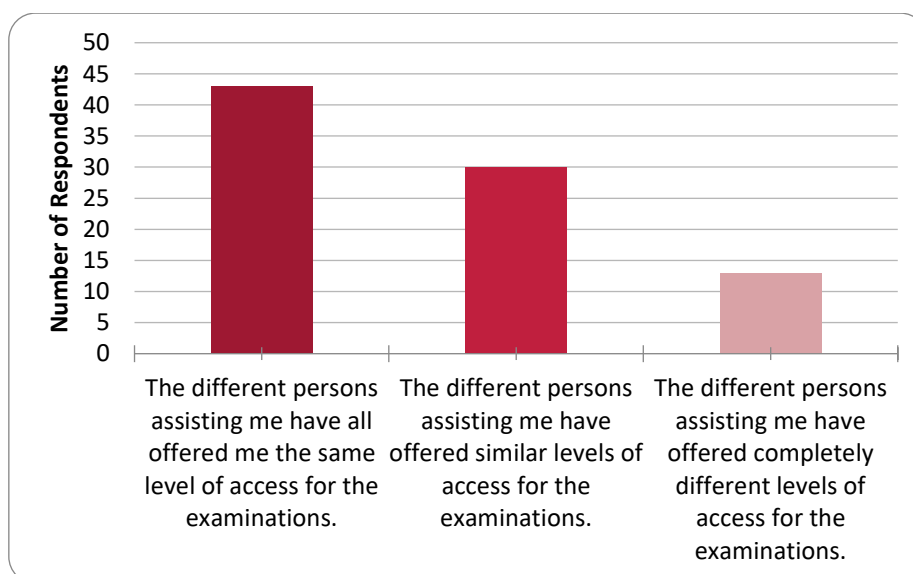
## CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2020): MATSEC SPECIAL SESSIONS IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

*Table 23: Usefulness of Examination Access Arrangements (modified)*

		Not used	Used but not helpful	Used and helpful	Used and very helpful
<b>Prompter</b>	N	9	8	4	3
	%	37.5	33.3	16.7	12.5
<b>Reader</b>	N	10	3	3	6
	%	45.5	13.6	13.6	27.8
<b>Room with few Candidates</b>	N	2	3	18	26
	%	4.1	6.1	36.7	56.1
<b>Extra Time</b>	N	15	3	21	41
	%	18.8	3.4	26.3	51.3
<b>Supervised Rest Breaks</b>	N	8	3	6	1
	%	44.4	16.7	33.3	5.6
<b>Scribe</b>	N	0	1	1	1
	%	0	33.3	33.3	33.3

Extra time and room with a few candidates are the EAAs deemed most helpful, with the majority of respondents indicating that they found these EAAs helpful and very helpful (92.0% and 77.6% respectively). The prompter is, similar to last year, the EAA less deemed useful by the participants, with 37.5% indicating not using the EAA and 33.3% not finding it useful. These are worse than last year where 32.4% had stated not making use of the EAA and 13.5% finding it not helpful, followed by the Reader where 45.5% claimed not using it and 13.6% finding it not helpful.

Respondents were asked which one of three statements best describes the equality of EAAs when these were offered by different persons. A total of 13 from the 86 responses to this survey item (15.1%) claimed that different personnel provided them with different levels of access, 30 (34.9%) stated that they received a similar level of access for the examinations, while 43 (50.0%) said they received the same level of access throughout all examinations. This year's feedback is, thus, similar to that obtained in previous reports (last year, 64 from 110 respondents claimed to have received equal level of access from different personnel).



*Figure 7: Equality of Access Offered by Different Access Personnel*

## CANDIDATES' FEEDBACK (2020): MATSEC SPECIAL SESSIONS IN LIGHT OF COVID-19 PANDEMIC

When asked whether EAAs were fair, most participants (81.3% of the 107 responses to this item) responded positively. The reason cited mostly by respondents who complained was not being given the EAA/s that they thought they should have qualified for, with some citing different access arrangements when sitting examinations offered by foreign awarding boards in Malta or for school examinations. These argued that not being granted the arrangements and help they had become used to was a drawback during their MATSEC examinations. Additionally, several respondents claimed that persons with different arrangements were commonly placed in one room, and these disrupted them.

The majority of qualitative comments noted how EAAs are tailor-made for each individual candidate and were very appreciative for the support and assistance they received from MATSEC and the ADSU. Others also noted how EAAs allow candidates with specific conditions to express their skills without being given an unfair advantage over other candidates. These comments have become common for this part of the survey.

Respondents who had qualified for EAAs were asked to give suggestions as to how EAAs can be improved. A total of 30 respondents gave their opinions which were analysed individually. The most cited suggestion was to contact EAA candidates individually so that their needs are met, to ensure that the EAA granted is sufficient. Some candidates asked for additional arrangements for Maltese examinations as, according to them, dyslexic candidates have more difficulty with this language. Some candidates indicated wishing to be placed in separate rooms. However, wherever possible, candidates with EAAs are assigned to the same, specifically assigned centre.

### General Comments

A variety of comments were collected from respondents and these were included in the relevant sections of this report. This section collates other comments not directly linked to one of the sections in this report. Most of these comments were provided in the additional feedback section, which concludes the survey and to which 101 participants responded.

The majority of the comments were related to the September Special Session and the upcoming results, where many participants desired that results be published earlier due to the registrations for post-secondary schools and University. Others expected that the stress and uncertainty caused by the pandemic should be taken into consideration by MATSEC examiners when correcting the examination papers. Furthermore, participants not receiving a Predicted Level, namely private SEC candidates, some SEC candidates from institutions which did not complete mock examinations, and MC candidates, expressed their disappointment at not receiving such a Level from a similar exercise. This was expressed repeatedly by SEC private candidates who had applied for the Main Session. Since no corresponding resit session is to be carried out for SEC subjects, these participants expressed anger at not having a second chance should they fail to get the desired grade during the September Special Session.

Many qualitative responses lamented of the conflicting instructions given early on during the beginning of the pandemic in the Maltese Islands, that is that examinations would happen as originally planned. Older participants expressed their desire to be placed in rooms with fewer numbers of candidates as to limit their exposure to potential infection from COVID-19.

Some participants argued that examinations depend mainly on recall and that more emphasis should be placed on application of knowledge and higher order skills. Due to the pandemic, many participants called for alternative forms of assessment, especially if they could be held from the relative safety of home.

A number of comments reflected inconsistency between MATSEC documents and teaching and learning in the respondents' schools. A number of respondents cited multiple times that the questions did not cover topics learned in schools, with particular emphasis on science subjects, specifically Chemistry and Biology. Further comments argued that not all online teaching experiences were positive and this impacted their performance.

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Other suggestions included spacing out examinations so as not to overwhelm candidates during examination period. However, the effect this would have on duration of the session, dates for result publication, and the timeframes for Second and Supplementary Sessions, are not mentioned in such comments. Others suggested that the post-examination feedback be made available in Maltese, in addition to the English version.

### **D. Conclusion**

MATSEC always considers informed criticism as part of its continuous improvement process. This is the fifth report to gather and analyse feedback from candidates on the MATSEC Examinations they have just sat for. Candidate perceptions of current operational practices are a valuable contribution to identifying areas to be proactively tackled to be able to deliver an enhanced service.