

## **THE MATSEC EXAMINATIONS BOARD**

### **A Brief History**

The Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Examinations Board was established in 1991 by the Senate and the Council of the University of Malta. The Board was entrusted with the development of an examination system to replace the GCE Ordinary and Advanced level examinations set by UK examination boards. The new board also took over the function of the Matriculation Board which also used to set examinations at Ordinary and Advanced level in a number of subjects. Indeed, the MATSEC Board holds records of Matriculation examinations that go back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The composition of the MATSEC Board ensured equal representation of schools and University. A Support Unit was also established in 1991 to implement the policies of the Board after these had been approved by the Senate of the University. The development of the MATSEC system of examinations occurred in two phases. The Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examination system was introduced in 1994 as an alternative to the previous Ordinary level examinations. Later, in 1997, the Matriculation Certificate system was introduced as an alternative to the Advanced level examinations. With the introduction of an affordable local examination system aimed at students with a wide range of abilities, Maltese educators were being given the opportunity to be more autonomous in establishing an organic and holistic vision of educational practice on the island. It was anticipated that a local examination system would also encourage the development of curricula and textbooks that take local culture and reality into account and hence eliminate cultural bias in examination papers.

The SEC syllabi and methods of assessment set in place in 1994 have two objectives: (a) to be appropriate for a wide ability range, and (b) to preserve existing standards for the more academically able candidates. All examinations consist of two papers: a common Paper 1 taken by all candidates and a choice of Paper 2A or Paper 2B, with Paper 2A intended for candidates of higher ability and Paper 2B for candidates with a lower ability in the subject. Oral examinations are included in the assessment of all modern language examinations. School-based assessment is included in subjects such as the sciences, geography, computer studies, art, business studies, home economics, physical education, textiles and design. While in 1994 only 50.5% of the cohort of 16-year-olds sat for the SEC examinations, in 2005, this percentage rose to 81.3%.

The Matriculation Certificate is the admission requirement of the University of Malta. It is based on the premise that students seeking admission to University are more likely to develop into mature persons if their education spans both the Humanities and the Science areas. Students are required to sit for six subjects from various areas in one session of the examination. The choice of subjects includes a language, a humanities or a business subject, mathematics or a science subject, and any other two subjects. The sixth subject is Systems of Knowledge, which is compulsory. Two of the subjects must be at Advanced level, three at Intermediate level and Systems of Knowledge, which is also rated as an Intermediate level subject. Similarly to the case of the SEC examination, a significant and

consistent increase in registrations has been noted in the case of the Matriculation Certificate from 1309 candidates, when it was offered for the first time in 1997, to 2455 candidates in 2005.

In 2004, ten years after the first SEC examinations set by the MATSEC Board, the Minister of Education, Youth and Employment commissioned a team to review the objectives, the operations, the impact and the quality of the MATSEC examinations system. The review produced a report, which was published in October 2005 with recommendations on how the system can be strengthened.