Part 1: Statistical Information

Table 1: Distribution of grades awarded in May 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADE</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Abs</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>8.70</td>
<td>15.94</td>
<td>36.23</td>
<td>26.09</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Part 2: Comments regarding performance

General Comments

The level obtained was satisfactory, however one must note that unfortunately there are still a few candidates who keep spelling incorrectly main geographical terms such as "climate", "vegetation", "volcano", "aquifer" and "precipitation" in spite of two years of study and the fact that the term would be found in the question itself. In addition, it was noted that for most of the examples and case studies, candidates based their answers on popular arguments and daily events rather than indicating in-depth geographic research.

It was observed that there were more diagrams intentionally included within answers even where this was not required of the candidate. The level of the diagrams was good and no one took the short-cut of copying from the Paper where diagrams were provided. Some of these diagrams were quite detailed and the range covered in the answers showed that the candidates were not afraid to tackle this topic which contrasted with previous sittings. Candidates were also credited when showing the ability to synthesize the answer provided with other relevant theories, models and examples.

Comments regarding Paper 1

Section A: Physical Geography of the Maltese Islands

Question 1 was an essay-format that required the candidate to integrate knowledge regarding not only the formation of the Maltese Islands but also weathering and erosion processes and how their inter-relationship has shaped present topography. The candidate had to relate basic textbook information on the subject and use his/her observation and analytical skills to arrive at a knowledgeable illustration of facts. The answers given managed to include different sets of diagrams which is an improvement over previous years, where candidates normally ignore this request and lose unnecessary marks.

Question 2 was based on presenting facts about the four main vegetation types and the candidate’s deeper knowledge of the subject, together with the application of environmental issues affecting the matter. Although in previous years, this kind of question would normally be the one most chosen, this year it was the least of the three in the section. Still the quality of the answers was quite high, often bordering on full marks.

Question 3 not only expected the candidate to relate information on Malta’s groundwater system, but the last two parts of the question were intended to obtain a reasoned interpretation of what was explained in the SOER extract and accompanying table, once again using basic skills listed in the syllabus. Only a minor percentage of those who answered this question failed to interpret the (c) question which was based on the table provided. Otherwise, the answers showed quite an in-depth knowledge of the matter.
Section B: Human Geography of the Maltese Islands

Question 4 required a discussion of the main demographic trends, following an extract from the State of the Environment Indicators 2007. The second part of the question was based on an evaluation of demographic trends in the regeneration of the Grand Harbour area. Almost all of the answers relied heavily on the statistics given in the quote and hardly ventured any new information. The quality of the answers was average as most were based on clichés / popular arguments heard on the media rather than on researched geographical information and publications. Lecturers should take note of this, not only in the case of the topic of demography but on the whole section regarding Human Geography.

Question 5 referred to Malta’s accession into the EU and the subsequent impact on the agricultural sector, which the candidate was required to discuss, together with providing knowledgeable suggestions as to the improvement of this sector. The same observation made in the previous paragraph applies. Unfortunately, candidates seem to shy away from researching and quoting from official EU sites on the subject. It is sad at this level and at this day and age to keep getting arguments on the advantages of governmental projects such as ‘Iżra’ u Rabbi’ in order to enhance the agriculture industry.

Question 6 tackled the construction and demolition waste issue, providing a quote from the Solid Waste Management Strategy for the Maltese Islands (2009), which the candidate had to evaluate in terms of sustainability of the industry together with indicating measures on how to improve the sector. This was one of the least chosen questions in the whole paper (besides question 8). The answers given were mostly less than average quality and once again, the same argument made in terms of question 4 applies.

Section C: Fieldwork and Statistical Techniques

Question 7 combined an explanation of fieldwork techniques used in valleys together with the evaluation of 15 sets of values obtained for the depth and the wetted perimeter from the valley using Spearman’s Rank Correlation. This was the most frequently chosen question, amounting to 48 or 24.4% out of a total of 197. The first part of the question was more than adequately illustrated both in words and in diagrams, and the level reached was quite high. The Spearman’s Rank exercise had the majority obtain correct answers and most did the ranking part correctly, but made unfortunate calculations mostly due to the misapplication of the formula (instead of $n^3$ they would calculate $n^2$ or miscalculate the addition or subtraction part). There is a general trend of leaving this question to the last minute, with a small number of answers being left unfinished due to the running out of examination time.

Question 8 required the interpretation of an isobar chart and the consequent statistical exercise that involved working out the mean, median, range and standard deviation of rainfall data for 15 localities. It is unclear why so many seemed to shy away from this question as it provided a very straightforward answer to the isobar chart interpretation; furthermore, the statistical exercise was one of the easiest that a candidate could attempt since these are among the first techniques that are taught in beginner statistics. Since the calculations required were far less time-consuming than the previous question, it is rather unfortunate that so many failed to consider the potential of gaining full marks.

Question 9 was based on sampling techniques. It required the candidate to list the advantages and disadvantages of sampling and to further distinguish between random sampling, grid sampling, line sampling, and belt transect. Although this was one of the least answered question from all nine, the level achieved was quite satisfactory, with diagrams accompanying the written answers that were likewise of quite good quality.
Comments regarding Paper 2

Section A: Atmospheric Processes

**Question 1** provided a relief map of the Mediterranean that showed the main winds affecting the region. The candidate was provided with the map as a guide in submitting a reasoned answer to the origin of such winds, after accounting for the seasonal and diurnal variations of Mediterranean climate. Although there were 23 who attempted this question (i.e. 11.7%), one would believe that a question on Mediterranean climate would generate substantial interest. The question was made easier by the provision of a map showing regional winds in the question (c) which, however, was often left out completely.

**Question 2** was based on the different stages of formation of a mid-latitude cyclone, which was illustrated in a diagram, and the basic explanation of orographic rainfall. The quality of the answers given was quite high and satisfactory, with adequate reference being made not only to the diagrams provided in the exam paper, but also through cross-sections of the front and other diagrams that showed in-depth coverage of the topic. There was a small percentage that failed completely to understand what ‘orographic’ rain means and some even dared give an answer on the other forms of rainfall, most notably convection rainfall.

**Question 3** provided an illustration of land-sea breeze formation which the candidate had to explain further. The second part of the question concerned the description of the anabatic and katabatic flows of mountain and valley winds, while the last part required the candidate to explain the formation of föhn winds. Unfortunately, the amount of incorrect answers given in question (c) cannot be understood, much like the case of ‘orographic rain’ in question 2. This is even more perplexing considering that the more difficult part - question (b) - requiring some highly specific explanation of mountain and valley winds was answered not only correctly but the illustrations given were of a high quality.

Section B: Geomorphology

**Question 4** gave the student ample choice in discussing different coastal features as well as two factors affecting coastal erosion. This question was not only the most popular of all nine, but the one in which candidates spent most time answering through the provision of diagrams that amply illustrated the description of the requested geomorphological processes. Some answers, however, did not give four examples of coastal feature formations but three; this was interpreted as not having enough time left to fully answer the question especially when it was the last one answered in the script.

**Question 5** was intended to test the candidate’s knowledge of river dynamics by giving the meaning of competence and capacity of a river, explaining the Hjulström graph provided and to compare and contrast the processes of corrosion/abrasion and corrosion/solution. This was, by far, the hardest question in the whole paper. About 5.6% attempted it giving quite high quality answers especially regarding the Hjulström graph.

The structure of **question 6** was intended to test the candidate's knowledge of the main parts of the topic, namely to know the difference between listed volcanoes. The last part of the question was aimed at evaluating the candidate's analytic and argumentative skills. The answers given were quite poor not only the written part but even more so the diagrams submitted. There were answers that kept not only mixing the types of volcanoes but also misspelling ‘volcano’ in the singular (“volcanoe” - Sic).

Section C – Biospheric Processes

Two soil triangles were provided in **question 7** which required the candidate to give a detailed explanation of such diagrams and to further evaluate the importance of soil texture. The last part of the question was based on knowledge of the soil catena. There was only one answer that made actual use of the triangles included in the question, otherwise the quality of the remaining answers was quite poor, except for the soil catena question, which was amply explained and illustrated.
Question 8 combined knowledge on the plant-water balance where a diagram was provided to help guide the candidate, and an overview of desert and tundra biomes. This was quite a popular selection that was facilitated by the use of the diagram for the first part of the question. The tundra/desert biome answers, however, were not sufficiently detailed; some of the answers just gave short paragraphs of 5 lines each, leading to loss of valuable marks.

Question 9 was based on a diagram of a hypothetical cross-section of a tropical forest, intended to guide the candidate to explain the main layers/canopies that constitute this type of forest as well as to account for the climate and soil formation associated with this biome. The answers given were of satisfactory quality especially those candidates who chose to follow the diagram provided in the exam, which facilitated the provision of a well-structured answer.

Comments regarding Paper 3

Section A - Human Geography and the Developing World

Question 1 related to the study of demography and was attempted by the majority of candidates. The average mark for this question is 16.6. Primarily candidates were asked to discuss the stages of the Demographic Transition Model and provide examples. Overall the quality of answers provided was high and almost all candidates were able to provide a sketch as to indicate the theoretic assumptions of the Demographic Transition Model. As already pointed out, those candidates that managed to synthesize their answer with additional theories and models (such as the age-sex pyramids) were credited. The answers for the second part of question one, were also very relevant. However, frequently candidates related the terms push/pull factors only to movement of people from rural to urban. Otherwise, a high level was obtained especially with those candidates furthering their answer with international examples (based on geographic research).

Question 2 required candidates to discuss Weber’s Least Cost Location Model and indicate what he considered to be the driving forces affecting the optimum location for industry. Overall the quality of answers was relatively good and candidates were able to demonstrate an understanding of Weber’s Model. Part 2 of the question requested candidates to indicate those factors affecting the location of the manufacturing industry. Most candidates managed to answer this part of the question by relying much on the quotation provided leaving out other contemporary factors. Question 2 was answered by a total of 7 candidates and the average mark for this question is 15.4.

Question 3 required candidates to briefly define the Green Revolution and subsequently discuss the outcome of such innovation in relation to demographic issues. A total of 7 candidates answered this question and the average mark obtained is 16. Almost the majority of candidates were able to provide a structural definition, outlining the innovations related to the Green Revolution. On the other hand, a number of candidates failed to interpret part two of question 3, indirectly requesting a description of the pros and cons of the Green Revolution. Otherwise, those who relied their answers on case-studies and showed confidence in the subject, produced high quality answers and frequently boarded full-marks.

Section B – Issues in Resource Management

Question 4 related to the concept of sustainable development. A total of 14 candidates answered this question and the average mark obtained is 16.9. Part 1 of the question requested candidates to discuss and show sufficient understanding of the concept of Sustainable Development. Almost all candidates relied their answers on the quotation provided, thus leaving much to be desired for an A-Level standard. Otherwise the minority of answers were of a high-level, providing a chronological description of how the concept of Sustainable Development emerged.
Some of the observations, made for part one, apply for part two, requesting the candidates to relate the concept of Sustainable Development to the Developing World. Some candidates managed to provide a good quality answer, otherwise the discussion provided was of an average standard.

Question 5 was the most popular question in Section B, answered by 51 candidates and the average mark obtained is 16. Question 5 was based primarily on presenting a definition of the term resources. Subsequently candidates were asked to list a number of factors influencing the attitudes of different countries on which sources of energy to use. Most candidates managed to provide a valid definition for the term resources, although full marks were only rarely obtained.

On the other hand for the second part of the question, the quality of the answers provided was average considering that most answers relied only on geographical space/position and economic aspects and frequently ignored other relevant factors such as technology, demand, political decisions, competition and environmental awareness. Answers highly relied on national examples and hardly were there any international case-studies provided.

The third part of question 5 related to the pros and cons of using wind energy instead of gas. The majority of candidates were able to compare these two types of energy and managed to provide high-level answers.

Question 6 not only requested candidates to discuss the importance of a fisheries policy in the EU but also to identify possible measures needed to gear sea fishing towards the goals of sustainable development. Only one candidate attempted this question and the level obtained was relatively low.

Section C – The Geography of Tourism and Recreation

Question 7 tackled the common concept of eco-tourism. A total of 15 candidates attempted to answer this question and the average mark obtained is 16.2. A low percentage of the candidates based their answer for part one on the quotation provided and rarely added extra knowledge based on research. On the other hand the rest of the candidates managed to provide a considerably good answer.

Part two of question 7 requested candidates to illustrate how eco-tourism can become unsustainable. Relatively high quality answers were obtained considering that a number of candidates managed to synthesize their answer with the Tourist Area/Resort Life-Cycle Model (after Briggs). In such cases the quality of answers was high and often bordered the full marks.

Question 8 was the most commonly answered question in Section C and the average mark obtained is 14.5. This question was based on presenting those factors affecting the growth of tourism and in part 2 candidates were requested to provide and explain four types of tourism. A considerably high percentage of candidates failed to interpret part one of the question and based their answers on the effects of tourism rather than on what has affected the growth of this economic sector.

Otherwise the quality of answers was quite high. Most candidates provided relevant answers for the second part of the question. Candidates were credited where relevant descriptions and comments were provided on the case-studies/examples listed (example: seasonality of ski tourism).

Question 9 related to tourism in the E.U. and the concept of sustainability. A total of 9 candidates answered this question with the average mark obtained is 9.9. Generally for part one of question 9, candidates relied highly on the information provided in the quotation and rarely showed that they had researched the subject.

The second part of the question demanded a discussion about the role of the EU in creating a sustainable type of tourism. The answers provided leave much to be desired especially when considering that five years have passed from the entry of Malta in the European Union.
Conclusions

The following are a number of recommendations:

- Candidates require more information relating to general concepts and policies adopted by the E.U.

- Candidates should show the ability to synthesize the answers provided with other relevant theories and models.

- Candidates should develop their arguments based on solid research, rather than focusing on the quotation provided by the examiner, in particular where this concerns current issues such as the EU’s impact on the human geography of the Maltese Islands.

Chairperson
Board of Examiners
July 2009