UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

THE MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
ADVANCED LEVEL

GEOGRAPHY

May 2010

EXAMINERS’ REPORT

MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS BOARD
Part 1: Statistical Information

Table 1: MATSEC Advanced Level Geography, May 2010
Distribution of Grades

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>Absent</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of candidates</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>56</td>
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Part 2: Comments on the Candidates’ Answers

General Comments

In general, the level of presentation of the material improved from the 2009 session. Unfortunately, one must note that there are still a few candidates who keep spelling incorrectly main geographical terms such as *Shrieve, Shreeve* (and other variants- referring to question 4 which concerned stream ordering, and hence the correct spelling being Shreve), *globoregina*, *spearlam* (Spearman), *geographist* and *geografist* instead of geographer, *Kemmuneth*, *enviorment*, *glacials* (glaciers), *downpoor* (downpour), *erroded*, *stallictyts* and *stallicmites*, *schlerofill* forest, *coroaline*, *corse* (coarse).

The most popular question chosen in Paper 1 was question 7 (23%) which dealt with a description of coastal fieldwork, whereas question 2 in Paper 2 was the more popular (21%), dealing with the Tricellular model of the global atmosphere. The level obtained was either extremely high, with marks scoring in the range 20 to 24 (out of 24), or on the other extreme with less than 5 out of a total of 24 marks. It goes to show that those candidates who were really prepared had the chance to show their skills whereas it was evident that there were some who were not well prepared. Considering that the papers were of a 2 hour duration and quite a substantial amount of material had to be achieved, those obtaining anything over 18 out of 24 showed nothing less than an excellent grasp of the subject.

Furthermore, section B in paper 1, showed lack of argumentation and basic research into fundamental questions that students of the geography of the MI are expected to be skilful at discussing - topics such as tourism, landuse, and resource limitation. In addition, the tendency to give examples either from Malta, in case of Maltese candidates, and from Gozo, in case of Gozitan candidates, rather than seeing the archipelago as one region, is an approach that should be discouraged by lecturers. Generally, question 4 in section B was the most popular question in Paper 3 as it was attempted by 64% of the candidates. The level obtained for Paper 3 decreased when compared to the 2009 session. Notwithstanding this, simple statistical analysis of the marks obtained suggests that the quality of answers ranged from high quality to the other extreme.

As already observed in previous sessions, generally candidates fail to take an argumentative approach for questions which do not necessary require ‘a single correct answer’. This was generally observed in questions 1, 2, 5, 7 and 9. Moreover, it is highly desired from candidates at Advanced Level to show an ability to provide answers based on quality research and case-studies rather than popular arguments and daily events.
Detailed Comments

**Paper I**

*Section A: Physical Geography of the Maltese Islands*

Question 1 required a description of the formation of the stratigraphy of the Maltese Islands. While not many of the answers took up the cue offered by the quotation and used that as an introduction, the majority just gave a plain almost bullet-form description of each layer. It was encouraging to find essays that showed that the Pedley, Clarke and Galea publication was consulted in some detail and these answers were awarded the highest marks for the extra effort.

Question 2 was divided into two: question (a) asked for a description of the terrestrial ecological succession in the Maltese Islands whereas question (b) concerned the marine ecosystem. The answers given reached a satisfactory level of quality, but others demonstrated a knowledge that is usually the competence of students sitting for the Intermediate Environmental Studies. Some of the answers in (b) were rushed, much unlike the (a) question.

Question 3 had two parts as well, the first concerning a description of the climatic regime of the Maltese Islands whereas the second part required a brief discussion of the possible climate change impact on the MI. Again, the level reached in the (b) question was seriously deficient, plus the answers given were simply token replies. It was quite clear that candidates find it easy to discuss question (a) but stop short of doing the extra research required to look into such an issue as outline in question (b) in the main environmental reports and publications that are easily accessible on the internet.

*Section B: Human Geography of the Maltese Islands*

Question 4 (a) necessitated a brief discussion of the fragility of tourism as an economic sector whereas 4 (b) concerned the future challenges and opportunities facing the same sector. Candidates lost valuable marks by giving simplistic arguments that lacked in-depth analysis of the subject. Most answers seemed to get stuck on the March/April volcanic eruption in Iceland that disrupted air travel whereas others seemed to mention just three points at most and stop there, which is hardly sufficient especially when the quality of the chosen arguments is already lacking. In fact, quite a large number of answers given in the (a) question had the tendency to be lost in rhetoric.

Candidates shied away from question 5, which required a discussion of how to best address landuse conflicts in question (a) and sustainable development in question (b). In fact, only two candidates out of 56 answered this question. The over-reliance of government intervention to solve any sort of problem in the country that is repeated over and over again in this Section of Paper 1 is quite alarming, and this particular question was no exception. Perhaps lecturers can encourage their students to think outside of the box.

Question 6 referred to the generation of construction and demolition waste, where question (a) required a discussion of the negative impacts associated with the deposition of such material in the marine environment, and (b) concerned a more generic discussion on the reduction of such material. This particular question had the highest level of qualitative discussion in the whole Section in particular answers given to the (a) question.
Section C: Fieldwork and Statistical Techniques

Question 7 was by far the most popular in all of Paper 1, with 23% of the candidates choosing it. The question was open-ended and required an outline of a fieldwork report that had to be carried out on a sandy beach at the foot of a Blue Clay slope. While there were about 4 or 5 answers that showed absolutely no idea of the subject, those that got the highest marks showed an excellent knowledge of the subject even though it was the third answer given in the script, and hence, there was a possible race against time to finish off the last answer.

Question 8 centred around the histogram both from a descriptive (definitions and applications of the technique) and a practical exercise that had to be produced on the graph paper in the script. Although only 8 candidates chose this question, the answers given garnered a substantial amount of marks especially those that got the (b) answer (the construction of the histogram) correct.

Question 9 concerned the construction of the Lorenz Curve and like the previous question, the 24 marks were spread over questions that were exclusively either descriptive or requiring a statistical exercise. Due to the time constraint of producing two written answers and a statistical one, part of the working of the Lorenz Curve was provided in the (d) question. Although 8 candidates, like the previous question, attempted this exercise, the marks obtained were extremely high to the straight-forward answers that were required.

Paper II

Section A: Atmospheric Processes

Question 1 requested an answer in an essay format that required the candidate to outline and discuss the main climatic parameters of either a cool temperate continental or a tropical continental regime. Although the question made it very clear that it was an 'either/or' scenario, there were candidates who attempted to answer both, albeit very poorly, in a possible desperate attempt to acquire marks. There was a handful of candidates who made it evident that they had originally prepared themselves for a question concerning the vegetation and soil type related to these regimes, in fact they mentioned anything but climatic characteristics. These same candidates fared badly in Section C of the same paper, which was quite alarming since that section contained two questions on soil that any candidates in two years of study of geography would have easily handled, especially if the subject was also covered in the fieldwork report preparation.

Question 2, on the other hand, was not only the most popular question in the whole paper, but also one in which a very high standard was reached in the answers. It was a very welcome change from previous years where candidates normally shied away from discussing the Tricellular model of global atmospheric circulation and illustrating their answer appropriately. Considering that a thorough knowledge of this subject was basic not only to this Section of the paper but also to the other parts of the exam, most notably Section C which concerns biospheric processes. Not only were elaborate and accurate diagrams given, but the most detailed discussion of formation was produced and a link between the illustrations and the discussion was amply made. There were quite a number of high marks awarded, mostly in the 20s (out of 24) and some of the answers were a pleasure to read. The candidates that fared very well in this question did extremely well in the other Sections of the paper, showing how well-prepared they were to be able to produce three excellent answers in two hours.

Question 3 related to sea level changes caused by eustatic and isostatic movements in question (a) and the relation to raised beach formation in the (b) question. While most of the answers given were correct albeit extremely dry, there were some who attempted to write
something out of desperation. Normally, those who gave seriously flawed answers to this question did just as bad in the whole paper.

**Section B: Geomorphology**

Question 4 was very popular and it asked for an essay-type answer illustrating the theory behind stream ordering. Considering how many candidates cover 'widien' for their fieldwork experience, this subject is normally covered in the preparation stage of such fieldwork. In fact, all of the answers attempted reached an excellent level of discussion and illustration. The only criticism that can be lodged is that there were a number who wrongly spelt Shreve.

Question 5 was based on the main processes involved in beach morphology. While the majority of the answers were very well presented essays, there were some lame answers that one would not expect especially due to the emphasis given to coastal geography in two years of study.

Question 6 was an (a) and (b) question, with the former requiring the description of three specific processes of chemical weathering and the latter the impact of climate change on such weathering. While the (a) question was adequately answered, the (b) part lacked in the proper understanding of such a topic. It seems that candidates find it hard to make cross-references between topics that fall under different sections of the syllabus, as the same situation was encountered in correcting question 3 of Paper 1 (climate of the Maltese Islands).

**Section C – Biospheric Processes**

Question 7 tackled the two biospheric regimes of savanna grassland and broad-leaved deciduous forest that have not been commonly asked in previous sessions. It seems to have caught most candidates off-guard due to the very dry answers that were given, often lacking basic knowledge, even though it was the second most popular question chosen in Paper 2. There was a handful that attempted to write about both regimes in an effort to get more marks, though in reality this does not garner candidates more marks. Although the savanna regime was preferred, those who chose the broad-leaved deciduous forest tried to disguise their answer by presenting knowledge of the tropical forest - needless to say, no marks were given for out of point essays.

Question 8 was based on the idealised soil profile and a description of the layers, chemical processes and biological activities involved. For this question, there were some very good answers and illustrations given; it could be that candidates who also had Environmental Studies had a preference for this question in that there were a large number of answers that gave some detailed scientific information that is not normally needed in this Paper.

Question 9 had an (a) and (b) question, with the former requiring a definition of zonal and azonal soils, and the latter a list of criteria that is normally used in determining the global distribution of biomes. While there were some good answers to question (a), the same cannot be said to the (b) question. This was rather unfortunate, leading to a loss of valuable marks, since anyone studying the topic has to actually cover such an issue at one time or another.
**Paper III**

*Section A: Human Geography and the Developing World*

Question 1 in Section A related to the study of Demography and was attempted by 21 candidates. The average mark obtained for this question is 14.8, the highest for Section A. Question 1 was an (a) and (b) question with the former requiring a definition of the term Carrying Capacity, were the majority of candidates managed to provide valid answers. The second part of the question focused mainly on problems related to growth in population. Although valid answers were provided, it has been generally noted that candidates failed to make a distinction between the demographic situation in developed and developing countries.

Question 2 was divided into two: question (a) required candidates to identify and discuss some of the human factors influencing the growth in agriculture, and question (b) which treated the challenges for the Agricultural Sector within the EU. A total of 16 candidates answered this question and the average mark obtained is 9.5. As can be suggested from simple statistical analysis, the quality of answers was relatively low, with the majority of candidates failing to obtain a pass-mark. As in previous sessions, the answers obtained suggest that candidates lack base-line data and information related to European matters.

Question 3 (a) required candidates to briefly define the term Settlement Hierarchy. Overall, the quality of answers was good and most candidates managed to synthesise their answer with key words such as settlement size, function and services. Part (b) of question 3, requested candidates to list and explain the geographic assumptions made for Christaller’s Central Theory. From the results obtained, it seems that a significant number of candidates failed to interpret this question and their answers diverted onto detailed description of Christaller’s Model rather than listing the geographic assumptions. Otherwise, good quality answers were provided. In part (c) of the question, candidates were requested to state how useful Christaller’s central place model is, to understand the real world. Average quality answers were provided, although a significant number of candidates relied excessively on local examples. Question 3 was answered by a total of 18 candidates and the average mark obtained is 13.4.

*Section B: Issues in Resource Management*

Question 4 was the sole essay format question in Paper 3 and required candidates to discuss the potential adverse environmental impacts related to the use of renewable sources of energy. A total of 35 candidates answered this question and the average mark obtained is 14.3. The majority of candidates were able to provide research-based essays and sustained their answers with relevant case-studies. Considering the range of renewable forms of energy available to answer this type of question, those candidates who relied part of their answer on the use of nuclear type of energy lost valuable marks. As a general note, those candidates who provided the theoretic framework, showed confidence in the subject, and made reference to significant case studies, obtained high marks (between 18 – 24).

Question 5 related to the concept of Sustainable Development. Part (a) of the question required candidates to discuss the issues generated by the concept of sustainable Development. It is generally noted that candidates link the concept of Sustainable Development ONLY to the use of energy resources and as a consequence leaving other important issues aside (such as the importance to incorporate the principles of Sustainable development into decision making processes). Similarly to previous exam sessions, part (b) of question 5 was answered with much reliance on the quotation provided by the examiner. To this end, the candidates should be encouraged more to develop the skill of argument
formation, which when synthesised with the theoretic knowledge, can produce the desired answers. The average mark is 14.1. A total of 11 candidates attempted this question.

Question 6 had an (a) and (b) question, with the former requiring the causes and consequences of deforestation in the developing countries and the latter a description in what ways acid rain can interfere with the growth of forested areas. For part (a) a significant number of candidates relied excessively on ‘shifting-cultivation’ and made less reference to other major causes of deforestation, otherwise the answers were of average quality. When it comes to part (b) of question 6, those candidates who managed to give a scientific and informed answer attained high marks. Otherwise as in part (a) the answers were of an average quality. A total of 8 candidates answered this question and the average mark obtained is 13.7

**Section C: The Geography of Tourism and Recreation**

Part (a) of question 7 necessitated a discussion on how tourism can potentially cause clashes between the host and the guest cultures. The majority of candidates did not score high marks as they relied exclusively on the quotation provided. On the other hand, candidates progressed better in part (b) of this question, which required a comparison between the theoretic characteristics of mass-tourism and eco-tourism. Those candidates who managed to amalgamate the theoretic concepts with relevant case-studies, obtained high marks. A total of 9 candidates attempted this question and the average mark obtained is 14.8.

Question 8 was the most common question in Section C. A total of 29 candidates attempted this question and the average mark obtained is 12.5. Part (a) of the question required candidates to list those socio-economic trends influencing the growth in tourism. A significant number of candidates focused their answers on how a host country can attract tourism, rather than discussing those socio-economic factors affecting the growth in this economic sector. In such cases valuable marks were lost. Part (b) of this question required candidates to state the cost and benefits that tourism can bring to a developing country. Unfortunately a number of candidates were only able to answer this question by just referring to the World Cup events taking place in South Africa. Much more is expected from candidates at Advanced Level. Otherwise those candidates who showed confidence in the subject and provided valid conclusions obtained high marks.

Question 9 related to the growth in tourism within the EU. A total of 17 candidates attempted this question and the average mark obtained is 13. Similarly to question 7, candidates performed better in part (b) of question 9. For part (a) of the question, candidates relied excessively on the quotation provided by the examiner and generally failed to relate tourism in the EU with issues of sustainable development. On the other hand, high quality answers were provided for section (b) which required candidates to list and describe three types of tourism within the European Union and suggest possible measures to sustain their growth. Notwithstanding this, it was quite surprisingly to discover that a number of candidates referred to types of tourism which are not a characteristic of the European Union.

**Conclusions**

The following are a number of recommendations:

- Candidates should be encouraged to develop the skill of argumentation in the answers provided rather than relying excessively on quotations provided by the examiner and/or common phrases. This also applies for the fieldwork reports.
- At Advance Level, candidates are expected to show the ability to synthesise the theoretic part of Human Geography with relevant case-studies and examples.

- The use of as many authoritative sources on the Maltese Islands as possible can never be over-emphasised, in particular in terms of Section B in Paper 1, which definitely needs much more preparation and serious consideration by the candidates.

Chairperson
Examiners’ Panel