

UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

**THE MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
INTERMEDIATE LEVEL**

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE

May 2006

EXAMINERS' REPORT*

**MATRICULATION AND SECONDARY EDUCATION
CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS BOARD**

***[NOTE: The following is a summary of the examiners' full report.
The original can be consulted at the Matsec Office.]**

IM EXAMINERS' REPORT MAY 2006

IM RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE May 2006 Session Examiners' Report

Statistics

Table 1: Distribution of grades for IM Level Religious Knowledge – May 2006 session

Grade	A	B	C	D	E	F	Abs	Total
N	23	66	103	121	52	105	9	479
%	4.8	13.8	21.5	25.3	10.9	21.9	1.8	100.0

Table 2: The cumulative percentage for IM Level Religious Knowledge – May 2006 session

Grade	%	Cumulative %
A	4.8	4.8
B	13.8	18.6
C	21.5	40.1
D	25.3	65.4
E	10.9	76.3
F	21.9	98.2
Absent	1.8	100.0

Introduction

1. A total of 479 students registered for the May Intermediate exam session.
2. Tables 1 and 2 show the distribution of students and their respective grades.
3. After the publication of results of the May session, 16 students asked for a Revision of Paper. The additional marker confirmed the original result of 13 candidates and recommended that the grade of three candidates be revised upward. The Board of Examiners endorsed the recommendation.

GENERAL COMMENTS

4. In preparing the examination paper, the Paper Setters have to evaluate to what extent students can recall the knowledge they have covered during the course, assess the understanding of the major concepts, and the ability to critically reflect and analyse Catholic beliefs and ultimately evaluate the ability to produce a logical and coherent argument based on knowledge and reflection. The items and questions presented in the paper cover a wide spectrum of the content presented in the syllabus. On the whole, a considerable number of the candidates were able to obtain an average grade of C or higher (40%). This, together with the wide range of marks (14.92) obtained by the students, demonstrates that overall the paper was fair and not too difficult. It is therefore a pity that 21.9% of the candidates were not able to obtain at least a pass grade. This is indeed a missed opportunity. Whilst there are surely practical benefits from the attainment of the Intermediate Level certificate, such as partially fulfilling the obligations of the entry requirements of a higher educational institution or having enough certifications to qualify for a job, the ultimate end of the examination is to evaluate students and give them an indication of the level of learning they were able to obtain at a certain point of their life-long learning process. It also aims at appraising their understanding and critical analysis of the Catholic beliefs. Thus, the high level of candidates not obtaining a pass mark is not only a missed opportunity for the individual candidates themselves but also for the learning community which includes the teachers at the post-secondary institutions and the persons responsible for setting the syllabus and textbooks.

Year after year, the Board of Examiners has been pointing to the same inadequacies in the syllabus and the textbooks, to some students' lack of commitment to the subject and/or wrong approach to learning, and also to inadequate teaching methods.

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5. From the type of responses we get it seems evident to us that a number of students seem to have chosen Religious Knowledge for their course of studies because of a mistaken perception that this subject presents only limited difficulty to achieve the grade. Notwithstanding any wrong initial motivation in their students' choice of subjects, teachers need to take up the challenge and this golden opportunity presented to us by having almost 10% of the age cohort studying Religious Knowledge at Intermediate Level, to present Christian tradition as relevant wisdom not only for today's society but also for the student's personal life. In their responses, most of the students rely solely on what they succeed to recall from their childhood years at the catechesis classes, what they grasp from the media and perhaps from the odd Sunday homily. This presents a major challenge for teachers to help students acquire those skills which make students understand and be proficient in Religious language.

6. It has again to be pointed out that very frequently candidates do not read the questions sufficiently well with the consequence that they misunderstand the question and give an answer which is partially or completely irrelevant.

7. It is quite evident that the majority of the students do not bother to go through the texts suggested in the syllabus. This is especially evident when they keep on repeating the same ideas that in their view are relevant to the question asked, and leaving out the core of what they were expected to discuss.

8. From the responses we assessed it is evident that in a considerable number of cases, students find it difficult to express their ideas in a logical order and are more apt to jot down ideas as they come to mind, resulting in a confused answer. It is clear that students lack essay writing skills. In quite a few cases very brief answers are given making it difficult for examiners to assess students' knowledge and understanding. Examiners expect that each question is amply discussed and that the answer is well argued and Teachers need to give more assignments to students in order for them to acquire better communication, critical and thinking skills.

REMARKS ON SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

9. An analysis of the frequencies of responses to the questions and the mean score obtained for each question is revealing.

Table 3: Frequency, minimum and maximum score, mean and standard deviation per question

	N	Minimum score	Maximum score	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	470	3	31	19.18	4.82
Q2	427	3	22	13.04	4.26
Q3	256	2	23	14.65	4.97
Q4	289	2	21	11.79	4.0
Q5	71	2	21	11.25	5.32
Q6	361	3	21	10.45	3.72
Overall Mark	470	14	92	55.97	14.15

10. **Question 1** aims at assessing students' knowledge of terminology, proficiency in the use of religious language and their knowledge of the suggested texts. Amongst the most common mistakes there is the incorrect definition of the term chastity, which is associated only with priests and members pertaining to religious orders. Similarly quite a few confused the meaning of Pentecost. Very few were able to list the three offices (ministries) of Christ shared by the people of God, or state which of the four Gospels narrate the institution of the Eucharist.

11. **Question 2:** Almost all students (90.85%) chose to answer this question, a majority of whom (57%) were able to obtain a satisfactory mark. It should be noted that a substantial number of students did not read the question well or else have shown that they have a wrong theological understanding of the matter. There were a considerable number of students who spoke of God as being the creature at the apex of creation whilst strangely enough a few students spoke of the devil as being at the apex of creation. All students gave a good definition of sin but only a few had a very clear idea of the consequences of sin. The majority of the students were aware that Christ's incarnation is to be considered as the positive outcome of the first sin.

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12. **Question 3:** The great majority of candidates (70%) gave a satisfactory response to this question. This was especially due to the right answers given to section (a) on the life of the first Christian community. However, although the majority of the students seem to have grasped the notion of the Church as the Body of Christ, only a small minority expressed amply and clearly its real meaning.

13. **Question 4:** A number of students demonstrated that they do not have a clear understanding of the terminology and of the Christian meaning of marriage. Some candidates did not mention Christ's prohibition of divorce, whilst a few others were not able to make a distinction between divorcees who remarry and those who choose to remain faithful to their first marriage covenant. According to these candidates all divorcees cannot be given Holy Communion. Another common mistake was the confusion between separation and annulment. For some students it is only the Church that has the right to declare whether a couple is separated. On the other hand, the vast majority of students answered correctly section (b), supplementing their answer with examples of Catholic Movements, Associations and Agencies that offer help and support.

14. **Question 5:** Very few chose to answer to this question (15.11%). Only 40.8% were able to achieve a satisfactory pass. Quite a number of students failed to remember which is the Seventh Commandment: You shall not steal. These students wrote about abortion, homicide, euthanasia, adultery, or masturbation all of which was obviously out of point. In their answer to section (b), a substantial number of students lost a lot of marks due to their very vague notion of the 'common good.' It is evident that they were not at all familiar with the suggested texts.

15. **Question 6:** Although many candidates (76.8%) choose to answer to this question, only 36.6% were able to achieve a mark above the average. Those who answered question 6 have a very general idea of the meaning of the Eucharist. A considerable number of candidates do not understand the relationship between the Eucharist and the Jewish Passover and the reason why Christ chose this important festivity. In section (c), a substantial number of students were not able to express themselves and explain how the Church follows Christ's instruction when he said "do this in memory of me".

**The Chairperson
Board of Examiners
July 2006**