



**Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission**

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2007

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

ORDINARY LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

HIGHER LEVEL CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

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1. General Introduction

1.1 The Syllabus

The syllabus for Agricultural Economics dates from 1969 and was examined for the first time in 1971. The number of candidates steadily increased, reaching a peak of 357 candidates in 1987. Thereafter, the numbers declined and this decline has accelerated since 2001, with 72 candidates taking the examination in 2007. This consisted of 67 candidates at Higher Level and 5 candidates at Ordinary Level. There has been no change in the syllabus or in the nature and format of the examination since its introduction in 1969.

This report should be read in conjunction with the examination papers and marking schemes, which are available on the State Examinations Commission website www.examinations.ie

1.2 Format of Examination

The examination has two components at both the Higher and Ordinary Level as follows:

- (i) Written terminal examination paper (80 %)
- (ii) School Assessed Project / Practical Coursework (20 %)

Candidates, at both levels, sit a terminal written examination of 2.5 hours duration. The written examination is assessed out of 320 marks by Examiners who are appointed and trained annually by the State Examinations Commission. The written examination comprises of two parts as follows:

Part 1: 120 marks

Candidates are required to attempt 15 of the 20 short-response type questions. All questions have an equal weighting of 8 marks.

Part 2: 200 marks

Candidates are required to attempt 4 of 6 constructed-response type questions. All questions have an equal weighting of 50 marks.

The practical coursework, which is offered at a common level, is undertaken by candidates over the duration of the course of study. The practical coursework involves school based assessment using a common level marking scheme. External monitoring takes place by personnel appointed annually by the State Examinations Commission. A maximum of 80 marks may be awarded to the candidate for this component. General themes for the practical coursework for the subject are outlined in *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*.

1.3 Candidature

The following table shows the numbers of candidates taking Agricultural Economics at Ordinary Level and at Higher Level in recent years.

**Numbers taking Agricultural Economics
Higher and Ordinary Level 2001 to 2007**

Year	Higher Level	Ordinary Level	Total
2001	219	13	232
2002	178	9	187
2003	115	2	117
2004	120	4	124
2005	89	11	100
2006	73	5	78
2007	67	5	72

Table I - Numbers taking Leaving Certificate Agricultural Economics (Higher and Ordinary Level) 2001 - 2007

It can be seen from these statistics that the majority of candidates take Agricultural Economics at the Higher Level. It can also be seen that the total number of candidates taking Agricultural Economics has declined significantly since 2001.

1.3 Performance of Candidates

The following table sets out the percentage of candidates achieving each grade in the written examination at Ordinary Level in the years 2002 to 2007

**Percentage of candidates achieving each grade in the Ordinary Level
Written Examination – 2004 - 2007**

Year	Number	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2002	9	-	11.1	-	22.2	33.3	-	33.4
2003	2	-	-	-	50.0	50.0	-	-
2004	4	-	-	50.0	50.0	-	-	-
2005	11	36.4	9.1	18.2	9.1	18.2	9.1	-
2006	5	20.0	-	-	40.0	20.0	20.0	-
2007	5	-	-	20.0	60.0	20.0	-	-

Table II Grade outcomes Leaving Certificate Agricultural Economics (Ordinary Level) Written Examination 2004-2007

Note: The grades here are indicative only. The grades awarded to candidates in Agricultural Economics are computed from the combined results of the coursework and written components completed by candidates.

The numbers taking the Ordinary Level examination continue to represent a very small percentage of the cohort of Agricultural Economics candidates. Examiners have noted that a number of candidates taking the Higher Level examination would be more suited to the Ordinary Level.

The following table sets out the percentage of candidates achieving each grade in the written examination at Higher Level in the years 2002 to 2007

**Percentage of candidates achieving each grade in the Higher Level
Written Examination – 2004 - 2007**

Year	Number	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2002	178	10.1	19.7	18.0	26.4	20.2	4.5	1.1
2003	115	5.2	18.3	26.1	22.6	18.3	7.8	1.7
2004	120	8.3	15.8	20.0	21.7	20.8	10.8	2.5
2005	89	9.0	18.0	16.9	27.0	18.0	11.2	0.0
2006	73	8.2	23.3	24.7	15.1	16.4	9.6	2.7
2007	67	10.4	26.9	22.4	22.4	17.9	0.0	0.0

Table III Grade outcomes Leaving Certificate Agricultural Economics (Higher Level) Written Examination 2004-2007

Note: The grades here are indicative only. The grades awarded to candidates in Agricultural Economics are computed from the combined results of the coursework and written components completed by candidates.

In the written examination, a consistently high percentage of candidates achieved less than a D grade between 2002 and 2006. Although the results in 2007 show a slight improvement, Examiners have noted that a number of candidates who take the Higher Level examination would appear to be more suited to Ordinary Level.

The main reasons reported by examiners for the poor performance of some candidates in the Higher Level written examination are as follows:

- Lack of sufficient knowledge of topics
- Limited understanding of economic concepts and theories, as they apply to Agricultural Economics
- Failure to attempt the required number of questions, especially in Part I
- Very brief answers given with no development of points.

The following table shows the percentage of candidates achieving each grade at Higher Level, from 2004 to 2007, when the outcomes of the written examination and the coursework components are combined.

**Percentage of candidates achieving each grade at Higher Level
2004 to 2007 (Written Examination and Practical Coursework combined)**

Year	Number	A	B	C	D	E	F
2002	178	10.1	22.5	25.3	35.5	5.1	1.7
2003	115	7.8	24.4	28.7	23.5	13.9	1.7
2004	120	10.8	15.9	26.7	27.5	13.3	5.8
2005	89	13.5	14.6	25.8	31.5	11.2	3.4
2006	73	10.9	23.3	30.1	13.6	15.1	6.8
2007	67	10.5	29.9	32.8	22.5	4.5	0.0

Table IV Grade outcomes Leaving Certificate Agricultural Economics (Higher Level) Written and Practical Examinations combined 2004-2007

As can be seen, the addition of the practical coursework component improves the D minus outcomes significantly. The standard of work presented by candidates in 2007

showed an improvement on previous years. Candidates generally performed better in the compulsory Part 1 of the written examination in 2007, leading to improved overall results.

2. Ordinary Level written examination

2.1 Introduction

Only five candidates presented for the Ordinary Level written examination in 2007. The examination paper was well received and contained a good range of questions. Candidates generally appeared to have a good understanding of the subject matter.

Given the very small cohort who presented for this examination in 2007, it is not possible to engage in any meaningful statistical comparison with candidate performance in previous years. However, the following advice, of a general nature, is offered for prospective candidates.

2.2 Recommendations to Teachers and Students

The following recommendations are offered to teachers and students with the view to assisting them in improving examination performance.

Teachers are advised to

- refer to the published marking schemes and notes which can be accessed on the State Examinations Commission website www.examinations.ie
- instruct candidates to pay attention to all parts of the question and if asked to explain or discuss a topic, one-word / one-sentence answers will not suffice for full marks
- provide candidates with opportunities to practice writing examination style answers, and drawing diagrams, that are relevant to the question asked and are sufficiently comprehensive in treatment
- pay particular attention to basic economic concepts / theories as they apply to the agricultural sector.

Students are advised to

- choose the questions you intend to answer carefully and complete the required number of questions and all sections within the questions
- practise writing answers to examination style questions
- ensure that all diagrams are drawn clearly and labeled correctly
- avoid one-word/ one- sentence answers when asked to ‘discuss’ or ‘explain’.

3. Higher Level written examination

3.1 Introduction

A total of 67 candidates presented for the Higher Level written examination in 2007. Examiners noted that the performance of candidates showed an improvement relative to previous years' examinations, especially in the compulsory Part 1 section. Most candidates appeared to be well prepared for the short response questions in Part I and they displayed a good knowledge of economic definitions and concepts. However, in Part 2, Examiners noted that many candidates gave very brief answers which lacked an in-depth knowledge of the subject matter.

3.2 Analysis of Candidate Performance

The table below sets out the attempt frequency of questions, the average marks obtained per question and the range of marks. The attempt frequency and the average marks given for each question are based on an analysis of all the scripts marked in the examination.

Attempt frequency and average marks obtained at Higher Level – 2007

Question	% Attempt	Range of Marks	Average Marks	Average %
Part 1	100	28-120	84	70
Part 2				
Q. 1	100	10 - 48	31	62
Q. 2	87	8 - 45	25	50
Q. 3	82	0 – 47	22	44
Q. 4	97	7 – 46	30	60
Q. 5	61	7 – 50	32	64
Q. 6	60	3 – 39	17	34

Table V Attempt Frequency and Average Marks Obtained - Leaving Certificate Agricultural Economics (Higher Level) 2007.

As is evident from the data presented in the table above, Questions 1 and 4 were the most popular questions, followed by Questions 2 and 3. Questions 5 and 6 were the least popular questions. Questions 1, 4 and 5 had the highest scores with Question 6 having the lowest average score.

Part I questions were generally well answered with some candidates scoring the full 120 marks. Examiners noted that the average mark for Part 1 was 70% which was a significant improvement on previous years.

QUESTION ANALYSIS

PART 1 Total Marks: 120

This part of the written examination is mandatory. Candidates are required to attempt 15 short-response type questions out of a possible 20. All questions carry an equal weighting of 8 marks. A good knowledge of the entire syllabus is required in order to perform well in this part of the examination.

The answering within this section was generally good with most candidates attempting all of the 20 questions. Marks ranged from 28 marks to 120 marks with an average percentage score of 70 %. This represented a significant improvement on recent years.

The following is an analysis of candidates' answers to each question in Part I with specific reference to common errors.

QUESTION 1: Many students failed to convey the idea of 'additional revenue' earned at each stage of the marketing chain.

QUESTION 2: The limitations of the Census proved difficult for many candidates.

QUESTION 3: This was a very popular question and it was well answered.

QUESTION 4: There were many vague answers to this question with only a minority of candidates scoring full marks.

QUESTION 5: This was a reasonably well answered question. However, many candidates failed to mention the 'organisation of other factors of production' in their answers.

QUESTION 6: This was a very well answered question.

QUESTION 7: This was a very well answered question.

QUESTION 8: This was a very well answered question.

QUESTION 9: This was a poorly answered question with candidates demonstrating little knowledge of the meaning of 'transfer payment'.

QUESTION 10: Although this was a popular question, it was generally poorly answered.

QUESTION 11: Generally well answered. Some responses were rather vague, however.

QUESTION 12: Examiners noted that many candidates did not appear to be prepared for this question.

QUESTION 13: This was a very well answered question, with many candidates using Engels Law to explain their answers.

QUESTION 14: This was a well answered question. The majority of candidates gave two valid economic consequences arising from the loss of the Irish sugar beet industry.

QUESTION 15: Many candidates failed to multiply by 100. (See the published Marking Scheme on www.examinations.ie).

QUESTION 16: A number of candidates appeared to misunderstand this question.

QUESTION 17: This question was not well answered in general. Examiners noted a lack of knowledge of current events and their application to Irish agriculture.

QUESTION 18: Most candidates gave clear precise answers to this question.

QUESTION 19: Most candidates were able to give two clear examples here.

QUESTION 20: This was a very well answered question.

PART 2 Total Marks: 200

Part 2 comprises six questions. All questions carry an equal weighting of 50 marks. Candidates are required to answer any four questions.

Responses to this section of the paper were generally good. Some candidates, however, wrote very brief answers without regard to the question cues such as 'explain' and 'outline'.

Overall, the candidates who presented definitions precisely and who elaborated on all the points in the questions in Part 2 scored the highest marks.

QUESTION 1.

Attempt frequency: 100%

Average Mark: 31

- a) This part was poorly answered as many candidates failed to differentiate adequately between 'households' and 'firms' and between each market.
- b) This was well answered in general and many candidates outlined a number of limitations of the diagram.
- c) This question was well understood by most candidates, but many responses were insufficiently developed.

QUESTION 2

Attempt frequency: 87%

Average Mark: 25

- (a) Most answers were very brief and provided limited explanations of the three types of budgets.

Parts (b) and (c) were poorly answered as most candidates seemed to misunderstand the question and many answers did not relate to the question asked. Some answers were very vague.

QUESTION 3

Attempt frequency: 82%

Average Mark: 22

- a) This was a popular question but many candidates did not score well as points were not developed.
- b) Many candidates appeared to be unclear about the benefits of membership of a co-operative for a farmer.
- c) Very few candidates understood the concept of 'vertical integration' within agricultural marketing.

QUESTION 4

Attempt frequency: 97%

Average Mark: 30

On the whole, this was a very popular question and it was generally very well answered.

- (a) A small number of candidates confused the Demand and Supply curves in the diagrams.

Parts (b) and (c) were generally well answered.

QUESTION 5

Attempt frequency: 61%

Average Mark: 32

This definitions question was answered reasonably well in general. Many candidates failed to score full marks due to definitions lacking precision. The distinction between 'Financial Feasibility' and 'Profitability' confused many candidates and the term 'Super Levy' presented problems for some candidates.

QUESTION 6

Attempt Frequency: 60%

Average Mark: 17

This was the least popular question and it was generally poorly answered. Many candidates produced very vague answers and tended to confuse the role / functions of the European Parliament and the European Commission.

Parts (b) and (c) were generally poorly answered.

3.3 Conclusions

- Many candidates demonstrated satisfactory levels of knowledge and skills in the written examination at Higher Level
- There was evidence of an improvement in the standard of answering in recent years and many candidates seemed to be well prepared for this examination, and particularly for Part 1 of the examination paper
- A failure to answer sections of questions and non-elaboration of the points made resulted in very low marks for some candidates
- There is further room for improvement in questions which require the ability to comprehend and apply economic theories to agricultural issues.

3.4 Recommendations to Teachers and Students

The following recommendations are offered to teachers and students with a view to assisting them in improving examination performance.

Teachers are advised to

- use the syllabus as the base document when preparing students for the examination
- refer to the published marking schemes and notes which can be assessed on the State Examinations Commission website www.examinations.ie
- instruct candidates to pay attention to question cues, such as ‘outline’, ‘explain’ and ‘discuss’. The amount of detail required in the answers will depend on the question cue used
- provide candidates with opportunities to practise writing examination style answers that are relevant and sufficiently comprehensive in treatment
- place additional focus on basic economic concepts / theories as they apply to the agricultural sector and also to current developments in agricultural policy.

Students are advised to

- read and practise writing examination style questions
- complete the required number of questions and all sections within questions
- ensure that all diagrams are drawn clearly and labeled correctly
- avoid one-word / one-sentence answers when asked to ‘explain’ or ‘discuss’
- pay attention to the skills of analysis and evaluation in the Higher Level examination.

4. PRACTICAL COURSEWORK

4.1 Introduction

The requirements for undertaking the Agricultural Economics practical coursework are stated in the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*. A common brief exists for both Higher and Ordinary level candidates. The practical coursework carries a weighting of 20% of the total marks. The marking criteria and marking scheme, which remain unchanged from year to year, are forwarded to schools by the State Examinations Commission, annually.

The practical coursework is carried out during the school year. The coursework is assessed in school by the class teacher and externally monitored in May each year by Monitors who are appointed by the State Examinations Commission. In 2007, a total of 74 students were monitored.

4.2 Analysis of Performance

The table below shows the total number of candidates achieving each grade for the Agricultural Economics Practical Coursework for 2007.

Agricultural Economics Practical Coursework

Total Number of Grades Awarded						
Grade	A	B	C	D	E	F
Total Number of Students	37	18	13	4	6	0
Percentage	47%	23%	16.7%	5.1%	7.7%	0

Table VI Grade outcomes Leaving Certificate Agricultural Economics Practical Coursework 2007

A wide variety of research projects were presented for assessment in 2007, the most popular of which were: Farm Accounts; Organic Farming; Renewable Energy, Wind farming, Biomass production; REPS and Dairy industry.

The projects were generally of a very high standard and, in some cases, were excellent. A number of projects were well researched, well presented, included the candidates own pictures, graphs, and charts and focused on new areas/developments in Agriculture such as Global Warming, Renewable Energy and Biomass Production. A small number of candidates used primary research methods, such as questionnaires and interviews, to support their investigations.

Monitors continue to express concerns in relation to the Farm Accounts submitted as coursework. The monitors, in a number of cases, questioned the actual knowledge and understanding of those candidates who did a set of farm accounts, based on their own farms as their practical coursework. Some candidates were unable to explain the figures when interviewed by the monitors. Farm accounts, if presented, must be supported by a farm profile so that the requirements of the marking scheme can be applied. The farm statistics must also be analysed with reference to national statistics.

The layout of the coursework showed an improvement on recent years. It appeared that the marking criteria, as outlined in the marking scheme had been taken into account. The aims were clearly stated, and other criteria such as relevance of methods, evaluation of information and economic principles were generally much better addressed than in previous years.

Monitors noted that in a small number of cases, projects were very descriptive and essay-type, and lacked any reference to economic principles. The most common weakness was a failure to deal with the 'Implications of Economic Principles' in the projects.

Some projects were too long, and included much material supplied by firms and Government Departments with little effort made to relate the material to the actual practical coursework undertaken.

There was also, in some cases, an over-reliance on internet material, with little or no understanding of the material demonstrated by the candidates. Large quantities of material were downloaded, some of which was very general, irrelevant to the project, and unreliable. It should be noted that including large quantities of materials downloaded from the internet, with no analysis does not constitute a project. It is imperative that candidates doing a research project carry out their own research and carefully locate information and acknowledge their sources.

4.3 Conclusions

- The more successful research projects were presented under the specific headings outlined in the Marking Criteria
- Many projects had well organised content, relevant research, evidence of planning and investigation undertaken. These included, for example, copies of correspondence sent and received, relevant photographic evidence, copies of questionnaires, records of interviews, and bibliography
- Some excellent projects were well-researched small-scale projects, which included both primary and secondary methods of research
- The marking criteria, which are forwarded to schools annually, are devised to provide teachers with a framework within which to assess the project work in Agricultural Economics. The scale of the research project should reflect the marks available.
- A small number of projects presented were not entirely relevant to the Agricultural Economics syllabus
- An over-reliance on photocopied materials and an indiscriminate use of materials downloaded from the internet by some candidates undermined the educational aims of the practical coursework and the spirit of the subject.

4.4 Recommendations to Teachers and Students

In relation to project work/practical coursework the following should be noted:

- The Research Project must have an economic content. It must relate specifically to some aspect(s) of the Agricultural Economics syllabus
- It should have a clear focus and should avoid being too descriptive
- The marking criteria, along with the marking scheme, should be available to all candidates to ensure that the different elements of the research project are included
- The projects should be structured around the headings of the marking criteria
- Candidates must consider and record in the project why they are carrying out the research, how it will be conducted, and what methods will be employed to gather the evidence
- Evidence of research, such as letters written requesting information, completed questionnaires, interview questions etc. should be included with the project
- Candidates should analyse, evaluate and make recommendations based on their evidence
- Candidates should be encouraged to be selective about what they include in the project and not rely solely on photocopied materials and information downloaded from the Internet
- Farm Accounts must be supported by a Farm Profile, and candidates must be able to analyse, with reference to the national standard, the various ratios they have provided
- All sources used, including books, publications etc., must be identified and credited
- If the Internet is used as a source for research then accurate website references must be provided by the candidate.