



**Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission**

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2004

AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT ORDINARY LEVEL

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT HIGHER LEVEL

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Syllabus

The syllabus for Agricultural Economics was introduced in 1969 and was examined for the first time in 1971. The number of candidates, while consistently low, increased in a steady manner to reach a peak of 357 candidates in 1987. However, the numbers declined thereafter to the lowest number of 117 in 2003. Against this downward trend a total of 124 candidates presented for examination in 2004, 120 candidates at the Higher Level and 4 candidates at the Ordinary Level.

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 nature and format of the examination at Higher Level and at Ordinary Level has remained unchanged since its introduction in 1969. When it was introduced the examination had two components at both Higher and Ordinary level as follows:

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

The syllabus has been assessed according to this structure without any change or adjustment since 1971. The written examination is assessed externally while the practical coursework is school assessed with external monitoring.

Candidates at both Higher Level and at Ordinary Level sit a terminal written examination of 2.5 hours duration. The written examination is assessed out of 320 marks (80%). The written examination comprises of two Parts:

Part 1: 120 marks

Candidates are required to attempt 15 short response questions out of 20. All questions carry an equal weighting of 8 marks.

Part 2: 200 marks

Candidates are required to attempt 4 out of 6 constructed response questions. All questions carry an equal weighting of 50 marks.

Both Ordinary Level and Higher Level candidates undertake common project work/practical coursework over the duration of their course of study. A maximum of 80 marks may be awarded to the candidate for this component following an oral examination based on an assessment of the practical coursework. (Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools 2002/03).

1.3 Numbers Taking Agricultural Economics

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

It can be seen from the table that the number of candidates taking Agricultural Economics has been in steady decline over the last number of years.

**Numbers taking Agricultural Economics
Higher and Ordinary Level 2001 to 2004**

Years	2001	2002	2003	2004
Higher Level	219	178	115	120
Ordinary Level	13	9	2	4

1.4 Performance of Candidates

The following table sets out the percentage of candidates achieving each grade at Ordinary Level in the years 2001 to 2004 for the Written Paper and Practical Coursework combined.

**Percentage of Grades Awarded - Ordinary Level
2001 to 2004 (Written Paper and Practical Coursework combined)**

Year	Number	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2001	13	-	15.4	30.8	15.4	23.1	15.4	-
2002	9	-	-	11.1	22.2	11.1	33.3	11.1
2003	2	-	-	50.0	50.0	-	-	-
2004	4	-	-	50.0	50.0	-	-	-

It can be seen from these statistics that the numbers taking the Ordinary Level examination are a very small percentage of the entire cohort of Agricultural Economics candidates. Examiners reported that a number of candidates taking the Higher Level examination would be more suited to the Ordinary Level. This observation was also made in previous Chief Examiner's Reports on this subject.

The following table sets out the percentage of candidates achieving each grade at Higher Level in the years 2001 to 2004 for the Written Paper.

**Percentage Grades Awarded - Higher Level
2001 to 2004 (Written terminal examination only)**

Year	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2001	5.5	13.2	21.0	25.6	22.4	11.8	0.5
2002	10.1	19.7	18.0	26.4	20.2	4.5	1.1
2003	5.2	18.3	26.1	22.6	18.3	7.8	1.7
2004	8.3	15.8	20.0	21.7	20.8	10.8	2.5

In the written examination, the consistently high % of candidates achieving less than a D grade raises concerns about the suitability of the Higher Level for some candidates.

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

- Lack of 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 1;
- Very brief answers given.

The following table sets out the percentage of candidates achieving each grade at Higher Level for the Written Paper **and** Practical Coursework combined.

**Percentage Grades Awarded - Higher Level
2001 to 2004 (Written paper and Practical Coursework combined)**

Year	Number	A	B	C	D	E	F	NG
2001	219	5.9	21.0	25.6	22.5	13.7	1.4	-
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	-

As is evident from the data presented the addition of the project component improves the D minus grade.

2. ORDINARY LEVEL

2.1 Introduction

Only four candidates presented for the Ordinary Level examination in 2004. The Ordinary Level paper was perceived as well laid out and ‘candidate friendly’. The paper was well received and considered by examiners to be fair with a good choice of questions. There was no evidence that candidates experienced any difficulty understanding the questions.

Given the very small cohort who took this examination in 2004 a detailed analysis of candidate performance is not possible. 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

- Refer to the published marking schemes and notes. These serve as a useful guide and resource. They can be accessed at www.examinations.ie
- Instruct candidates to pay attention to all parts of the question and if asked to explain or discuss an aspect one-word/one-sentence answers will not suffice for full marks.
- Provide candidates with opportunities to practice writing examination style answers that are relevant to the question asked and sufficiently comprehensive in treatment. This is essential in preparing for the examination.

- Give greater attention to an understanding of basic economic concepts/theories as they apply to the agricultural sector.

Students

- Choose carefully the questions you intend answering, and then complete the required number of questions and all sections within the questions.
- Have sufficient practice at writing examination style questions.
- Ensure that all diagrams are drawn clearly and labelled correctly.
- Avoid one word/one sentence when asked to explain.

3. HIGHER LEVEL

3.1 Introduction

A total of 120 candidates presented for the Higher Level Examination in 2004.

The performance of candidates was very varied in the written examination at this level. While a significant number of candidates achieved high grades a more significant number achieved very low grades i.e. E, F or N/G. When both written and practical coursework components were taken into account 19.1% achieved an E or an F grade.

It was evident, from monitoring candidates' scripts, that a significant number of candidates did not have the level of knowledge and understanding of the programme required at Higher Level. A decline in the standard of answering was evident with a significant number of candidates totally unprepared for the examination.

3.2 Analysis of Candidate Performance

The table below sets out the attempt frequency of questions and the average marks obtained per question. The range of marks is also highlighted. The attempt frequency and the average marks given for each question are based on a sample of 40 scripts from examiners and should be used as a general guideline only.

Attempt Frequency and Average Marks Obtained at Higher Level -2004

Question	% Attempt	Range of marks	Average Marks	Average %
Part 1	100		63	52.5
Part 2				
1	90	9-42	20	40
2	100	2-50	23	46
3	70	4-40	14	28
4	65	0-50	18	36
5	50	0-50	17	34
6	95	0-42	22	44

An examination of the table shows that, in many instances, the standard of responses, especially in Part 2, was very low.

Many candidates did not attempt the minimum number of questions in each part, or did not attempt all components of the questions in Part 2.

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 essential in order to perform well in this part of the examination.

The answering within this section was very variable with some candidates answering most questions very well and others attempting less than the required number of questions with very poor responses in many cases. Marks ranged from 4 marks to 116 marks out of a possible 120 marks, the average percentage score being 52.5%.

The questions requiring knowledge of economic terms and concepts were very poorly answered in general.

The following is an analysis of candidates' answers to each question in Part 1 with specific reference to common errors.

QUESTION 1. This question was poorly answered, especially, the last part (i.e. rent, wages, interest rates).

QUESTION 2. This was generally well answered.

QUESTION 3. It was evident that some candidates had difficulties with this question.

QUESTION 4. Generally, candidates did not mention the need to deduct living expenses in order to achieve repayment capacity.

QUESTION 5. This question was generally not attempted and poorly answered by those candidates who did.

QUESTION 6. *Increased purchasing power* was the most common answer given. Some confusion between supply and demand was evident

QUESTION 7. This question was not well answered.

QUESTION 8. This question was generally well answered.

QUESTION 9. This concept was generally misunderstood.

QUESTION 10. This question was not well answered due to confusion between profits and inputs.

QUESTION 11. This question was not a popular question.

QUESTION 12. The research function was seldom mentioned.

QUESTION 13. A minority of candidates answered this question very well.

QUESTION 14. Only repayment capacity mentioned in many cases; security was seldom mentioned.

QUESTION 15. This question was generally not well answered by the minority of candidates who attempted it.

QUESTION 16. Many candidates answered this question in the context of the expansion of agriculture rather than the contraction.

QUESTION 17. This question was generally well answered.

QUESTION 18. The question was seldom attempted and was not well answered when it was attempted.

QUESTION 19. The price gap between guaranteed price and export price was seldom mentioned.

QUESTION 20. This was a popular question but answers were very vague.

PART 2 Total Marks: 200

Candidates were required to answer 4 out of a possible 6 questions. All questions carry an equal weighting of 50 marks

Marks awarded for this section were very low on average. Many candidates had great difficulty with the more demanding components of questions. Many candidates appeared to have misread some of the questions especially questions 3, 4 and 5 as the answers, frequently, did not relate to the questions asked.

QUESTION 1.

Attempt Frequency: 90%

Average Mark: 20

This was a very popular question. The marks ranged from 9 marks to 42.

- (a) This section was generally answered well with most candidates able to label the diagram correctly.
- (b) Some candidates were unable to explain the shape of the demand curve.
- (c) Most candidates could show that the expansion in supply created a fall in price.
- (d) Many candidates concluded that a decrease in price causes a decrease in revenue.
- (e) Generally only “quotas” were mentioned as an example of how CAP reform discouraged an expansion in supply

QUESTION 2.

Attempt Frequency: 100%

Average Mark: 23

This was a very popular question but a variable standard of answering was evident. While the majority of candidates attempted this question, many had no knowledge of the formulas required to do the calculations. Some candidate had problems with the calculation of Farm Output, which resulted in little or no progress with the remainder of the question. This was a very straightforward type of question, therefore, should not have presented problems for any Higher Level candidate.

The marks for the question ranged from 2 to 50 marks, indicating that some candidates had no idea how to do the calculations required.

QUESTION 3.

Attempt Frequency: 70%

Average Mark: 14

- (a) (i) This section was very well answered
(ii) and (iii) were poorly answered.

- (b) This section was poorly answered. Many candidates explained the objectives of CAP in its original form. Only a small number of candidates identified the CAP reform in the context of the “McSharry Proposals”. While some candidates may have focused on this issue in their practical coursework they were unable to transfer the knowledge to the written examination.

- (c) Candidates did not understand the term “Ring Fencing” of quotas and in general omitted this part of the question.

QUESTION 4.

Attempt Frequency: 65%

Average Mark: 18

- (a) Most candidates were able to define the Price-Cost Squeeze.
- (b) This section was poorly answered. Many candidates repeated the definition in (a) and did not relate how the farmer's welfare was linked with the contraction of the gap between value of output (i.e. price of products) and value of inputs (i.e. cost of inputs).
- (c) This section was poorly answered, despite the fact that it has been asked in previous examinations. Generally, the candidates could not explain how the forces of supply and demand in the product market affect prices and how forces outside the farming sector mostly affect the factor market.

QUESTION 5.

Attempt Frequency: 50%

Average Mark: 17

- (a) Although a small number of candidates gave excellent answers, the concept of **decoupling** was generally not understood by those who attempted this question.
- (b) This section was generally poorly answered.
- (c) Pollution was generally the only point presented here.

QUESTION 6.

Attempt Frequency: 95%

Average Mark: 22

- (a) Most candidates were able to differentiate between World and EU markets.
- (b) Generally, candidates understood that the equilibrium price on the world market would prevail on the EU market without protection.
- (c) There was a lot of confusion with the quantities supplied and demanded on the diagram for the EU market.

- (d) This section was poorly answered. The answers lacked clarity and were very vague in most cases.

- (e) Most candidates used examples which were not related to free trade e.g. quotas.

3.3 Conclusions

- In general many candidates did not demonstrate satisfactory levels of knowledge and of skills in the written examination, at the Higher Level.
- There was evidence of a decline in the standard of answering, with a significant number of candidates totally unprepared for this examination.
- Many candidates demonstrated inadequate knowledge of economic terminology and Agricultural policy.
- Examiners continue to note that there are candidates presenting for the Higher Level examination for whom the Ordinary Level would be more suitable.
- Failure to answer the questions asked and non-elaboration of the points resulted in low marks for many candidates.
- Where there was a restricted factual focus to questions, candidates scored well. However, where more demanding skills such as ability to comprehend and apply theories were required, only a minority of candidate scored well.

3.4 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:

- Use the syllabus as the base document when preparing students for the examination.
- Refer to the published marking schemes and notes. These serve as a useful guide and resource. They can be accessed at www.examinations.ie
- (f) Instruct candidates to pay attention to outcome verbs particularly *State, Outline, Explain, Discuss* as the amount of detail required in the answers will vary.
- (g) Provide candidates with opportunities to practise writing examination style answers that are relevant to the question asked and sufficiently comprehensive in treatment. This is essential in preparing for the examination.
- (h) Give greater attention to an understanding of basic economic concepts/theories as they apply to the agricultural sector and also to current development in agricultural policy.

Students

- Choose carefully the level of examination you will take. Do not take the Higher Level examination unless you have done the required work.
- Read and practise writing exam style questions as often as possible.
- Choose carefully the questions you intend answering. Complete the required number of questions and all sections within the questions.

- Ensure that all diagrams are drawn clearly and labelled correctly.
- Avoid one word/one sentence answers when asked to ‘explain’.
- Higher order skills of analysis and evaluation are required at Higher Level. It is important that you continue to perfect these skills.

4. RESEARCH PROJECT/PRACTICAL COURSEWORK

4.1 Introduction

Requirements for undertaking the Agricultural Economics practical coursework are stated in the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*. The research project/practical coursework requirements are common to Higher Level and Ordinary Level. The research project/practical coursework carries a weighting of 20%.

The practical coursework is carried out during the school year. It is school assessed and externally monitored, in May each year, by Monitors appointed by the State Examinations Commission.

4.2 Analysis of Performance

A greater variety of research projects were presented for assessment in 2004, including some new well-researched topics such as: *Trends in Farmer Incomes; Decoupling; Reform of the CAP; Alternative Farm Enterprises; Organic Farming*.

The projects were generally of a high standard and in some cases they were excellent. The excellent projects were very focused, well researched and well presented. Monitors, commented that the less successful projects were very descriptive, essay type projects, which lacked any economic focus.

Concern was expressed in relation to the content of some of the projects. It was difficult, in some cases, to identify the projects with the Agricultural Economics syllabus. In many cases these projects were more suited to the Agricultural Science syllabus than to the Agricultural Economics syllabus.

The aims of the research project must be stated and must clearly relate to specific aspects of the syllabus.

Genuine research was not carried out in all cases. It is imperative that candidates doing a research project carry out their own research and carefully locate and acknowledge their principal sources. Candidates have access to material from the Internet and frequently access relevant websites as part of their research. There was evidence of increasing use, and in some cases overuse, of the Internet for the research project. Large quantities of material were downloaded from the Internet, some of which was very general, irrelevant to the project, and unreliable.

Written material, supplied by firms and Government Departments, was transcribed by candidates and, in some cases, sources were not cited accurately. Other primary research methods such as interviews, surveys and questionnaires were not often used.

The completion of Farm Accounts, based on the candidate's own farm, and its evaluation by comparison with National statistics, was undertaken by an increasing number of candidates. While it was the most popular type of project in 2004, some candidates did not include any analysis of the figures presented or give any reference to national figures/statistics. Some candidates were unable to explain the figures when interviewed by the monitors.

A small number of candidates used research instruments such as case studies and questionnaires to support their investigations. These candidates generally achieved high marks.

4.3 Conclusions

- The research projects, which attracted the highest marks, provided evidence of wide reading, good research and careful preparation. They were presented under the specific headings outlined in the Marking Criteria.
- Candidates who engaged in planning and background research, used genuine sources, made reference to economic principles or concepts, and made recommendations based on their interpretations, were rewarded by achieving higher marks.
- The better projects were well-researched small-scale projects, which included both primary and secondary methods of research.
- The marking criteria, forwarded to schools, have been 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.

4.4 Recommendations to Teachers and Students

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

- The Research Project selected should 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.
- Candidates should consider and record why they are carrying out the research, how it will be conducted, and what methods will be employed to gather the evidence.
- Candidates should analyse, evaluate and make recommendations based on their evidence.
- All sources used should be identified and referenced.
- If the Internet is used as a source for the research then accurate website references must be provided by the candidate.
- Candidates must include the headings outlined in the marking criteria.
- The marks assigned should take account of the requirements outlined in the Marking Scheme