Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit

State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2015

LATIN

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

Contents

1   Introduction

The syllabus in Leaving Certificate Latin and the structure of the examination papers have remained largely unchanged for more than thirty years. In 1989, a comprehension question was introduced as an alternative to the composition passage in Question 1 on both Higher level and Ordinary level papers.

In 2009 the Department of Education and Science (DES) accepted a recommendation from the NCCA that the number of unseen translations required to be attempted by candidates be reduced from three to two on the Higher level paper, and that the mandatory translation of unseen poetry be removed from the Ordinary level examination paper. Those changes came into effect in 2009.

It is intended that this report be read in conjunction with the relevant examination papers and marking schemes, which are available on www.examinations.ie.

1.1   Syllabus Structure

The syllabus for Leaving Certificate Latin comprises a two-page document and forms part of the *Rules and Programme for Secondary Schools*. It is available on-line at www.education.ie and is outlined here.

The Leaving Certificate Latin syllabi at Higher and Ordinary levels comprises five areas of study and the syllabus document details not only the course content but both the questions type and mark allocations also.

The five areas of Study at both Higher and Ordinary level are: Composition & Comprehension, Formal Grammar, Prescribed Texts, Unprescribed Texts and History. Differentiation between Higher and Ordinary levels within the syllabi is achieved through the inclusion of more complex content and applications at Higher level. For example scansion is confined to Elegiac Couples and the Hexameter at Ordinary level whereas at Higher level the scansion requirement also includes Sapphic and Alcaic. Additional authors are included under Unprescribed Texts at Higher level whereas the requirements in terms of content under Prescribed Texts and History are the same at both levels.

1.2   Assessment Specification

The Assessment Specification also forms part of the syllabus. Assessment is by way of written terminal examination, offered at Higher and Ordinary levels each of 3 hours duration. The papers are marked out of a total of 400 marks.

1.2.1   Higher Level Examination Specification

Question 1 deals with the area of Composition and Comprehension and consists of a choice between the translation of a continuous passage into Latin (composition) and a comprehension passage with accompanying questions. The mark allocation to Question 1 is 75.

Question 2, which is allocated 130 marks, offers four Latin passages, two prose and two poetry, for translation into English (or Irish). Two passages, one from Section A (Poetry) and one from Section B (Prose) are required to be translated in the case of Higher level candidates. These passages for translation involve Unprescribed Text: two passages from the works of the following authors: Cicero (*Orationes*), Caesar, Livy, Virgil (*Aeneid*).

A vocabulary aid is provided in the case of all unprescribed passages appearing on the examination and the words in the vocabulary aid are underlined in the passages.

Question 3 is allocated 90 marks and requires candidates to translate a passage for 60 marks and answer subsidiary questions (30 marks) from either of the two Prescribed Texts. In 2015 the prescribed texts were Cicero, (*Pro Lege Manilia*) and Virgil, (*Aeneid*), Book I, lines 1-519.

Question 4 examines Formal Grammar (the scansion requirement includes Sapphic and Alcaic as well as Elegiac Couplet and the Hexameter) which is allocated 30 marks, comprises three subsections which examine grammar and scansion.

Question 5 is allocated 75 marks and consists of Section A (History) and Section B (Art and Literature), each of which offers three questions. Candidates are required to answer three questions (25 marks each) and to choose at least one from each section – (i) Roman History (ii) Roman Art and Literature.

The prescribed historical period from which questions can be drawn is the period from the death of Caesar to the death of Trajan.

Candidates are expected to have studied Roman Art and Architecture within the prescribed period, under such headings as: patronage, portrait sculpture, murals, mosaics, historical reliefs, (e.g. the Ara Pacis and Trajan's Column), the Roman house, roads, arches, bridges, aqueducts, basilicas, amphitheatres, public buildings, temples.

Questions are set on the life, works and literary importance of Latin authors from the prescribed history period (including Caesar and Cicero) and, in addition, Catullus.

1.2.2   Ordinary Level Examination Specification

Question 1 deals with the area of Composition and Comprehension and consists of a choice between the translation of five sentences into Latin (composition) and a comprehension passage with accompanying questions. The number of marks allocated to Question 1 is 75.

Question 2, which is allocated 130 marks, offers four Latin passages, two prose and two poetry, for translation into English (or Irish). Any two of these passages are required to be translated in the case of Ordinary level candidates. The passages involve Unprescribed Text: two passages from the works of the following authors: Cicero (*Orationes*), Caesar, Livy, Virgil (*Aeneid*).

A vocabulary aid is provided in the case of all unprescribed passages appearing on the examination and the words in the vocabulary aid are underlined in the passages.

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questions (25 marks each) and to choose at least one from each section – (i) Roman History (ii) Roman Art and Literature.

The content covered by this section is the same as that described above for Higher Level.

1.3   Participation Trends

Table 1 gives the overall participation rates in Leaving Certificate Latin for the past five years.

Year	Higher level Candidature	Ordinary level Candidature	Total Candidature
2011	94	7	101
2012	130	1	131
2013	91	4	95
2014	108	7	108
2015	110	7	117

 Table 1: Participation in Leaving Certificate Latin, 2011 to 2015

As can be seen the numbers of candidates presenting for examination in Leaving Certificate Latin remains small but fairly stable with very few candidates participating at Ordinary level. Leaving Certificate cohorts, excluding Leaving Certificate Applied, were of the order of 52,000 to 56,000 over this period placing participation rates in Leaving Certificate Latin at a level of around 0.2%.

2.   Performance of Candidates

2.1   Higher Level Statistics

The distribution of grades awarded over the past five years is given in **Table 2** (lettered grades).

Year	A	B	C	ABC	D	E	F	NG	EFNG
2011	41.5	29.8	17.0	88.3	8.5	3.2	0.0	0.0	3.2
2012	29.3	41.6	10.0	80.9	7.6	1.5	0.0	0.0	1.5
2013	40.7	24.1	13.2	78.0	6.6	3.3	2.2	0.0	5.5
2014	28.7	34.3	23.1	86.1	10.2	2.8	0.9	0.0	3.7
2015	40.0	41.8	14.6	96.4	0.9	1.8	0.9	0.0	2.7

Table 2.   Percentage of candidates achieving each lettered grade in Higher level Latin, 2011 to 2015

The detailed distribution of sub-grades awarded at Higher level over the last five years is given in **Table 3**.

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2011	26.6	14.9	11.7	4.3	13.8	4.3	7.4	5.3	5.3	3.2	0	3.2	0	0
2012	20.8	17.7	19.2	8.5	14.6	3.8	5.4	0.8	2.3	3.8	1.5	1.5	0	0
2013	22	18.7	13.2	13.2	7.7	2.2	5.5	5.5	3.3	1.1	2.2	3.3	2.2	0
2014	14.8	13.9	14.8	10.2	9.3	11.1	4.6	7.4	6.5	2.8	0.9	2.8	0.9	0
2015	30.9	10	24.5	10	5.5	9.1	4.5	1.8	0.9	0	0	0.9	1.8	0

Table 3.   Sub-grades achieved at Higher level 2011 – 2015

The candidature has consistently returned a strong combined A+B+C grade percentage and a small E+F+NG percentage. Given the small cohort size it is not surprising that there are fluctuations from year to year in the percentages achieving individual grades.

The results for 2015 show an A+B+C rate of 96.4 %, which is the highest in the last five years. The number of candidates who achieved an A grade (40.0 %) is higher than last year but similar to other years.

2.2   Ordinary Level Statistics

As the size of the candidature at Ordinary level over the past six years is very low, statistical data on outcomes are not given here in the interest of candidate confidentiality. Furthermore, with such small numbers neither is it meaningful to make any observations on the statistics.

3.   Analysis of Candidate Performance

3.1   Analysis of Candidate Performance at Higher Level

Once again, candidates at this level continue to achieve very well in sections of the paper that can be prepared and practiced as was seen in questions three and five this year and very few candidates experienced difficulties with translating the set Virgil text. The solid preparation and practice at translation involved here forms a basis on which the vast majority of candidates achieve a C grade at least, and provides the necessary grounding for their engagement with the unprescribed texts. It was pleasing yet again this year to see that the improvement noted for the last two years in the standard of answering in question 4 (grammar and scansion) has continued. This shows an ability of many candidates to apply thoroughly what they have learned.

The ability of candidates to apply their knowledge, as demonstrated in the excellent standard of answering in the unseen passages, was mainly responsible for the overall improvement in grades this year.

Given that each question on the examination paper relates to a specific area of study from the syllabus, candidate performance in these specific areas will be dealt with through question by question commentary. This section in particular should be read in conjunction with the published marking scheme.

Composition & Comprehension
Question 1A. Composition
This option was answered by 18% of candidates this year which is much lower than usual. However, many candidates scored high marks in this question and the average mark achieved

out of a possible total of 75 marks was 65 with several candidates scoring full marks. It was particularly encouraging to note that most candidates were able to correctly translate the conditional clause and the verb of fearing clause towards the end of this passage. In general, the constructions and vocabulary in this passage caused very few difficulties with the exception of the following: "to Minturnae" some candidates did not realise it is a plural noun; "*litus*" ---when used for the "coast" proved difficult to render in the correct case as some candidates forgot that *litus* is a neuter noun.

Question 1 B. Comprehension

Answered by 82% of the candidates, this passage, although difficult in places, was well answered by most. A considerable number of candidates scored full marks in this question. Most candidates seemed to understand the story being told which greatly assisted in answering the set questions. Questions (i), (iii) and (vi) proved to be the most difficult. Some candidates tended to provide very detailed answers. The average mark achieved (63) was slightly lower than that achieved in Question 1.A.

Unseen Text – Question 2

Candidates are required to translate one unseen from Section A and one from Section B. There was clear evidence once again this year of an improvement in the standard of translation in this question and very few candidates appeared to find it difficult. The overall improvement in the results this year can largely be attributed to the excellent performance of candidates who presented for examination.

Passage 2 A (i) (Virgil) was the most popular passage and was translated very well; the words "moras" and "opera" caused difficulties for some candidates.

Passage 2A (ii) (Catullus) was not at all popular but caused few difficulties for those candidates who attempted it apart from the second and fifth lines which caused some confusion.

 Passage 2B (i) (Cicero) was not a very popular passage but was very well translated by those who decided to attempt it. Candidates seemed to understand the context of this passage very well.

 Passage 2B (ii) (Livy) was very popular and was very well translated. Some candidates experienced difficulties with some of the military vocabulary contained in this passage.

Prescribed Text – Question 3

Passage 3 A(i) (Cicero) was attempted by only a tiny minority of candidates and was excellently done.

Question 3B(i) (Virgil) was attempted by the vast majority of candidates and was generally very well answered with very few candidates experiencing difficulties. This extract from Virgil is obviously well known by the vast majority of the candidates.

Question 3B(ii) the accompanying questions on the text were very well answered without exception. In (e) very few candidates attempted to write on Penthesilea. Candidates wrote competently and at length on all the other questions.

Grammar and Scansion – Question 4

Section (i) was answered very well again this year. Candidates seemed to understand the grammar, especially in the extract from Virgil. The only exception was the use of the locative case in *humi* which was frequently misunderstood.

Section (ii) was quite well answered. Most candidates attempted all five verbs asked thereby ensuring that they generally achieved full marks in this section. Some candidates experienced problems with *tollo* and *posco*.

In **Section (iii)** most candidates were able to scan this Sapphic line, mark the quantities and name the metre.

History – Question 5

In general the standard of answering in Section A and Section B was very high and, once again, very many candidates achieved full marks. Answers indicated that most candidates had prepared thoroughly for this section of the exam. It is very satisfactory to note that the vast majority of candidates answered the questions exactly as asked on the paper thus not only showing their acquired knowledge but also an ability to evaluate, analyse and synthesise.

Exceptionally, **Question 5A (i)** was not very popular and generally not well answered. It seems as if the foreign policy of Augustus is not covered by many candidates. **Question 5A (ii)** was very popular in this section and was excellently answered. Candidates displayed a detailed knowledge of the events of Nero's life. **Question 5A (iii)** was also very popular in this section and was quite well answered with the exception of Claudius and the invasion of Britain.

Question 5B (i) was easily the most popular in this section. Candidates were very good at writing on the lives and works. However, some candidates neglected to write on the writing style of their chosen author.

Question 5B(ii) on architecture proved, once again, to be the least popular question in this section, however, the standard demonstrated by the candidates who answered it was generally good. Some candidates provided wonderfully detailed answers on features of relief sculpture such as the Ara Pacis, Trajan's Column and the Arch of Titus. **Question B (iii)** was not very popular but generally well answered. Candidates experienced very few difficulties with any of the three parts.

3.2   Analysis of Candidate Performance at Ordinary Level

At Ordinary level, examiners have noted that where candidates possess an appropriate knowledge of the prescribed text, they tend to do very well. In 2015 it was clear that some candidates had insufficient knowledge of the prescribed text, which accounts for 22.5% of the overall marks for the paper.

Given that each question on the examination paper relates to a specific area of study from the syllabus, candidate performance in these specific areas will be dealt with through question by question commentary below. However, the fact that there were only 7 candidates limits the level of information that is available with some parts of questions attempted by no candidates. This section in particular should be read in conjunction with the published marking scheme.

Composition & Comprehension

Question 1A. Composition

No candidate opted for this question on translation of sentences in 2015. Examiners have noted that candidates generally tend to attempt Question 1B, a trend that has been in place for the last decade.

Question 1 B. Comprehension

All candidates attempted this question. Most candidates understood the content of the passage and responded well. The average mark was 41 out of a possible 75 representing 55%.

Unseen Text – Question 2

Candidates are required to translate any two unseen texts from Section A and Section B.

Passage A (Ovid) - four candidates chose this prose passage for translation. The quality of responses was somewhat varied as marks ranged from 10 marks - 43 marks. They found lines 3 and 4 particularly difficult.

Passage B (Virgil) was the choice of the majority of candidates. They found lines 3, 4 and 5 challenging. Examiners noted that good use was made of the glossary. This is to be encouraged and it is recommended that candidates focus on the glossary of all unseen passages. Most candidates did well enough in this passage.

Passage C (Caesar) was the second most popular choice. Again, good use was made of the glossary given. Candidates did well in this passage. They found the sentence 'Treveri...constituunt' challenging. Some did not know the word 'flumen' in the last sentence.

Passage D (Cicero) was the least popular choice and candidates found it challenging as a whole. It is recommended that candidates be fully aware of the open choice of unseen passages and that they use this choice judiciously.

Prescribed Text – Question 3

Passage 3 A (Cicero) and its accompanying questions were not attempted by any candidate.

Question 3B (Virgil) and its accompanying questions were attempted by all candidates. In the main, B(i) (the translation) was poorly attempted and in fact 4 candidates did not attempt the translation of the text at all. This is not unusual at Ordinary level. Of the subsidiary questions, (a) and (b) and (e) were the most popular choices. These were well answered. Examiners noted some issues in relation to the level of candidate preparation for the prescribed texts. As this question accounts for 22.5% of the total marks of this paper, inadequate preparation is reflected in the overall results. It is strongly recommended that candidates at this level prepare the prescribed text adequately.

Grammar and Scansion – Question 4

In general, this question was well answered in 2015. Marks ranged from 10-28 from the 30 marks available.

Section (i) examined the cases of nouns and unlike the pattern in previous years, this question was well answered.

Section (ii) on the principal parts of verbs: this was well attempted.

In **Section (iii)**, which was on scansion, candidates displayed limited knowledge.

History – Question 5

In general, candidates achieved quite high marks in Question 5. Examiners noted that it appeared that, at this level, the non-language based part of the course is either more appealing or not as challenging for candidates as the actual language. This is also reflected in the subsidiary questions in the prescribed text where candidates show good background knowledge of the story.

Question 5A (i) was attempted by only two candidates. Both achieved full marks, showing a good knowledge of the second triumvirate. Question 5A (ii) was a fairly popular choice of question in this section. All candidates who attempted this did well and demonstrated good knowledge of the reign of Claudius. Question 5A (iii) was the most popular choice and was well answered with Trajan and Caligula being the most popular choices.

Question 5B (i) which presented a choice between the authors Horace and Caesar were equally popular but the range of knowledge was varied. Those who attempted an account of Horace attained more marks than those who attempted Caesar. Question 5B(ii) was not a popular option. Question B (iii) was attempted by half the candidates and was well answered. Ara Pacis and Trajan's column were the more popular choices.

4.   Conclusions

Candidates at both Higher and Ordinary levels were tested across the range of skills and topics set out in the syllabus. At Higher level in particular candidates demonstrated good knowledge, understanding and where appropriate an ability to apply that knowledge and understanding to evaluate, analyse and synthesise in formulating their responses to more open questions.

Since the introduction of a comprehension piece as an alternative to translation there has been a dramatic shift to the comprehension option over that of translation at both levels.

Ordinary level candidates clearly engaged better with the aspects of the subject delivered and examined through English rather than through Latin with greater achievement demonstrated in the History section and in the supplementary questions associated with the texts. However, candidates demonstrated a limited knowledge of the prescribed tests at this level.

5.   Recommendations

5.1   Preparing for the examination

At Higher level

- Students are encouraged to learn vocabulary in context and to familiarise themselves with the type of vocabulary used by the authors in the unprescribed texts. This includes the military style vocabulary employed by authors such as Caesar, Livy and Sallust.

- Students are encouraged to practise examination questions with a view to determining exactly what is being asked and learning how to construct a coherent response. This will help develop an ability to analyse, evaluate and synthesise in formulating responses to questions.

- When students are practising comprehension passages, it is recommended that they try to obtain as full an understanding as possible of the context of the passages and not be depending on guessing which words can be used to answer a particular question.

- Candidates are advised to take due care with the prescribed text as a high level of accuracy is required in translation.

At Ordinary level

- Students are encouraged to study the prescribed texts. This area is valued at 22.5% of the overall examination and should not be ignored.
- Students are encouraged to study basic Latin grammar, vocabulary and to engage with scansion.

- Students should be encouraged and advised on the use of the glossary in the unseen translation so as to optimise its use in the examination
- Students should be fully aware of the open choice of unseen passages in Question 2.