SENIOR SOPHISTER GENERAL PAPER
FOR BESS AND TSM ECONOMICS STUDENTS

INFORMATION HANDOUT

This information handout is directed at three groups of Senior Sophister students: Single Honours economics students, Joint Honours economics (and another subject) students who elect to take the economics component of the Faculty General Paper and Two-Subject Moderatorship Pattern A and B economics students.

There are eight questions in the Economics section of the Faculty General Paper and ten questions in the Two-Subject Moderatorship Economics General Paper. All students taking the general paper in economics must answer two (Economics) questions. The examiners for the 2006/2007 General Paper in Economics are Alan Matthews and Kevin O’Rourke. The format of the paper will be broadly the same as in previous years.

The Economics questions on the General Paper are intended to test your ability to apply basic principles and thinking to a select number of broad economic issues. The expectation is that you can answer these questions with information from the core Economics courses in the Senior Freshman and Junior Sophister years, i.e. SF Intermediate Economics and Economy of Ireland, and either JS Economic Analysis or Monetary & Welfare economics, which all students will have taken, complemented with some general reading on topical economics questions of the day.

The eight questions will be drawn from two blocks, one covering theory and the other economic policy issues, as follows:

A  Economic Theory and Analysis
   •  Macroeconomics (2 questions)
   •  Microeconomics
   •  Economic Methodology

B  Economic Policy
   •  Public policy issues at the national level (2 questions)
   •  Public policy issues at the EU and international levels (2 questions)

BESS: As in 2006, one of the national policy questions and one of the EU/international policy questions will be an either/or question where joint honours students will be given an additional choice of essay topic within these questions. De facto this implies that these students are asked to answer two questions from a total of ten. Single honours students will only be permitted to answer Part (a) of each of these questions.

TSM: As described, two of the questions on the BESS paper are each divided into two parts, (a) and (b). On the TSM paper these parts each appear as separate questions and choice is unrestricted. This is the only difference between the BESS and TSM papers.
We look on the General Paper as testing a set of skills different from those required to answer your four core subject papers. A good analogy might be an interview situation after graduation where you are presenting yourself as a candidate with an economics degree from Trinity. The interviewer would expect you to be able to answer general questions about the application of economic principles and the implementation of economic policies, not necessarily in depth, but in a coherent and structured way. You should approach the General Paper in the same way. There is thus no set reading or required preparation for the General Paper and there is no particular advantage to students having taken one set of economics courses from the undergraduate degree programme over another. The examiners are not looking for knowledge in depth – this is the purpose of your subject papers – but rather whether you are able to think like an economist when addressing relevant and/or topical issues in the real world.

Thus the examiners will look for evidence that you can, as appropriate:
- consider the question asked as a hypothesis to be examined;
- identify relevant arguments and appropriate evidence for and against;
- link the discussion to some relevant body of economic theory or principles;
- provide evidence of a general awareness of current economic debates and policy issues;
- Display some originality in your contribution.

To further assist students to prepare for the General Paper, we will hold a further meeting of those interested at the beginning of Trinity Term where we will discuss how to approach the answering of the essay-style questions in the General Paper.

There is no set reading for the General Paper. Students might, however, focus part of their review and preparation on parts of some of the following:


Recent working papers at the CEPR ([www.cepr.org](http://www.cepr.org)) and NBER ([www.nber.org](http://www.nber.org)) give a good flavour of recent work in applied economics.

*The Economist, The Wall Street Journal, The Financial Times* and other newspapers also provide good sources for debates on contemporary economic policy issues.


ESRI reports such as the *Quarterly Economic Commentary*, the *Mid-Term Evaluation of the National Development Plan*, the *Medium-Term Review 2003-2010, Budget Perspectives 2006* and other publications (see [www.esri.ie](http://www.esri.ie) for more details).
