

C A R I B B E A N E X A M I N A T I O N S C O U N C I L

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION**

MAY/JUNE 2006

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

JUNE 2006

GENERAL COMMENTS

The syllabus in Office Administration was tested for the first time in the June 2006 examination and offered at the General Proficiency only. This syllabus replaced Office Procedures that was last tested in January 2006. The candidate population for this examination remained approximately the same as last years population for Office Procedures. Candidates' performance will be compared with the performance in Office Procedures in 2005. Candidates' responses reflected a wide range of abilities as evidenced in the distribution of scores. The examination consists of four papers:

Paper 01	-	Multiple Choice
Paper 02	-	Short Answer
Paper 03/1	-	School-Based Assessment (SBA)
Paper 03/2	-	Alternative to the School-Based Assessment

A satisfactory number of the stated objectives were tested from the various modules in this examination. The responses from the candidates indicated that they had some knowledge of each of the objectives tested.

The overall performance in the compulsory section of the examination was satisfactory. There were some very good responses in both the Compulsory and the Optional sections of the examination. The shortcomings observed will be addressed in this report in the detailed comments on individual questions.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS

PAPER 01 - Multiple Choice

This paper tested the knowledge and application of important facts, concepts, principles, processes and procedures involved in routine clerical and office activities. Candidates' performance in this paper was satisfactory with 66.26 per cent of the population achieving Grades I - III. This figure represents a decrease of 8.21 per cent over that of 2005, when some 74.47 per cent achieved similar grades.

PAPER 02 - Essay

The format of this paper remained the same as the Office Procedures. The paper has two sections. Section I, which is compulsory, tests Modules I - VI and Module XII of the syllabus. Candidates are required to answer the four questions in this section.

Section II is the optional component of the paper. It tests Modules VII - XI of the syllabus. It assesses knowledge and procedures associated with specialised office activities and routines at the entry level. Candidates are required to answer two of the four questions.

The performance of the candidates on Paper 02 showed a marginal increase compared to that of 2005 when 71.87 per cent of the candidates obtained Grades I - III. In this examination, 75.21 per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I - III. Candidates' performance on the Application Profile of this paper was generally satisfactory.

PAPER 03 - School-Based Assessment (SBA)

The School-Based Assessment of the Office Administration examination is a single guided research project designed to develop and enhance skills and competencies identified in the syllabus. The teachers and students were responsible for choosing the topics in this examination. Students worked progressively on their projects through the two years, with feedback from their teachers to ensure that timely submissions at each stage met the required standard for CXC.

Candidates performance on this paper was satisfactory. Approximately 92.15 per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I - III. This figure is comparable with 2005 when 91.01 per cent of the candidates achieved the same grades.

The specimens submitted indicated that the candidates found the topics interesting and well within their competence to produce. The creativity emerging from this paper should be commended.

PAPER 03/2 - Alternative to the School-Based Assessment

Paper 03/2, the Alternative to the School-Based Assessment was a written examination, targeting candidates who would not have the facility of being supervised in a school environment. The objective of this paper was to test the candidates' ability to use their personal experiences of routine office activities acquired through observation or from doing the practical office tasks assigned to them as employees in order to solve office-related problems. This paper consisted of ten essay-type questions, based on a case study in an office environment. The paper tests the Application Profile only and is done in 1 1/2 hours.

Candidates' performance on this paper declined. The number of candidates achieving Grades I – III was 57.07 per cent compared with 66.23 per cent in 2005.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 02 - Essay

Section I comprised four compulsory questions, each worth 15 marks.

Question 1

In this question, part (a), candidates were required to identify two duties of both (i) a Clerk Typist and (ii) a Secretary in the Administrative Office. For the most part, candidates' responses were satisfactory while a few seemed unable to differentiate between the roles of the personnel identified. Filing and answering the telephone were two popular responses.

Part (b) tested knowledge of the functions of the office in a business organisation that support the production of goods and services. Some candidates related the response to the functions of the production department, rather than the functions of the office.

Part (c) tested candidates' ability to communicate information in writing and knowledge of centralisation of reprographic services within a company. To this end, candidates were asked to write a memorandum to the Office Administrator, providing justifications for or against the centralisation of reprographic services in the organisation.

Most candidates wrote a memorandum with the requisite presentation and information, but fell short by repeating the same rationale. Some candidates wrote a letter instead of a memorandum. Critical requirements such as date of the document, subject line, name and designation of the recipient and the sender were sometimes incomplete. Candidates continue to make the same and similar mistakes each year. Candidates' responses were generally satisfactory.

Question 2

This question tested candidates' understanding of:

- (i) Reference sources - trade journals
- (ii) The means of communication
- (iii) Time in the 24-hour clock

It was a compulsory question and was attempted by the majority of the candidates.

Part (a) of the question required candidates to list three types of information which can be found in trade journals. This posed great difficulty to the candidates. In most cases this section was not attempted and if attempted, the candidates who gave responses did so based on their general knowledge, but in most cases those responses were inadequate.

Part (b) of the question was well done and candidates were able to score full marks.

However, part (c) (i) posed great difficulty. Some candidates demonstrated weaknesses in changing the 12-hour clock to the 24-hour clock. This is an area of the syllabus that continues to pose a challenge to candidates. Candidates were unable to perform creditably on section (c) (ii) and (c) (iii). The candidates generally did not complete the column headed *Implications for contacting staff*, or gave a solution for contacting staff. The possible implications were:

- (i) Office closed – 4 hours
- (ii) Office not opened as yet – 1 hr and 30 minutes to opening time.
- (iii) Office closed – 40 minutes

Question 3

This was another compulsory question that was attempted by most candidates. It tested candidates' understanding of:

- (a)
 - (i) Information that an immigration officer can obtain from a passport
 - (ii) Documents that are required when applying for a visa to enter the United States of America
 - (iii) Services provided by travel agencies
- (b) Actions that should be taken in each of the following situations:
 - (i) A customer would like to gain access to his wife's personal chequing account
 - (ii) Your supervisor has asked you to inform a new employee about ways to safeguard confidential information
 - (iii) You have observed your co-worker leaking customer information to the media

Most candidates responded satisfactorily to parts (a) (i) and (ii) of the question. However, in part (a) (ii), some candidates gave responses such as "passport" and "birth certificate" although the passport would have served the purpose of certifying the bearer. Part (a) (iii) tested candidates' knowledge of two services provided by travel agencies. Some candidates were not able to differentiate between services provided and services facilitated by the travel agency. For example, some candidates gave "hotel accommodation" as a service provided by travel agencies. Still, others misinterpreted this part of the question by giving airline services rather than travel services.

Some candidates experienced difficulty in doing part (b) (i) of this question as they assumed that fraudulent behaviour was involved. However, many responses were carefully crafted which reflected higher level thinking skills. The second scenario also posed some difficulty for some candidates who either responded by repeating the question or stating that it was not their responsibility to safeguard confidential information. Generally, they acknowledged that they were to inform the new employee of safeguarding confidential information, but failed to detail the procedure for doing so. In the third situation, most candidates attempted this section satisfactorily, but some candidates indicated that rather than allowing their supervisor to deal with the situation, they would take matters into their own hands by either firing, calling the police or “knocking them off”.

Question 4

Question 4 was also compulsory. It tested candidates’ understanding of:

- (a) the use of a diary. (Receptionist)
- (b)
 - (i) The importance of the alphabetical filing system
 - (ii) Use of geographical filing
 - (iii) Use of numerical filing

Part (a) filing in an alphabetical system was a popular section and the responses of candidates indicated that they found the question interesting. Most candidates were able to obtain some mark for this section, by listing *for appointments, making notes*.

Part (c) of the question appeared to pose the most challenge to candidates, as the responses were superficial or not attempted.

Most candidates were able to obtain 4 of the 8 marks awarded for the section. Responses were satisfactory.

Question 5

Although an optional question, the number of responses marked were 6500 making it the most popular option. This question tested candidates’ understanding of the benefits of legislation related to workers’ welfare, as well as the factors that contribute to employee turnover in an organisation. Candidates were also tested on their understanding of the preparation of the petty cash book.

Part (a) (i) of the question was done satisfactorily. The weaker candidates did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the benefits that can be derived by the employer for issuing protective clothing and gear to the employees.

Part (a) (ii) was also done satisfactorily. The weaker candidates tended to give the answer to (a) (i) here.

Part (a) (iii) was well done. The weaker candidates did not demonstrate a clear understanding of the term “turn-over”.

Part (b) was the most popular part of the question. Here candidates were required to record five items in the most appropriate analysis columns on the form provided.

The majority of candidates were able to post 4 of the 6 items correctly, using the appropriate date and details. They were able to compute the grand total and also totals for the individual analysis columns correctly.

The weaker candidates demonstrated problems in balancing and restoring the imprest as required. They were unable to match the correct details for the balance carried down and brought down and the imprest. The balance brought down and the imprest in most cases were not shown on the correct side of the petty cash (left hand side).

Overall, the majority of candidates were awarded marks in the range 6 - 11.

Question 6

This question was also quite popular. It was designed to test the candidates' understanding of:

- (a) The ways in which the particular equipment (computer) can be used to increase the efficiency of the sales department.
- (b) The similarity and differences between debit and credit cards.
- (c) The advantages and disadvantages of answering machines which are programmed to operate without manual assistance.

This question was attempted by more than 4 000 candidates.

For part (c) most candidates were able to state three ways in which the computer can be used in the sales department, though the structure of the responses needed improvement. Candidates were however, able to demonstrate that they had adequate knowledge of the functions of the computer and were thus able to obtain at least 1 of the 3 marks awarded.

The concepts of debit and credit cards need to be emphasised as they are popular methods of transacting in the exchange of goods and services. Whereas most candidates were aware that they referred to payments, the responses ranged from the functions of debit notes and credit notes, to sales on credit, and making deposits as credits, and withdrawals as debits. Responses included reference to the physical material of which the cards were made. Marks obtained for this section were poor.

Many candidates who opted for this question were able to answer part (c) quite well. The majority was able to list five advantages of using the answering machine. Most found 3 correct disadvantages; others were able to list at least one disadvantage. However, most looked at the disadvantages as being linked to the employee and not the organisation. Candidates were able to score quite well in this section of the question. The mark awarded for grammar and spelling eluded most candidates.

Question 7

This was another optional question, though not popular among candidates. The question was designed to test candidates' understanding of:

- (a) The meanings of the terms "Free on Board", "Ex Works" and "Cost, Insurance and Freight" as used in trading documents.
- (b) Drafting a Press Release, to attract the attention of potential buyers based on a given situation.

The majority of candidates had difficulty explaining in part (a) what was meant by the trading terms. Many related the terms to the workers in the company. For example, *ex works* was *an employee who no longer worked with the organisation*. The paucity of the responses were reflected in the marks which though ranging between 0 - 6, were clustered at 0 - 3. It appeared that there was some understanding of what the terms meant, but there was an inability to be explicit.

Part (b) required candidates to write a press release from information given to them in the stimulus material. The presentation from the majority of candidates showed that they did not know the format of how a press release should be written. However, because they were able to interpret the information, they were able to obtain some marks.

Question 8

This question required candidates to (a) list three tasks which a clerk in the factory office would be expected to perform in the preparation of a shift roster for the staff; (b) identify three benefits of the interaction between the sales office and the dispatch and transport office and (c) use the information from a planning master to complete a cost card provided.

This question was a very popular option and many candidates attempted it. Most candidates did fairly well and the scores ranged between 8 - 11.

Most candidates were able to complete the form accurately but the weaker candidates were unable to compute the costs accurately and were unsure of the costs to include in the total cost. Parts (a) and (b) were for the most part very poorly done. Many candidates did not attempt these sections. Many of those who answered these sections gave incorrect responses. Some candidates listed three functions of a clerk in the factory office for part (a) and functions of the dispatch and transport office for part (b).

Candidates need more practice in answering questions which require more than recall. They need to apply their knowledge to situations. Using case studies in the classroom can assist students in developing analytical skills.

Recommendation to Teachers

1. Team teaching can be encouraged so that the Accounts teacher and Office Administration teacher can work more closely together in finding the right approach to use, to present concepts.
2. Candidates need more practice in the preparation of the petty cash form. Emphasis should be placed on the correct steps to take when balancing.
3. Resource persons can be brought in to speak to students on the legislation related to workers' welfare. Emphasis must be placed on the benefits that can be derived by both the employer and the employee in the workplace.
4. More practice exercises and simulations, to reinforce teaching points.
5. The integrated approach to teaching should be employed in teaching various aspects of the syllabus.
6. Refrain from one-word responses.
7. Invite resource persons to address students.
8. Familiarise students with the taxonomy as outlined in the syllabus.
9. Assessment – self, peer, and teacher should be done to reinforce acceptable standards.

PAPER 03 - School-Based Assessment (SBA)

The School-Based Assessment for the Office Administration Examination of 2005 - 2006 applied a new approach in the conduct of the school-based assignment. The strategy is designed to enable candidates to acquire and enhance critical skills by working on projects that they consider more worthwhile and within their capability, but which are part of the learning activities outlined in the Modules of the syllabus. Candidates, with the guidance and approval of the teacher, were allowed to select their own topics derived from objectives in the syllabus. Among those submitted were.

1. Transformation from a Manual to an Electronic Filing System
2. Principles of Records Management
3. Equipment used in Records Management
4. The Role of the Human Resource Department as a Competent Source in an Organisation
5. Investigating the Daily Operations of the Purchasing Department of a Bank
6. An Investigation into the Recruitment of Workers in the Human Resource Department of the National Commercial Bank
7. An Investigation into the Marketing Methods of the Sales Department of Courts Ltd. With Regard to Marketing and Publicizing of their Products and Services

The more popular headings generated by candidates were as follows:

- Transformation from a Manual to an Electronic Filing System
- Equipment used in Records Management
- Emerging Office Careers and Applicable Attitudes
- Role of the Office in an Information-Driven Society
- Centralization versus Decentralization of Office Activities, and
- Principles of Records Management.

The least popular topic selected was “Preserving and Retaining Records and Associated Legal Stipulations”.

The type of study conducted by candidates was mainly field-based research and incorporated mainly features of the qualitative design. A few candidates did research which could be classified as library-based research.

The Caribbean Examinations Council provided a detailed Mark Scheme, which outlined the tasks, criteria and marks for each section. The total score for the research project was 50 and contributed to 25% of the final marks. Marks were awarded only to the **Application** Profile.

For the most part, the level of research conducted was satisfactory. Candidates scored marks ranging from a low of 10 to the maximum of 47. Those candidates who scored low marks were mainly those who did not comply with the requirements of the new Office Administration syllabus, using instead the Office Procedures guidelines for completing the SBA project. Where candidates were familiar with the new Mark Scheme and where they heeded the step-by-step suggestions of their teachers, they demonstrated an acceptable level of research skills, coupled with neatly presented folders that were almost error-free, with appropriate graphics and creative in their designs. An attempt was made to stick to the 1 000 - 1 200 word limit. Teachers are reminded to use the Mark Scheme provided by CXC. It should be attached to EACH candidate’s project as it facilitates the moderation process, besides indicating how the marks are allocated to the tasks. On no occasion should fractional marks (1/4 or 1/2) be awarded.

Some candidates demonstrated weakness in presenting the three kinds of information sources, i.e. for persons list, publications lists and internet sites lists. A sample is outlined below:

LIST OF INFORMATION SOURCES:

1. For persons list:

Date	Place interviewed	Job title
May 01, 2006	Canewood, TVU	Chief Executive Officer
May 02, 2006	St. Bess High School	Administrative Assistant

2. Publications list: (one author)

Ellis, A. K. (2005). *Research on educational innovations* (4th ed.). New York: Eye On Education, Inc.

(2 or more authors)

Harry, F., Forde, G., Tucker, C. (2004). *Writing letters*. San Fernando: MacPhee Publishers Limited.

Scholoss, P. J., Smith, M. A., & Scholoss, C. N. (2001). *Instructional methods for secondary students with learning and behaviour problems*. Needham Heights, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

3. Internet sites list:

Duffrin, E. (1996, Sept.). *Direct instruction making waves*. Retrieved May 5, 2006, from <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org.arch/09-96/096main.htm>.

Careful attention must be paid to the wording of titles for the research project, the aims/objectives and the methodology employed. Candidates should ensure that the methodology includes a description of the sample, instruments and rationale. At least one of the business forms used should be properly completed and inserted in the Appendix section. The entire project should be error-free, that means, all effort should be made to proofread for spelling, grammar, punctuation and presentation/formatting errors.

The Table of Contents were in some instances incomplete, as some candidates failed to indicate the page number as well as to number the pages of the project to match the way it is specified in the Table of Contents. In numbering the Table of Contents, for example, if “Regulations and Policies” occupies two pages, it should **not** be written 10 - 11, but only to indicate the page on which it starts, followed by whatever page numbering for subsequent content.

The instruments used for collecting information, such as the questionnaire, should include some instructions to the respondents with regard to what they are required to do. Anonymity and confidentiality should be maintained throughout the process. Too often, only the name of the data collecting instrument and the questions are presented.

Recommendation to Teachers

It is important for schools and territories to share best practices through workshops, seminars and exhibitions as well as to utilise a variety of resource texts, and make good use of electronic and other means to ensure that a high standard of work is maintained at the secondary level.

PAPER 03/2 - Alternative to the School-Based Assessment

Question 1

This question required that candidates list three traits an employer should possess that would demonstrate a positive relationship with his employees. It was worth 3 marks. Most candidates responded satisfactorily, giving at least two correct traits, while others did not demonstrate an understanding of the term. Some candidates, on the other hand, misinterpreted “traits” for “skills” and therefore scored minimal marks.

Question 2

For this question, candidates were asked to list two ways in which a “positive” culture is demonstrated in the workplace among employees. It was worth 2 marks. Most candidates gave appropriate responses such as “supportive of each other” or “team effort” and so were able to score satisfactorily. Unfamiliarity with the jargon of the subject appeared to be a shortcoming.

Question 3

Candidates were asked to state four ergonomic changes that the employer in the case cited, could have made in the workplace to enhance it. It was worth 4 marks. Many candidates misinterpreted “ergonomic changes” and gave responses relating to “change” in general, for example, “change in work conditions”. Factors like lighting, ventilation, colour schemes and design of furniture to meet the needs of its users would have comprised more appropriate responses in this instance, but few candidates were able to zero in on the specific requirements.

Question 4

Candidates were required to state three reasons for employees’ loyalty being necessary, particularly among the staff in the Sales and Marketing Department. It was worth 3 marks. Responses like, “employees are responsible for selling and advertising the company’s goods and services, thus securing continuous employment for workers”, as well as, “to improve the firm’s image”, were given by many candidates. Some candidates, however, were challenged in articulating appropriate responses specifically relating to the staff in the Sales and Marketing Department and making linkages of relationships that would be fostered with external customers and their impact. Poor grammar and spelling sometimes made it difficult to determine what the candidate actually wanted to describe.

Question 5

For this question, candidates were required to list four pieces of modern technology that are used by an employee in the sales department on a daily basis. It was worth 4 marks. Most candidates were able to give satisfactory responses such as computers, photocopiers, fax machines and printers, thus displaying their familiarity with the concept of modern technology. A few candidates listed items such as paper clips in their responses.

Question 6

Candidates were required to list three skills and three attributes that are necessary in conducting a needs analysis for employees in the human resource department. It was worth 6 marks. Some candidates had difficulty in differentiating between factors that could be described as “skills” and “attributes”. Many candidates, on the other hand, gave specific, appropriate examples relating to the case study.

Question 7

This question asked candidates to formulate questions for a needs analysis. It was hoped that a similar technique as utilised in the school-based assessment data-gathering component, would be employed in structuring questions for the needs analysis. Whereas most candidates did write questions, most of them had no link to the objective.

Question 8

This question required candidates to prepare a notice to all staff to inform them of a workshop on “change” with instruction as to the venue, time, guest speaker, duration and all other pertinent information. It was worth 6 marks. Most candidates scored well on this question, demonstrating that they had clear knowledge and understanding of the essential competencies.

Question 9

Candidates were required to write a letter. This area continues to be one that necessitates development, as the letter, in whatever medium, remains an essential business tool. Though candidates were given all the necessary information to formulate the letter, there were significant shortcomings in presentation and technique.

Question 10

Part (a) asked candidates to identify skills acquired as a clerk, that would be utilised in a new position at a higher level. Candidates’ responses indicated that they were unable to make the connection.

Part (b) presented candidates with the challenge of having a clerk in the human resource department assist the manager who would be conducting a workshop. This question asked that candidates distinguish the role of the clerk in the HR office from the role of the manager and how the clerk could support the functions of the manager. Some candidates responded as the clerk actually conducting the seminar.

Recommendation to Teachers

1. Students should be given adequate practice in answering questions from case studies.
2. Past papers are a good source of practice.
3. Students should be encouraged to use the jargon of the subject. They must be made aware of the modern terminologies being used for various areas of activities applicable to office administration.