

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 2008**

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION

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OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION
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GENERAL COMMENTS

There were some encouraging responses to questions in all three papers of the General Proficiency Examination.

The performance in questions testing the compulsory units of the syllabus improved over that of past years. While there were encouraging responses to the compulsory units as well as some of the optional units some candidates continue to produce unsatisfactory work. These areas are addressed in the detailed comments on individual questions.

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

The two profiles used in the assessment of Office Administration are Knowledge and Application. These two profiles are tested in the Paper 01 examination. Candidates' performance in this paper declined. The mean performance in 2008 is 31.75 compared with 35.54 in 2007.

Paper 02 – Essay

Paper 02 also assesses Knowledge and Application of procedures associated with specialized office activities and office routines. The paper consists of two sections. The paper contributes 90 marks to the entire examination. There are four compulsory questions in Section I based on Units I, II, III, IV, V, and XII.

Section II consisted of four optional questions taken from Units VII, VIII, IX, X and XI. While candidates' performance in the Paper 01 declined performance in Paper 02 improved. The mean of Paper 02 in 2008 was 45.61 compared with 40.56 in 2007.

Paper 03/2 – Alternative to the School-Based Assessment (SBA)

This paper took the form of a written examination that targeted candidates who would have difficulty completing SBA projects as school candidates. The paper was designed to test the candidates' ability to use their personal experiences on routine office activities acquired through observation or from doing the actual office tasks as a real employee to solve office related problems. The paper consisted of ten short essay-type questions based on an office case. For this examination the case focused on Units II, VII and XII of the syllabus. Candidates' performance in this paper declined compared with 2007. In 2008 the mean score was 20.68 compared with 28.59 in 2007.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 02 - Essay

Section I – Compulsory Questions

Question 1

This question tested Module I, Objective 1 and Module II, Objective 10.

In Part (a), candidates were asked to state two other ways apart from through e-mail, that information is distributed (i) within an organization, and (ii) to customers. This was worth 2 marks each.

For Part (b), candidates were required to list three basic skills that are required of a general office clerk in a modern office. It was worth 3 marks.

For Part (c), candidates were provided with a scenario for which they were to compose an e-mail message. This was worth 8 marks. In some instances many candidates did not use the information provided in the stimulus in the e-mail messages. In other instances, some candidates wrote letters or neglected to use the assumed name.

Marks ranged from 0 – 15, and the mean was 9.19.

Question 2

This question tested Module II, Objective 6 and Module XII, Objective 3.

For Part (a) (i), candidates were required to give the meaning of the terms (i) telephone etiquette and (ii) 'smile with your voice'. This was worth 4 marks.

For Part (b), candidates were asked to list three categories of information contained in a telephone directory. This was worth 3 marks. Many candidates overlooked the word "categories" and resorted to listing any three items of information such as telephone numbers, addresses and names of subscribers.

For Part (c), candidates were required to use an assumed name to write a letter of application in response to an advertisement. This was worth 8 marks. In many instances the body of the letter was well done; however, some candidates were unable to provide appropriate letter format which included the date, an appropriate salutation and complimentary close in addressing the human resource manager. Some even wrote memos.

The overall performance in this question was satisfactory. The mean for this question was 8.80

Question 3

This question tested Module V, Objectives 1 and 2 and Module IV, Objective 2.

In Part (a), candidates were asked to define the terms 'adjourn' and 'motion' as they relate to meetings. This was worth 2 marks each. Candidates' responses indicate that they had very little knowledge of these terms that are associated with meetings.

For Part (b), candidates were required to identify three reasons why departmental meetings are important to staff. It was worth 3 marks. This part of the question was well done.

For Part (c), (i), candidates were provided with a checklist format that they were to copy into their answer booklet. A scenario indicated that a Procedures Manual was being developed to train new employees in customer relations. Candidates were to indicate six steps to be followed when screening and receiving visitors. In many instances candidates misinterpreted the question and did not provide the requirements for screening and receiving visitors. In other instances where steps were provided they were not listed in the proper order. This was worth 6 marks.

For Part (c), (ii), candidates were to write brief instructions for using the checklist. Most candidates obtained full marks for this section of the question. This was worth 2 marks.

Marks ranged from 1 – 15, and the mean was 6.43.

Question 4

This question tested Module III, Objectives 1, 2 and 5.

In Part (a), candidates were asked to identify three stages in the information cycle of a records management system. This was worth 3 marks.

For Part (b), candidates were required to list four types of supplies used in the storage of records. It was worth 4 marks.

For Part (c), candidates were asked to arrange a list of potential providers in (i) indexing order and (ii) in filing order. This was worth 4 marks each. Many candidates were unable to arrange information in the indexing order. Instances that posed a challenge were the placement of 'The', 'St', and '&'. Attempts to place the list in filing order was equally challenging to some candidates. It is evident that more practice is required in these activities in spite of the fact that this type of question has been repeated over the years.

Marks ranged from 0 – 15, and the mean was 7.43.

Question 5

This question which was the most popular of the optional section, tested Module VII, Objectives 1 and 4 and Module VIII, Objective 5.

In Part (a), candidates were asked to state three situations in the workplace that may result in the need for disciplinary action by the human resource department. The majority of candidates provided appropriate responses. This was worth 3 marks.

For Part (b), candidates were required to list three pieces of information that are included in a Contract of Employment. This segment of the question was well done. It was worth 3 marks.

For Part (c), candidates were provided with information on a payroll. They were to use the form provided to complete in (i) the wage cash analysis sheet. They were advised to use the highest denomination in each case. Some candidates did not adhere to this requirement and were not awarded marks in this instance. This was worth 6 marks.

In (ii) candidates were to complete the withdrawal slip for the total sum of money to be withdrawn. This was worth 3 marks.

Marks ranged from 0 – 15, and the mean was 9.12.

Question 6

This question tested Module X, Objectives 1, 2 and 3, and Module IX, Objective 6 (c).

For Part (a), candidates were required to state three functions of the sales clerk in engaging in customer follow-up. It was worth 3 marks.

In Part (b), candidates were asked to state three ways in which the facsimile, answering machine or risograph contribute to efficiency in the sales and marketing office. This was worth 3 marks.

For Part (c), candidates were provided with a stock record card. They were asked to calculate the value of closing stock using the LIFO method of stock valuation. This was worth 9 marks. Candidates were reminded to show workings in the answer booklet however, many continue to be challenged by this type of question and do not provide workings.

Marks ranged from 0 – 15, and the mean was 5.78.

Question 7

This question tested Module IX, Objectives 3 and 6, and Module X, Objectives 1 and 2.

For Part (a) (i), candidates were required to name the bar code symbol that was provided. It was worth 1 mark.

In Part (a), (ii), candidates were to state two ways in which the bar code symbol is used in stock control. This was worth 2 marks.

In Part (b), candidates were asked to identify three documents that are used in the purchasing procedure. This was worth 3 marks.

For Part (c), candidates were provided with a scenario where they were asked to develop a new portfolio of promotional strategies for the latest cellular telephone. In (i) they were to state four promotional activities that may be organized for the launch of the cellular telephone. This was worth 4 marks.

In (ii), candidates were to prepare an advertisement on any media to inform buyers about the cellular telephone's latest technology, size, appearance, availability and price. This was worth 5 marks.

Question 7 was not well done. Teachers should expose students to actual copies of these documents so they become familiar with them.

Marks ranged from 0 – 15, and the mean was 6.48.

Question 8

This question which was the least popular of those selected. It tested Module X, Objective 1 and Module XI, Objectives 1, 2 and 3.

For Part (a), candidates were required to identify three functions of the factory office. It was worth 3 marks. This was well done. Many candidates scored full marks.

In Part (b), candidates were asked to list three documents used when sending air freight to another country. This was worth 3 marks. This part of the question was also well done.

For Part (c), candidates were provided with a job cost card. In (i) they were asked to show the procedure used to calculate the total costs, factory overheads, total costs of job and cost per unit. This was worth 5 marks. This part of the question proved to be difficult for the candidates. Some candidates explained the steps instead of calculating the total cost of the job. Candidates generally do not do well on the questions requiring simple calculations. Teachers are encouraged to provide ample opportunities in the classroom for students to work with numbers.

In (ii), candidates were to calculate whether there will be a profit or loss at the price of \$10.00 that he plans to sell the t-shirts, and if so, how much. This was worth 2 marks.

In (iii), candidates were asked to state two reasons for the production manager's liaising with the accounts department on this job.

Marks ranged from 0 – 15, and the mean was 5.42.

Paper 03/2 General Proficiency

The Alternative to the School-Based Assessment

Question 1

This question required to candidates list three (3) functions that are usually performed in schools' administrative processes:

Record Keeping
Word Processing
Updating Accounts

This question was worth 6 marks.

Many candidates did not approach the focus on the functions usually involved in the processes listed. They often defined the terms used and stated their advantages; therefore, they scored the minimum marks.

Question 2

Most candidates answered this question in a general sense not relating it to job entry-level positions. They knew that from the Business Studies Programme in school, some of the activities that took place in the world of work, and to some extent, information obtained in the case study. Some candidates were able to score the full 3 marks allotted to this question.

Question 3

Many candidates misinterpreted this question which required that they state the contributions that can be made by certain job positions, in achieving the organization's goals. The responses were mainly based on what new positions they could achieve, and not on the duties the individuals had to perform to contribute to the achievement of the organization's goals. They knew the attitudes, attributes and skills required but could not say in any intelligible manner, how these would advance the position of the organization. They mentioned that the clerical assistant could become a manager and the bank teller a financial analyst, but not how the entry level position helped the business, immediately. Out of a possible 8 marks, most candidates scored 4.

Question 4

This question required candidates to chart data given. Some drew a line graph or histogram, on the graph paper provided. Generally the graphs were not labelled for the most part, and if they were, they were done only on one axis. The intervals were inconsistent, and some candidates merely used the data given to them and failed to put any intervals in between. Many candidates failed to insert the title for the graph, label the axes, use appropriate intervals or plot the data properly. Few candidates were able to score the 5 marks allotted to this question. Most were able to score 2 – 4 marks.

Question 5

This question called for candidates to state the activities a person should engage in, to remain competitive in the job market, but they seemed to place emphasis on a company's attempts to remain competitive in the marketplace. This resulted in candidates failing to score or at most getting 0 – 2 marks for the question. A few candidates, however, managed to obtain 3 marks.

Question 6

Candidates were required to consider the focus of guidance counseling but they examined instead the considerations in seeking employment.

Question 7

Candidates were required to write a letter. The scores for this question ranged from 3 – 7. Few candidates scored the full 7 marks allotted. They were not clear on the proper complimentary closing to use with a specific salutation. They often left out the return address, or the date and the inside address. Many candidates were able to zero in on what the question asked and to compose a letter, albeit with poor grammar and punctuation.

Question 8

This question gave candidates the opportunity to be creative and to structure questions that may be addressed in a training programme to meet the needs of the organization. Some candidates focused on the type of question that elicited the needs of the organization and the needs of the workers. Many of them failed to determine what the criteria would be.

Question 9

The responses to this question were satisfactory. They had the general idea of the response by stating that through customer relations and employee satisfaction, a company can be profitable. Some of the responses were poorly expressed.

Question 10

This section seemed widely known and allowed candidates to express themselves. They stated that through work experience, there should be attitude change, but this point was expressed in a variety of ways, yielding in the end, only one answer. Many failed to differentiate between employee and employer benefits.

School-Based Assessment

The School-Based Assessment component of the Office Administration Syllabus is designed to give candidates an opportunity to apply skills, knowledge and attributes and attitudes acquired in Office Administration classes, during the secondary school experience, in a practical manner. This is demonstrated by the compilation of a project which synthesizes skills in letter writing, structuring a questionnaire, developing a work plan, observing equipment employed in business, gathering information by means of reading, via the internet, through interviews and analyzing data obtained noting the strengths, weaknesses and limitations. This is then compiled in a report complete with title page, table of contents and bibliography.

In general, candidates were able to present the **Title Page** with the required information such as names of: the teacher, school, candidate, examination body and the subject under examination.

Table of Contents: Most candidates displayed sections as per the marking scheme in left-hand column, with page numbers aligned in the right-hand column. Very few candidates used leader dots to align the Content with the Page Numbers.

Stated the title of the project: Some of the topics selected were often not carefully structured. They were too broad and in some cases outside the scope of the syllabus. This topic must be related to objectives in the syllabus and framed in a manner to indicate that the candidate is examining or researching some specific area which has some educational or social value from which (s)he will learn. They should not be too broadly stated, thus creating an overwhelming workload for the candidate.

Aims: The aims must be stated clearly. It must state precisely what the candidate is setting out to do. Many candidates failed to state these in a manner which tied them in to the title of the project.

Functions: This should be the function of the department under observation as relates to the title of the project. Many candidates did not gain full marks in this area.

Correspondence: Many candidates failed to follow the general principle in letter writing. This should be a letter composed by the candidates seeking permission to carry out the research. In instances where the letter is written as a form letter by the school, candidates are required to write their own letter stating the objective to be achieved by the individual researcher. Attention must be paid to the format of the letter: return address, date, addressee, salutation and complimentary close, paragraphing, grammar, enclosure. The letter should be signed by the writer.

Methodology: Apart from the specimen, the candidates are required to submit particulars of why that particular instrument was chosen instead of some other method of gathering information for the project. They are also required to explain how they used the instrument. This section was poorly done by most candidates as they failed to justify use of the instrument.

Questions: This was done satisfactorily by most candidates. Few failed to submit relevant questions. The questions were often taken off the Questionnaire.

Schedule of Activities: Most candidates submitted a schedule of activities. Most candidates listed the sequence as they progressed through the research, and made appropriate comments. In some cases, it was evident that candidates were unsure of what was required of them, and listed less than the minimum required activities, and excluded the comments column.

Regulations/Policies: Evidence of a piece of legislation is designed to sensitize candidates to an awareness of the laws governing the workplace. It would be useful therefore if they would obtain a copy of the relevant legislation or make reference to the specific regulation and what it is intended to do. The same would apply to the policies of the organization and rule relating to employees and which the candidate was subject to.

Candidates should know how to differentiate the following:

Legislation (or statutory law) is law which has been enacted by the governing body and actively regulates the operation of the business. Examples are the Company Act, Shop and Factory Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act.

Policies on the other hand, are a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve goals. Policy may also refer to the important organizational decisions, such as spending priorities, and choosing among them on the basis of the impact they will have. There may be management, financial, and administrative policies, designed to reach explicit goals. For example, an organization may accept a legal and moral obligation to ensure that staff are not subjected to Sex Discrimination, through harassment, bullying or workplace violence by ensuring that in the event of alleged discrimination, harassment, bullying or workplace violence, a staff member, or their representative, may refer the matter to the human resource manager or notify a shop steward¹.

Many large companies have policies that all purchases above a certain value must be performed through a purchasing process. By requiring this standard purchasing process through policy, the organization can limit waste and standardize the way purchasing is done.

Staff Rule: These rules are generally established by management and apply to all staff or categories of staff, except where specifically provided and may include the candidate who is doing the research. An example with regards to Court Employees: Court employees shall not solicit, accept or agree to accept any gifts or gratuities from attorneys or other persons having or likely to have any official transaction with the court system².

¹ <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary>

² <http://www.nycourts.gov/courtinterpreter>

Presentation: While some candidates presented a well written report, many wrote brief notes on the findings. This should be well written, synthesizing the entire project. Many candidates were not able to state what they had accomplished by doing the research. They seemed able to express the challenges they encountered, but were unable to do the same with the problem-solving strategy to overcome the challenges.

Business forms: The business form used in the project must be related to the business under consideration. Some candidates simply included forms that had no relevance to what they set out to do. The forms and the title must be related.

Bibliography: Most candidates failed in getting the maximum marks allotted for this section as they incompletely listed either the literature or the books read.

(With 3 writers)

Below is an example of the correct format for the bibliographic entries.

Finisterre, S., Payne, L & Reid, J. (2004) Longman Office Administration for CXC. Pearson Education Limited, England.

Hewitt, Les, Andrew Hewitt, and Luc d'Abadie. The Power of Focus for College Students. Deerfield Beach, FL: Health Communications, 2005.

(With 1 writer)

MLA Handbook for writers of research papers, theses, and dissertations , (New York: MLA, 1977)
Gen. Ref. Z 253

Rowling, J. K. Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets. New York: Scholastic, 1999

(Person interviewed or resource person)

Ms. Johenn Almanzar
Purchasing Manager
School Supplies Incorporated
Nukes, Lethem, Guyana

Website visited: <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/policylibrary>
 <http://www.nycourts.gov/courtinterpreter>
 <http://www.caricom.org>

Whereas some candidates may not have access to each media, the medium used should be stated correctly.

Office Equipment: As required by the mark scheme on-line and in the syllabus, the equipment stated in the SBA, must be equipment observed or used in the business studied. Candidates are required to list the equipment, state its use, and its suitability for the specific function, in the business under consideration, be it an office or a factory. Most candidates referred to the equipment employed by them in the preparation of the SBA.

The Caribbean Examinations Council provides a detailed Mark Scheme which was posted on their website in January 2008, outlining the tasks, criteria and marks for each section. The total score for the research project is 50 marks and accounts for 25% of the final mark in the Office Administration examination.

It is evident that there are some teachers who are not familiar with the revised mark scheme as the projects were not in compliance with the current requirements.

Marks for the SBA this year ranged from 13 – 50. Those who scored high exhibited extensive research skills on the topic they had selected, whereas those who obtained low marks, generally did not comply with the requirements of the syllabus.

The weaknesses identified included:

- Failure to attach to the project, the mark scheme showing how the candidate was marked
- As it related to the major accomplishments/findings, candidates failed to make the connection with the aims identified
- Some schools submitted SBAs that were based on the 2004 syllabus and mark scheme.
- With regards to methodology, there is no clear definition about how candidates gathered the data. For example how long it took to administer and collect data, how many persons were in the sample, why they were selected and how a particular instrument was used, instead of another
- Stating how candidates became aware of the legislation regulating the workplace.
- Incorrect listing of sources
- Sources of information must include:
 - For persons interviewed: Date, Place and Job Title
 - Publications: Use APA style or MPA or other approved style
 - Internet sites: address of the website, name of authors and organizations
- Students are to be monitored throughout the project to ensure the SBA is done correctly and that the stipulated guidelines in the current syllabus are being followed
- Not stating the department of the organization under study.
- The department under examination in the business should be identified in the title of the project.

Recommendations to Teachers

- Create a glossary of commonly used terms
- Give more exposure to Paper3/2 type question
- Education departments should plan workshops for private candidates
- Preparation of letters for various occasions
- Development of observation and research skills
- Encourage reading and practice of numerical computations.