

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
CARIBBEAN SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE® EXAMINATION**

MAY/JUNE 2012

**OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

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GENERAL COMMENTS

The General Proficiency Office Administration examination is offered in January and May/June each year. In June 2012, some 17 322 candidates sat the examination compared with the June 2011 sitting when 16 937 candidates wrote the examination. Approximately, 78 per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I–III compared with 88.70 per cent in 2011. There were some encouraging responses to questions on all three papers. However, there are some specific areas of weakness which need greater attention. These areas are outlined in the detailed comments on individual questions.

The objectives tested were chosen from all the modules. The papers offered were:

- Paper 01 – Multiple choice
- Paper 02 – Short answer
- Paper 031 – School-Based Assessment (SBA)
- Paper 032 – Alternative to School-Based Assessment (SBA)

Paper 01 covered the entire syllabus and was set to test Knowledge and Application/Profiles. Candidates' performance showed more or less similar achievement to that of 2011. The overall mean of the 2012 paper was 34.64 compared with 34.75 for June 2011. Marks ranged from 2 to 59 out of a maximum of 60.

Paper 02 also assessed Knowledge and Application of procedures and processes associated with specialized office activities and routines. This paper consisted of two sections. Section I comprised four compulsory questions covering Modules I–VI and Module XII. These questions were attempted by the majority of candidates.

Section II consisted of four optional questions taken from Modules VII–XI. Candidates were required to answer two questions from Section II, so, in total, candidates were required to answer six questions from Paper 02. The overall mean for this paper was 40.37 compared with 50.32 in 2011. Marks ranged from 0 to 83 out of a maximum of 90. There are some areas that continue to pose difficulty for candidates and this is reflected in their overall performance.

Paper 031 is a project for candidates in regular school settings, and is set and marked by the teacher, using guidelines and criteria provided in the syllabus. The overall mean for this paper was 32.89 compared with 34.29 in 2011. Marks ranged from 0 to 50 out of a maximum of 50.

Paper 032 took the form of a written examination that targeted private candidates who would not have had the opportunity to complete SBA projects as school candidates. The paper was designed to test candidates' ability to use their personal experiences on routine office activities acquired through observation or from doing actual office tasks as a real employee. The paper consisted of ten structured response-type questions, which were based on an office case. For this examination, the case focused on Module XII of the syllabus — Recruitment and Orientation.

Candidates' performance improved slightly on this paper, with a mean of 30.69 compared with 27.06 in 2011. Marks ranged from 2 to 46 out of 50.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 02 – Short Answer

Section I

Section I was compulsory and each question was worth 15 marks

Question 1

This question tested Module III, Objectives 1 and 2. It was designed to test candidates' knowledge and their ability to apply the knowledge related to the management of records. The mean for the question was 4.34.

For Part (a), candidates were required to state three characteristics of an efficient records management system. For the most part, candidates were able to identify at least one characteristic. In Part (b) (i), candidates were required to list two types of filing classifications. This segment of the question was fairly done.

Part (b) (ii) required candidates to identify one type of record that is filed using the classification stated in (b) (i). The Majority of candidates was able to identify one type of record for alphabetical filing classification.

Part (c) (i) required candidates to complete a table given to show the indexing order of each of the names given. Most candidates who attempted this section were unable to give the appropriate responses. Candidates demonstrated a lack of knowledge *indexing* and *indexing order*.

Part (c) (ii) required candidates to prepare a cross-reference sheet for a client with a hyphenated name. This section was unsatisfactorily done. Again, candidates demonstrated very limited knowledge of this aspect of the syllabus. Part (c) (iii) required candidates to arrange three names given in alphabetical order. Candidates were expected to use the *rules of filing* to guide them in providing the correct response. This section was fairly well done.

Question 2

This question tested Module IV, Objective 1 (b, e, h, j) and Objective 2 (d). Specifically, the question tested candidates' understanding of terms associated with meetings and the different types of meetings. The mean mark for the question was 6.75.

Part (a) required candidates to state the meaning of the following terms:

- (i) Ad hoc
- (ii) Ex officio
- (iii) Proxy
- (iv) Motion

This section posed some difficulty for candidates. It was evident that candidates were not familiar with the terms as most of them failed to state appropriate meanings of the terms.

Part (b) required candidates to use information from a given excerpt to prepare a notice of meeting to be sent out by the board. Candidates were also required to include two agenda items. This section was popular among candidates and most of them were able to score highly.

Part (c) required candidates to state three legal requirements for convening an annual general meeting. The word *legal* was misinterpreted and in most cases was disregarded by candidates.

Question 3

This question tested Module IV, Objective 2 (a–g) and Objective 3 (a–d). It was designed to test candidates' understanding of the duties and responsibilities of a receptionist. For the most part, candidates' responses were fairly well done. The mean mark was 9.96.

For Part (a) (i), candidates were to list three main duties of a receptionist. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this section and were able to give responses such as:

- Receiving visitors
- Operating the switchboard
- Handling appointments
- Keeping a register of callers/callers' log
- Introducing and directing visitors
- Maintaining the reception area

For Part (a) (ii), candidates were required to identify two attributes, other than a good temperament, that a receptionist should possess. This section was satisfactorily done as most candidates were able to list two attributes.

For Part (a) (iii), candidates were required to state two security measures that should be practised by the reception staff. This section was handled well by the candidates and a large number of them were able to score the marks allotted.

For Part (b), candidates were required to use the form provided to enter the information given. Candidates were also required to convert times to the 24-hour clock. This part of the question was satisfactorily done by most candidates. However, some candidates failed to write appropriately the correct times and some of them used both the 12- and 24-hour formats.

Question 4

This question tested Module I, Objectives 1 and 3 (a–b); Module II Objective 1 (written- b); Module II, Objective 6. This question was designed to have candidates examine the benefits and drawbacks of an open plan office and also to apply the rules governing the composition of a memorandum. The mean mark was 8.01.

For Part (a) (i), candidates were required to state two advantages of the open plan office. Candidates gave appropriate responses such as *cheaper to maintain, better communication* and *easier to supervise*. This part of the question was handled well by candidates with the majority of them gaining the maximum marks allotted.

For Part (a) (ii), candidates were asked to state two disadvantages of the cellular office. Candidates were familiar with this aspect of the syllabus and gave favourable responses such as *less supervision, more costly to build and maintain, communication is minimal* and *more space is required*.

For Part (c), candidates were required to write a memorandum to the junior clerk indicating four main rules she should follow when answering the company's telephone. Most candidates made a fair attempt at answering the question.

Section II

Candidates were required to attempt any two of four questions from this section.

Question 5

This question tested Module VIII, Objective 2 (a–g); Objective 4 (d, g) and Objective 8(a–b). It was designed to test candidates' understanding of the role of the clerk in the accounts department and their knowledge of the preparation of some documents usually handled by this clerk. The mean was 4.52 and the marks ranged from 0 to 15. This was the least popular question in Section II.

For Part (a) (i), candidates were required to state two duties of an accounts clerk. Some candidates presented appropriate responses to include: *preparing payroll, ledger postings and preparation of cheques*.

In Part a (ii), candidates were required to identify two tasks that the computer can help the accounts clerk to accomplish in the accounts office. The majority of candidates were able to identify satisfactorily tasks such as:

- Data entry
- Storage of information
- Preparing accounting documents (invoices)
- Updating records
- Detecting errors

For Part (b), candidates were required to state two purposes of the spreadsheet as a useful tool in the accounts office. Candidates demonstrated knowledge of the purposes of the spreadsheet as an accounting tool and the majority of those who attempted this question was able to score maximum marks.

Parts (c) (i) required candidates to prepare a bank reconciliation statement using the information given. This section of the question posed difficulty for many candidates. The majority of candidates who attempted this question was unable to write up the statement accurately.

Part (c) (ii) required candidates to state three reasons why the cash book and bank reconciliation statement may differ. This aspect was satisfactorily done and candidates were able to state reasons such as:

- Standing order agreements
- Credit transfers
- Bank charges
- Late lodgment

Question 6

This question tested Module IX, Objectives 2, 3 and 6. It was the most popular among the optional questions. It tested candidates' understanding of the roles and function of the clerk in the purchasing department and their ability to calculate stock balance using the FIFO method. The mean marks ranged from 0 to 15, and the mean was 5.91.

For Part (a), candidates were required to identify two duties of the purchasing and stock control clerk. While the majority of candidates were able to identify the duties of the clerk satisfactorily, they were unable to differentiate between duties carried out by management and those carried out by entry-level workers as required by the question.

In Part (b) (i), candidates were required to list two factors that the purchasing clerk must consider when ordering goods. Candidates performed satisfactorily in this section, giving responses such as:

- Cost
- Warranty /guarantee offered
- Urgency
- After sales service

For Part (b) (ii), candidates were required to outline the procedure that a department should follow when making an internal request for supplies that (a) are in stock, (b) are not in stock. In most instances, candidates were able to outline the procedure satisfactorily; however, some candidates did not pay keen attention to the term '*internal*' and so gave an inappropriate response.

In Part (c) (i); candidates were required to use the information in the table given to calculate the value of the stock using the FIFO method. The form was provided for candidates. This section posed a great deal of difficulty for candidates. Candidates failed to use the columns appropriately with many candidates reversing the entries in the *balances* and *values* columns.

For Part (c) (ii), candidates were required to use the information given to complete a stock control card. Candidates' performance on this question demonstrated very little knowledge of calculating *running balances*.

Question 7

This question tested Module X, Objectives 1, 2 and 4. It examined the role and function of a clerk in the marketing department. The marks ranged from 0 to 15, and the mean was 5.14.

For Part (a), candidates were asked to identify three functions of the marketing office. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this section. Weaker candidates repeated the same function expressed in different ways.

For Part (b), candidates were required to state three reasons why a clerk in the sales and marketing department should maintain a mailing list. This section posed some level of difficulty for candidates.

Some candidates related their responses to the mail room while other candidates related their responses to the accounts office.

Part (c) (i) required candidates to explain the difference between a *trade discount* and a *cash discount*. Candidates had a working knowledge of *trade discount* and were able to state explicitly the correct meaning, however, the majority of candidates who attempted this question was not able to state the distinguishing feature of a *cash discount*.

Part (c) (ii) required candidates to calculate the amount of money a customer would pay if he took advantage of all the discounts. The majority of candidates who attempted this question was able to calculate correctly the total price before any discounts and the trade discounts. More than 50 per cent of the candidates who attempted this part of the question was able to score the maximum mark.

Question 8

This question tested Module XI, Objectives 1 and 3. It was designed to test candidates' understanding of the roles and functions of the factory, despatch and transport office. This was the second most popular question and had the highest mean of 8.44 in this section. Marks ranged from 0 to 15.

For Part (a), candidates were to outline three functions of the factory, despatch and transport office. Candidates' performance in this section was only fair as many of them failed to attempt this section and those who did were only able in most cases to list one function.

Part (b) required candidates to identify three duties, other than routine office duties, of a clerk in the transport office. As in Part (a), some candidates did not respond to this section and others who attempted could only list one duty.

For Part (c) (i), candidates were required to use the form given to complete an advice note from given information. Over 80 per cent of the candidates who attempted this section scored maximum marks. Performance on this section was good.

In Part (c) (ii), candidates were required to suggest three items of information that should be included on the gate pass they were asked to assist in designing. Performance on this section was fair.

Paper 032 – Alternative to School-Based Assessment

A short case was provided and candidates were required to read and respond to ten structured questions. This paper was worth 50 marks.

The case was based on a large Caribbean-owned company that specialized in providing office products and technology services to its customers. The company prided itself on being globally competitive, innovative and customer-focused, and placed emphasis on employing a workforce that was not only competent at multi-tasking but also multi-skilled. Management believed that this strategy would lead to increased productivity and consequently started a recruitment drive to employ staff with wide-ranging skills that can adapt and perform a multiplicity of activities in their company.

Candidates had to respond to ten questions to include:

- writing an unsolicited letter of application
- drafting an email
- preparing an advertisement for the newspaper
- suggesting ways to prepare for an interview
- outlining factors to consider when accepting a new position
- listing tasks to be completed before leaving one's current job.

Candidates performed satisfactorily for the most part, except in areas like the unsolicited letter where they did not express interest in whether or not a vacancy exists, and using appropriate salutation and complimentary close in letters and emails. Candidates should pay attention to sentence structure, grammar and spelling. More specific comments follow.

Question 1

Candidates were required to outline three characteristics that the management of Hi Tech Limited would want its employees to display. This part was done satisfactorily and candidates gave correct responses such as, *skillful in communication, IT and other relevant areas; multi-skilled and cross trained; qualified/professional/team player* and *able to respond to global competition*. This question was worth three marks and the mean was 2.02.

Question 2

Candidates were asked to write a short paragraph to explain the reason for applying to Hi Tech Limited for employment, giving justification. This section posed a challenge to many candidates as they were able to state only two reasons correctly. This question was worth five marks and the mean was 2.91.

Question 3

This question required candidates to prepare a draft of an unsolicited letter of application for the position of administrative assistant at Hi Tech Limited. Performance on this section was unsatisfactory. This question was worth eight marks and the mean was 4.53.

Question 4

Candidates were required to draft a copy of the email that Kamla received at her email address, kramugh@mail.com. This was based on information given. The question was worth eight marks and the mean was 4.14.

Question 5

In this question, candidates were asked to use the information provided to prepare an advertisement to appear in the weekend newspapers. They performed fairly well on this section. This question was worth six marks and the mean was 5.32.

Question 6

Candidates were asked to state four ways in which Kamla can prepare for the interview. This question was worth four marks and the mean was 2.68.

Question 7

Candidates were asked to suggest three techniques/ways to remain calm during an interview when one starts to feel very nervous. This question was worth three marks and the mean was 1.43.

Question 8

Candidates were asked to develop one question for each of five factors (education, job security, opportunities for promotion, working hours, training) that individuals could ask during an interview. Candidates were required to use the specific format given. This question was worth five marks and the mean was 3.57.

Question 9

Candidates were required to suggest three factors to consider when deciding whether to accept a job position. This question was worth three marks and the mean was 2.22.

Question 10

This question required candidates to prepare a checklist of four tasks that should be completed before leaving one's current job. It was worth five marks and the mean was 2.44.

The overall performance on the paper was satisfactory. Marks ranged from 2 to 46. The mean was 30.69 compared with 27.06 in 2011.

Recommendations for Overall Improvement

Candidates should

- acquire a personal copy of the syllabus and incorporate it in their examination preparation process
- make optimal use of past papers and access the CXC website for comments presented in the subject report to assist in identifying their strengths and weaknesses
- seek assistance from experienced teachers in the school system, as well as from past successful scholars of Office Administration.

Paper 031 — School Based Assessment (SBA)

The SBA component of the Office Administration course is an integral part of students' assessment which is covered by the syllabus. It is designed to assist students with the acquisition of specific knowledge, skills, attributes, and attitudes during the secondary school experience, for application in a practical manner. This single guided research project is intended to develop in students the basic skills of research and should lead to a sense of accomplishment as they collect data in a scientific manner.

The information gathered through various methods such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, the internet, or by means of primary and secondary sources are compiled in a report, complete, inter alia, with title page, table of contents and bibliography. This paper is worth 50 marks.

Title Page

In general, students were able to present the title page with the required information. However, a few of them lost marks for omitting the project title, teacher's name, and name of the school.

Table of Contents

Most students were able to prepare suitable table of contents (TOC) as detailed on the mark scheme. However, some TOCs were without page numbers while in others the page numbers did not correspond at all. In some instances, students used ranges to complete the TOC, for example, Report..... 9–12. This should not be encouraged. The report which starts, for example, on page 9 is good enough. Subsequent headings would indicate on which page each starts. Students, however, should ensure that the table of contents is complete and should cover the entire body of the project.

Project Title

The title should be linked to the objectives or specific department/business being studied in the syllabus. The title should be carefully structured, as in some instances some were too broad, and in a few cases, outside the scope of the syllabus.

Aims

The aims should state clearly and precisely what students are setting out to do. The aims must be directly related to the title. Some candidates listed personal aims such as ‘love for the subject’, or ‘to get a better grade’.

Functions

Most students scored full marks on this section once the department was identified. However, those students who scored zero gave functions of the business studied and not the department itself.

Correspondence

Generally, the letters presented were generated from students and entailed the relevant content. However, many students failed to follow the general principle in letter writing. Formatting was the main issue identified as it relates to letter style, for example, blocked or indented, date, line-spacing and appropriate matching of the salutation with the complimentary close. The salutation should give an indication of what form the complimentary close should take, for example, named person (Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr Brown — Yours sincerely; and unnamed person) (Dear Sir/Madam — Yours faithfully/respectfully). ‘Yours truly’ is not acceptable. In many instances, the students/writers did not sign the letter.

Methodology

Most students included a specimen of the data gathering instrument, but some did not clearly explain why the instrument was chosen and how it was used. In some cases, the instruments themselves were not properly constructed. Some students failed to include the data gathering instrument in the Appendix.

Questions

In most instances, this was done satisfactorily, although some of the questions submitted were not relevant and not related to the stated aims and title of the project. Students should avoid giving statements for questions and asking the same questions in different ways.

Schedule of Activities

Some Students failed to provide a table showing 10–12 activities. Invariably, the comments did not relate to the follow-up actions or decisions taken.

Regulations/Policies

From the responses given in this area, it was evident that several students had difficulty distinguishing between company policy and legislation governing the workplace. Legislation is a law passed and this should indicate the name of the law, the year and an explanation of the law. Some students failed to state how they became aware of the legislation. However, the health and safety practices observed section was done satisfactorily. Many students were able to give the staff rule but failed to state how they had to comply with the stated rule while carrying out the project.

Report Presentation

Many students did not meet the minimum requirement of 500–750, neither did some include graphs, charts or tables in the findings. It must be noted that a minimum of forty-one lines with font size 12 should average 533 words. Most students identified a major accomplishment, but failed to identify a problem-solving strategy.

Business Forms

In most instances, students included forms but some were not relevant to the department or the project. Students are required to include one blank document and one that is properly completed.

Bibliography

Many students failed to obtain the maximum marks allocated for this section as they did not complete the listing of resources used or internet site referenced.

Office Equipment

This was properly presented by most students in a four-column table with specified headings. However, the suitability for task should relate to the business and not how the equipment aided the researcher in the completion of the project.

Bibliography

Many students did not score full marks in this area as they failed to include the internet sites which should comprise the following:

Name of author, date posted, title of article, retrieved by, date retrieved and website address, for example, http...

Publications List: A specific format should be used consistently as in the case of the APA or MLA styles

Presentation

Most projects were satisfactorily presented, neatly arranged and accurately word processed. Marks ranged from 0 to 50. The mean score was 32.89, compared with 34.29 in June 2011.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Students should be given access to a reference copy of the current detailed mark scheme (as submitted in the marking exercise).

Mark schemes should not be condensed as moderators need to see how marks were allotted

Students should be consistently monitored throughout the project to ensure that the project is done correctly and that the stipulated guidelines in the current syllabus are being pursued.