

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

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

JANUARY 2011

**OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Candidates' performance in the January 2011 Office Administration sitting was satisfactory and revealed that most candidates were prepared for the examination, notwithstanding some areas of weakness. This year, 1,233 candidates sat the examination compared with the January 2010 sitting where approximately 1,682 candidates wrote the examination. Seventy-seven per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I–III. The mean score for the examination was 98.98 out of 200 marks.

Three papers were offered at the General Proficiency Level to ensure broad coverage of the syllabus, with objectives tested from all of the modules. More specific comments will be addressed separately under each paper.

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

Paper 02 – Short Answer

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

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

Paper 01 consisted of 60 multiple-choice items. The overall mean was 34.76 compared with 33.86 for January 2010. Marks ranged from 13 to 55 out of a maximum of 60.

Paper 02 – Short Answer

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. Knowledge and the application of procedures associated with specialized office activities and office routines were tested in this section of the paper. Candidates were required to answer two questions from Section II. The overall mean for this paper was 33.82 compared with 34.00 in 2010. Marks ranged from 1 to 67 out of a maximum of 90. There are some topics however, that continue to pose difficulty to candidates and this is reflected in their overall performance.

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

This paper took the form of a written examination that targeted private candidates who would not have had the opportunity to complete SBA projects. The paper was designed to test candidates' ability to use their personal experiences of routine office activities acquired through observation or from doing the actual office tasks as a real employee. The paper consisted of ten structured questions based on a case study. For this examination, the case focused on Unit XII of the syllabus.

In this paper, candidates' performance improved significantly in some areas over that of the 2010 examination. The overall mean for this paper was 30.08 compared to 14.90 in 2010. Marks ranged from 2 to 46 out of a maximum of 50.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 02 – Short Answer

Section I was compulsory and each question was worth 15 marks.

Question 1

This question tested Module I, Objective 1 (c), Objective 2 (a) and Objective 5.

For Part (a), which was worth three marks, candidates were required to list three activities performed in the office that relate to processing information. For the most part, candidates were able to list at least two activities and gave responses such as collecting/sourcing information from files, libraries; extracting or pulling out relevant data; sorting; and distributing or routing of information to those needing the information.

For Part (b), candidates were required to state two differences between a small company and a large company with respect to: (i) employees and (ii) structure. Each of these parts was worth two marks. Part (b) was generally well done by the candidates who performed well in Part (a). Candidates gave a wide range of responses such as space, equipment, furnishings and technology considerations, as well as salaries, working conditions, specializations and workload with regard to employee differences; while for differences in structure, candidates' responses included type of organizational structure, communication channels used, strategic plans, goals, vision and mission.

In Part (c), candidates were presented with the following scenario: "As an employee you believe that your co-workers must promote positive relationships with each other in the workplace". Candidates were required to copy a table with specific headings: Key Positive Attitudes, Employee's Actions/Demonstrations, and Employer's Actions/Demonstrations — in their answer booklets and for each positive attitude listed, they were to state one appropriate action both by the employee and the employer that would promote the attitude. This was worth eight marks.

This part of the question was somewhat challenging to some candidates who repeated the same responses for both the employee's and employer's actions. However, some candidates were able to express appropriate actions/demonstrations to indicate clear differences.

Marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 5.24.

Question 2

This question tested Module II (Objective 1, Objective 6 (c) and Objective 3 (b)).

For Part (a), which was worth three marks, candidates were required to state three uses of the Internet.

This part of the question was generally well done by candidates who gave responses such as accessing electronic mail, research purposes, intranet, e-commerce, entertainment, job search, communication and e-learning.

For Part (b), candidates were to list four items of information that should be included on a telephone message form. This was worth four marks.

Most candidates were able to list correctly the required items of information such as date/time the call was received; name of person for whom the message was intended, summary of the message and the person who took the message.

Part (c) related a case where some employees at the workplace had been abusing the use of cellular telephones during working hours. As a result, policy guidelines regarding the use of cellular phones had been developed. Candidates were required to draft a memorandum to inform staff of the plan to introduce new policies on the use of cellular telephones during working hours. The memorandum should also include three ways in which cellular telephones may be used inappropriately by employees in the workplace. In addition, candidates were required to state one disadvantage of using cellular telephones during working hours. Part (c) was worth eight marks.

Most candidates were able to draft the memo correctly by indicating the different headings and inserting relevant information regarding ways in which cellular telephones are inappropriately used. These include: when using office equipment, uncontrolled use during meetings, untimely sending of text messages, and use in the presence of customers.

Most candidates scored the point for stating a disadvantage of using cellular telephones during working hours by including responses such as interrupts workflow, distracts individuals, can contribute to accidents and loss of productivity.

Overall performance on this question was satisfactory. Marks obtained ranged from 0 to 15 with a mean of 9.27.

Question 3

This question tested Module III (Objectives 2, 4 and 6).

Part (a) (i) tested candidates' understanding of the term 'indexing' as it is used in records management. It was worth two marks.

Although many candidates attempted this part of the question, generally, it was not well done. The question specifically asked candidates to state the meaning of the term as it is used in records management, but it appeared that the latter part of the instruction was ignored as many candidates defined indexing with reference to a list at the end of a book or as an indicator of a trend.

Correct responses such as ‘the process of determining the various ways that attention is drawn to brief information’, ‘how data are organized to be used in the order of filing’, ‘making a decision on the name by which correspondence will most likely be requested from files’, ‘identifying where to file or find information’, were invariably not forthcoming from candidates.

In Part (a) (ii), worth two marks, candidates were required to state two reasons for cross-referencing a name. In most instances, candidates were able to state one reason; the most frequent responses being a name change as a result of marriage or a change in company name. Other appropriate, expected responses include: ‘doubt about where to place information’, ‘when the content of two files are related’, and ‘when information must be placed in more than one place’.

For Part (b), candidates were required to list three regulations that relate to access and retention of documents. This part of the question, worth three marks, posed a great deal of difficulty for most candidates. In a few instances, candidates gave correct responses such as ‘the need for authorization’, ‘signature’, ‘length of retention’, while the majority of them failed to list regulations related to limitations on the right of access, infringement of copyright, defamation, parliamentary privilege and breach of confidence.

In Part (c) (i), worth four marks, candidates were presented with a case in which they were clerks with Prime Real Estate Ltd which had recently merged with two other companies. At that company, a departmental filing system was used. However, the merged company decided to use a centralized filing system. Candidates were required to identify four changes that the clerk must make to facilitate the use of the centralized filing system.

Some candidates interpreted the question to mean the changes that the company should make instead of the changes that the clerk should make to facilitate the use of the centralized filing system. Correct responses such as ‘receive training’, ‘be aware of new equipment and technologies’, ‘more effective management of times so as to meet deadlines for returning files’, ‘be able to apply changes to the requirements of your specific job/tasks’, ‘change attitudes and habits to accommodate new procedures’, were hardly considered by candidates.

In Part (c) (ii), candidates were required to state four activities that management should undertake to ensure that the change from a departmental to a centralized filing system was successful. This part of the question was worth four marks.

In many instances, candidates repeated the responses given in Part (c) (i) for Part (c) (ii) and hence, failed to score optimal marks. Correct responses should have included:

- selecting an appropriate system to meet organization's needs
- formulating policy and communicating to staff
- training staff to use and maintain system
- standardizing systems throughout the organization,
- evaluating the system and its usability

Overall, performance on this question was unsatisfactory. The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 13 and the mean was 2.93.

Question 4

This question tested Module V, Objective 1 and Module VI, Objective 1 (b).

Part (a) (i) of this question, worth one mark, required candidates to define the term 'quorum'.

In most instances, candidates gave the correct definition, 'the minimum number of persons who must be present for a meeting to be convened'.

In Part (a) (ii), candidates were required to state four legal requirements of an Annual General Meeting. Part (a) (ii) was worth 4 marks.

This section of the question was satisfactorily done by most candidates who gave correct responses such as:

- meeting must be held once every year
- there must be a quorum in order to conduct the meeting
- annual reports must be tabled
- election of officers must take place
- dividends are declared

For Part (a) (iii), candidates were required to list two ways in which the Chairman's Agenda is different from the General Agenda. Part (a) (iii) was worth two marks.

In most instances, candidates were able to state at least one difference between the two types of agenda by responding that adequate space is left on the right hand side of the chairman's agenda for notations. Other differences such as 'last minute information (e.g. apologies) is obtained', and 'more detailed information about agenda items to be raised', were not given by the candidates.

Part (b), worth eight marks, instructed candidates to use the information provided in an electronic mail to prepare an itinerary for Mr Sant, using the 24-hour clock.

This part of the question was satisfactorily done, although some candidates failed to head up and use the correct format for an itinerary by incorporating the name of the document

(itinerary), for the named person, the specified period and what the traveller had to do during the period.

Marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 4.66.

Question 5

This question tested Module VII, Objective 1 (c, h), Module VIII, Objective 1 and Module X, Objective 4.

In Part (a) (i), candidates were asked to state three responsibilities of the human resource department with regard to deployment. This was worth three marks.

In many instances, candidates stated the responsibilities of the human resource department generally, with scant regard to deployment. As a result, responses such as ‘to assess the needs of the department’, ‘to determine number of employees required’, ‘to assess skills and work experiences of workers’, and ‘to evaluate attitudes and qualifications of employees’, were hardly given.

Part (a) (ii) of the question, worth three marks, required candidates to state three items of information that the human resource department must obtain from other departments to develop a job description.

Responses such as ‘qualifications’, ‘skills’, ‘attitudes’, ‘persons to whom the employee is directly responsible’, ‘salary paid’, ‘grade levels’ and ‘job titles’, indicated that many candidates possessed fairly good mastery of the content in this area.

In Part (b) (i), candidates were presented with a scenario about a customer making credit purchases for the first time. The goods to be purchased were valued at \$8,500.00 and the terms of payment were 2 per cent, net 15 days. Candidates were asked to assume that they were working in the accounts department of the company and were required to outline three actions that the company should take before granting credit facilities to the customer. Part (b) (i) was worth three marks.

Most candidates’ responses indicated that they possessed a fairly good command of knowledge in the area. Correct statements included ‘determining Ryce’s credit worthiness or ability to pay’; ‘investigating the customer’s credit history’; ‘checking the order to determine if it was within the value of credit allowed to customers’, and ‘instructing the relevant department to process the credit facility’.

In Part (b) (ii), worth three marks, candidates were asked to write three recommendations to deal with delinquent debtors.

This part of the question was satisfactorily handled by most candidates who gave recommendations such as ‘send reminder letter’, ‘stop credit’, ‘resort to legal action’ and ‘repossess goods’.

In Part (b) (iii), which was worth two marks, candidates were instructed that the customer in Part (b) (i) repaid the loan within eight days and were asked to calculate the final payment by showing all working.

Many candidates calculated the correct amount of \$8,330.00 that the customer should pay.

For Part (b) (iv), candidates were asked to write a justification indicating whether the customer was entitled to a discount. Part (b) (iv) was worth one mark.

Many candidates correctly reasoned that the customer was entitled to a discount of 2 per cent for repayment of credit granted before the 15 days limit.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 5.61.

Question 6

Question 6 tested Module IX, Objective 5 and Module VIII, Objective 3 (c).

In Part (a) (i), which was worth three marks, candidates were asked to state three reasons why stock control is important to a company.

This part of the question was answered satisfactorily by many candidates whose responses included 'to determine purchasing quantities', 'availability of space for storage', 'stock movement', 'usage patterns' and 're-order levels'.

Part (a) (ii) required candidates to identify three factors that would influence a company's decision on what items to stock. It was worth three marks. Correct responses given by candidates included 'usage', 'market demand and supply', 'price', 'time of delivery', 'climatic needs' and 'nature and size of business'.

In Part (b), which was worth nine marks, candidates were asked to assume that they worked in the accounts department of Fores Construction Company. As employees, one of the duties included the preparation of statements of accounts. Candidates were presented with the account of Charters Equipment of 36 Hades Park, Anguilla, which showed three transactions. The statement number was 5732 and the brought forward balance on December 02 was \$655.25. Candidates were to be asked use the form provided to prepare a statement of accounts to be sent to Charters Equipment Company.

This was the most popular of the option questions and most candidates who attempted it performed satisfactorily. The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 15, with a mean of 6.83.

Question 7

This question tested Module X, Objective 2, Module IX, Objective 3 and Module X, Objective 3 (d).

In Part (a), which was worth three marks, candidates were required to state three duties that may be required of a clerk in the sales department when dealing with customers.

This part of the question was satisfactorily done by those candidates who gave correct responses such as 'supply information' 'answer queries', 'follow up orders', 'liaise with other departments' and 'distribute brochures and pricelists'.

Part (b), which was worth three marks, required candidates to list three steps in the purchasing procedure. This part of the question was unsatisfactorily done as many candidates failed to produce correct responses such as 'general enquiries', 'obtaining price quotations and transportation information', 'following up on orders' and 'obtaining departmental requisition'.

For Part (c) (i), candidates were presented with a scenario where suppliers of office equipment were to be invited to submit tenders for a photocopier machine to the company in which they are employed. The equipment should have cutting edge technology in order to meet the needs of the marketing department. Candidates were required to draft the request for tenders that would be sent out to suppliers. They were asked to include three main components of the tender.

Part (c) (i) was worth four marks.

Generally, this part of the question was not done satisfactorily. Candidates failed to include three main components such as 'name of company', 'items/goods required', 'means by which tender should be presented', 'period of tender' and 'terms and conditions of tender'. As an alternative, candidates' responses which mentioned functions of the photocopier such as 'colour', 'speed', 'size', multi-functionality, 'durability' and 'cost' were accepted as well.

For Part (c) (ii), candidates were asked to assume that they were assisting the sales manager in evaluating the tenders received from suppliers and in designing a checklist that would help identify the major features of the photocopier machine. Candidates were asked to design a checklist identifying four features of the photocopier machine that would meet the needs of the marketing department. Part (c) (ii) was worth five marks.

Candidates performed satisfactorily in this section, providing a checklist which included acceptable features of the photocopier machine such as 'sort and staple', 'copy two and multiple sides', 'fast and easy to operate' 'produce colour and black and white copies', 'durable and able to withstand use from many users' and 'easily serviceable'.

Marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 5.36.

Question 8

This question tested Module XI, Objective 2 (a), Module XI, Objective 3 (b, c) and Module XI Objective 2 (c, d).

In Part (a), which was worth two marks, candidates were required to state two tasks performed by a clerk in the factory office in the preparation of a shift roster.

For this part of the question, some candidates stated those tasks that were generally performed in the factory office with little attention paid to the preparation of a shift roster. Hence, correct responses such as 'obtain schedule of production from files/production department', 'retrieve maintenance and repair schedules', 'list incoming orders' and 'prepare the draft/final copy of the roster' were seldom provided.

In Part (b), candidates were required to state two uses each for the (i) destination sheet and (ii) delivery note. This part of the question was worth four marks.

This part of the question was satisfactorily attempted by candidates. They indicated uses of the destination sheet such as 'informs the driver of name and address of the customer', 'assists driver in planning his trip route', and 'customers sign the appropriate section when goods are received as proof of receipt'. Correct responses for the uses of the delivery note included: 'note accompanies goods being delivered to customer', 'verification document' and 'purchaser checks goods against delivery note, and if correct, signs a copy for the driver'.

In Part (c) (i), candidates were presented with a scenario where they were to assume that they worked in the production department of the Fashion Statement Company, 14 Chaud Place, Bridgetown, Barbados. The Production Manager, Mr Chris Welsh, had left a note indicating that it was time to re-order production forms from the printers. Candidates were required to prepare a draft form to include specified headings with adequate space for inserting information. Part (c) (i) was worth five marks.

This part of the question was completed satisfactorily. In their design, most candidates included the name of the form and all headings that were required.

For Part (c) (ii), which was worth four marks, candidates were required to use the form they designed to record Production Order No. 56/2011, received by the company for 1,000 ladies straw hats. The form should be signed by Mr Welsh, the production manager.

Candidates were able to use the form they designed to record the appropriate information and indicated the signature of Mr Welsh.

Marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 15, with a mean of 7.04.

Paper 03/2 – 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 mean for this paper was 30.08.

The Case

The case focused on a thriving medium-sized construction company, ACME Limited. The company which has been in existence for the past 20 years needs to expand its operations to cope with the current construction boom at its peak in the country. The case dealt with the issues surrounding the management procedures that must be put in place to effectively handle the hiring of additional full-time staff for the office and for the various work sites.

Question 1

This question tested Module XII (Objective 1 (a, b, c)). Candidates were asked to discuss why the three suggested methods, namely, electronic media, newspapers and employment agencies would be effective methods of advertising for the new staff. In addition, candidates were asked to state two advantages of using each of these three methods. This question was worth six marks and had a mean of 3.41.

Candidates gave appropriate responses for the use of the electronic media such as ‘reaches a large audience’, ‘fast’ and ‘can be easily updated’. For the newspaper advertisement, candidates noted that this method is less expensive’, ‘there is a permanent record’ and ‘job information is current’. Correct advantages of the employment agencies included that ‘they act for employers in seeking applications for job vacancies’ and that the agencies aid employers by ‘testing and screening applicants’ and ‘sourcing qualified applicants for the position’.

Question 2

This question tested Module XII, Objective 2 (c). Candidates were asked to explain, giving two reasons for each, why a potential applicant who had concerns about (i) hours that she may be required to work and (ii) the qualifications needed for the post should seriously consider these concerns before applying for a position at the company. This question was worth four marks. The mean was 2.52.

In terms of hours required to work, candidates presented responses such as ‘may impact on family responsibilities’, ‘may impact on other responsibilities such as study or hobbies’, or ‘may prevent applicant from working a shift system, if required’. With respect to the qualifications needed, candidates provided responses that the applicant should consider whether she ‘is qualified for the position’, ‘overqualified’ and that she also needs to consider the ‘competitiveness of the field’.

Question 3

This question tested Module XII, Objective 3 (c). Candidates were presented with an advertisement which appeared in the local newspaper. They were required to apply for the position in response to the job advertisement by writing a cover letter to ACME Limited that would accompany the résumé. This question was worth six marks. The mean was 2.90.

Candidates responded favourably to this question except in some instances where the date and the inside address were omitted from the letter. In addition, the complimentary close did not always match the salutation. Candidates should bear in mind that once a name is used, for example, 'Dear Mr Brown', then the complimentary close should end with 'Yours sincerely'. When the salutation is not personal, for example, The Resource Manager, the complimentary close can be 'Yours faithfully', 'Yours truly'. In addition, some candidates failed to include the enclosure/attachment notation.

Question 4

This question tested Module XII, Objective 3. This question presented candidates with an extract of personal information on an applicant and is completing her résumé. They were required to suggest a layout for the résumé, making sure to include the appropriate headings and related details. This question was worth ten marks. The mean was 8.15.

Some candidates failed to include appropriate headings, for example, Personal Data/Information, Education, Work Experience and Extra-curricular activities/Hobbies. In some instances, the layout was not appropriate.

Question 5

This question tested Module XII, Objective 5. In this question, candidates were informed that the applicant had submitted her application and had been selected to attend an interview. They were asked to provide three suggestions that would assist her in preparing for the interview. This question was worth three marks. The mean was 1.81.

Candidates performed satisfactorily on this question. Correct recommendations given included:

- find out as much as possible about the organization
- find out where the interview is taking place and how to get there in good time
- take special care with your appearance, making sure you are tidy
- carry along copies of essential documents/portfolio

Question 6

This question tested Module XII, Objective 5 (d). In this question candidates were asked to help the applicant in preparing for the interview by suggesting one likely response to each of three questions: 'Why do you want to work with the company?', 'Why do you think you are suitable for the position?' and 'What are your long-term goals?' This question was worth three marks. The mean was 2.56.

Most candidates gave appropriate responses to the questions such as: “It fulfils my personal values/interests/beliefs”; “I possess the relevant qualifications/experience” and “My goal is to continue to improve my skills and qualifications”.

Question 7

This question tested Module XII, Objective 5. Candidates were required to write three questions that the applicant could ask the interviewer, at the interview. Generally, candidates performed satisfactorily in this question and provided appropriate responses such as:

- What are the opportunities for training and professional development?
- What are the fringe benefits?
- How soon can I expect to hear from you if I am selected for the job?
- What is the basis for salary review?

This question was worth three marks. The mean was 2.09.

Question 8

This question tested Module XII, Objective 4 (c). Candidates were informed that the applicant had received a letter offering her a job as a clerk in the human resource department. They were required to complete the letter of acceptance. This question was worth five marks. The mean was 2.80.

Some candidates who attempted this question failed to include important elements in the letter of acceptance such as:

- Thank the company for the opportunity to join staff
- Indicate date of letter or some reference
- Confirm date to start employment
- Confirm salary/benefits

Question 9

This question tested Module XII, Objective 6. Candidates were informed that on the first day at the office, the new employee will have to attend an orientation session to be briefed on her duties and responsibilities. Candidates were required to draft an email to the new employee from the human resource officer, inviting her to attend the session and highlighting three other pieces of information that will be discussed during the orientation and induction session.

This question was unsatisfactorily done as some candidates failed to include:

- An appropriate greeting and closing
- Details of time and place of the orientation

- Activities to be discussed such as, conditions of service, rules and procedures of the organization, introduction to other employees, and grievance and disciplinary procedures

This question was worth five marks. The mean was 1.85.

Question 10

This question tested Module XII, Objective 6 (c). This question advised candidates that during orientation and induction, the new employee was informed that, as part of her duties, she would be responsible for handling confidential files. Candidates were required to write a response, on behalf of the new employee, to a colleague who had been asking her repeatedly to share information on other employees in the company. They were asked to provide reasons why the new employee should not engage in this practice.

In most instances, candidates gave at least two appropriate responses to this question. These included:

- Employers expect employees to keep company and client information confidential
- May result in job loss
- Employees with sensitive/confidential information should not gossip
- Breach of professionalism/work ethic

This question was worth five marks. The mean was 2.63.

The overall performance on this paper was satisfactory.

Recommendations for Overall Improvement

1. Candidates should acquire a personal copy of the syllabus and incorporate it in their examination preparation process.
2. Past papers can be of invaluable assistance in time management and preparation for the actual examination. Candidates should review past papers and practise formulating answers.
3. Greater emphasis must be placed on the 'newer' modules of the syllabus and content areas to promote a clear understanding of examination requirements and guidelines, in keeping with current trends and practices at the workplace.
4. Candidates must always be cognizant of the rules of grammar, spelling, structure and presentation in Office Administration activities and apply these appropriately.