

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

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

JANUARY 2012

**OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

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GENERAL COMMENTS

The Office Administration examination is offered in January and May/June each year. In January, three papers are offered at the General Proficiency level:

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice, Paper 02 – Short Answer and Paper 032 – Alternative to School-Based Assessment (SBA).

In January 2012, there was marked improvement in performance, with 83 per cent of the candidates achieving Grades I–III, compared with 77 per cent in 2011. This was due mainly to improvement on Paper 02. This year, the mean on Paper 02 was 41 per cent, compared with 34 per cent in 2011. While there were some encouraging responses to questions on Papers 02 and 032, there were also some areas of weakness. These areas are addressed in the detailed comments on individual questions.

Paper 01 consisted of 60 multiple-choice items. Candidate performance was comparable with that of 2011. The overall mean was 36.40 compared with 34.76 for January 2011. Marks ranged from 12 to 58 out of a maximum available score of 60.

Paper 02 consisted of two sections. Section I consisted of 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 to XI. Knowledge and the application of procedures associated with specialized office activities and office routines were assessed in this section. Candidates were required to answer any two questions from Section II. The overall mean for this paper was 40.69 compared with 33.82 in 2011. Marks ranged from 0 to 77 out of a maximum of 90. While this improvement is commendable, there are, however, some areas that continue to pose difficulty to candidates. These areas are addressed in the section for ‘Detailed Comments’.

Paper 032 – Alternative to School-Based Assessment (SBA)

This paper targeted private individuals who would not have had the opportunity to complete SBA projects as school candidates. It took the form of a written examination designed to test candidates’ ability to use their personal experiences of routine office activities acquired through observation or from performing the actual office tasks as a real employee.

The paper consisted of ten short, structured essay-type questions, based on an office case. For this examination, the case focused mainly on Module X of the syllabus which covers sales and marketing, and to a lesser extent, on Modules II and VIII which deal with communication and the accounts office, respectively.

The overall mean for this paper was 27.39 compared with 30.08 in 2011. Marks ranged from 1 to 46 out of a maximum of 50.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 02 – Short Answer

Section I consisted of four compulsory questions, each worth 15 marks.

Question 1

This question tested candidates' understanding of

- the modes of oral communication
- sources of reference materials used by a receptionist
- the types of information that a secretary can obtain from specified sources
- the consequences of reporting messages inaccurately
- the components of an email.

For Part (a) which was worth two marks, candidates were required to identify two modes of oral communication that can be used to advertise a company's products. Generally, candidates were able to identify two modes and gave responses such as *radio, television, telephone* and *word of mouth*.

In Part (b) (i), candidates were asked to suggest two sources of reference materials which may be used by a receptionist. This part of the question was worth two marks.

Candidates gave responses such as the *dictionary, hansard* and *encyclopedia*. In some instances, candidates inaccurately named the 'telephone' rather than the *telephone directory* as a reference material.

Part (b) (ii) required candidates to identify one item of information which a secretary could obtain from the following sources: (i) map, (ii) official gazette and (iii) post office guide. This part of the question was worth three marks.

Candidates were more familiar with the concept of 'map' and provided correct responses such as *directions, locations* and *countries*. However, the official gazette, and to a lesser extent, the post office guide, presented some difficulty to candidates.

Expected responses for the official gazette, including recent *appointments, legal issues, job offers* and *advertisements*, were not presented. Similarly, many candidates failed to provide correct responses for the post office guide such as *postal information* and *postage rates* when answering this part of the question.

Part (c) (i), which was worth two marks, required candidates to state two consequences a receptionist would face for reporting a message inaccurately.

In some instances, candidates stated some extreme consequences such as ‘firing’ or ‘dismissing the receptionist’, instead of more plausible responses such as *queries will not be resolved, incorrect information pertaining to dates and times will be conveyed* and the *possibility of ambiguities and distortions of the message*.

In Part (c) (ii), candidates were asked to assume that they were the receptionist at Northern Supplies, Trinidad. They were required to compose an email to be sent to Mr Neal Sparks, the purchasing clerk, to convey a message from Mrs May Peters of Home Supplies Ltd to Mr Sparks about an order which was placed two weeks previously. This part of the question was worth 6 marks.

Many candidates failed to head up the email correctly by writing key words such as *To, From,* and *Subject*. Some candidates wrote the date, which was not necessary, since the date is inserted, by default, when composing an email. However, the body of the message which carried most of the marks was satisfactorily done.

Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 7.31.

Question 2

This question tested candidates’ knowledge of filing systems and of specific office duties, namely (i) answering the telephone, (ii) filing inactive files, (iii) dealing with outgoing mail and (iv) scheduling appointments.

Part (a) required candidates to identify three advantages of using the electronic filing system as a means of storage. This part of the question was worth three marks. Popular responses provided by candidates included *less paper use, easy retrieval, safer and more effective* and *less time consuming*. This part of the question was satisfactorily done.

In Part (b), which was worth four marks, candidates were required to define the terms *copyright* and *libel* in relation to records and information management. The majority of candidates were able to provide an appropriate definition for *copyright*, that is, *a set of exclusive rights granted by a state to the creator of an original work, or the right to reproduce, publish, sell or distribute the matter and form of something as a literary, musical or artistic work*.

However, many candidates failed to differentiate between the two concepts and gave a definition for *libel* which was similar to that of *copyright*. Candidates who performed well on this part of the question gave correct responses for *libel* such as *a published false statement that is damaging to a person’s reputation* or *a written or visual defamation, which takes the form of lies in print, or misleading or deceptive photographs*.

Part (c) required candidates to outline two tips that they would give to the assistant clerk for carrying out specific office duties. This part of the question was worth eight marks.

This part of the question was generally well done by candidates, except for Part (ii) which dealt with filing inactive files. Correct responses for answering the telephone such as *answer telephone promptly, be polite, helpful and tactful at all times, and keep a message pad and writing instrument handy* were frequently provided by candidates.

In dealing with outgoing mail, candidates provided correct responses such as *check if letter is signed, check each envelope to verify address, special notations and postage, and enter particulars in the postage book.*

Candidates who scored full marks on scheduling appointments gave responses such as *study your executive's routine activities, agree on times, allow sufficient time between appointment, and confirm by letter any appointment made by telephone.*

Several candidates were unable to give correct answers that demonstrated that they knew how to deal with filing inactive files. Correct responses — such as *maintain a form of confidentiality, inactive files or dead files need to be disposed of in order to create room in the filing system, and when hard copy documents are unlikely to be used again, but cannot be destroyed for legal reasons, they can be placed in an archive* — were seldom provided by candidates.

However, the one frequent correct response that was given for filing inactive records was that the *documents should be shredded.*

Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 8.28.

Question 3

This question tested candidates' understanding of

- documents that are required for travelling overseas
- services offered by the bank, travel agency and the embassy
- tasks to be performed to ensure appropriate hotel arrangements
- how to prepare an itinerary.

For Part (a), candidates were required to list four travel documents that are required for an overseas field trip. This part of the question was worth four marks.

The majority of candidates supplied satisfactory answers such as *visa, itinerary, passport, travel ticket and driver's licence/permit/ID.*

For Part (b), which was worth three marks, candidates were required to identify one service that is offered by each of the following three types of organizations: (i) bank, (ii) travel agency and (iii) embassy. This part of the question was handled well by most candidates.

Favourable answers for services offered by the bank included *travellers' cheques, money transfers, credit cards, ATM services, e-banking and financial advice.*

Correct responses provided for the travel agency included *flight arrangements, hotel bookings, tour bookings, and transportation/car rentals.*

Expected responses for services offered by the embassy included *scheduling appointments for interviews, assisting citizens with visa requirements and notarizing documents during normal service hours.*

For Part (c), candidates were required to prepare a list of three tasks that must be performed to ensure that appropriate hotel arrangements are made for an executive who will be attending a regional conference for a specified period. This part of the question was worth three marks. Among the tasks that candidates listed included the *name of person for booking, type of room accommodation, length of stay, food preferences and payment plan.*

For Part (d), candidates were required to prepare an itinerary using the information given in the scenario. This section was worth five marks and was satisfactorily done. The majority of candidates were able to convert to the 24-hour clock and provide details of dates and times of arrival at and departure from the various destinations. However, a major weakness identified in this part of the question was that some candidates failed to head up the itinerary to include *the name of the document (itinerary), the person for whom the itinerary was being prepared and the period for travel.*

Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 8.95.

Question 4

This question was designed to test candidates' knowledge of job recruitment and resignation procedures.

For Part (a), candidates were required to list three factors which should be considered when seeking employment based on a particular scenario. Popular among the correct responses provided by candidates were *type and size of business, working hours, salary, fringe benefits, location, qualifications/skills required and working hours.*

For Part (b) (i), which was worth one mark, many candidates failed to give a correct definition of *deportment* and instead provided definitions for 'deport' or 'deportee'. Those candidates who earned the mark gave responses such as *the ability to conduct oneself in an acceptable manner, one's behaviour/actions in public, one's appearance and dress.*

For Part (b) (ii), candidates were required to state three fringe benefits that an employer may offer to an employee. This part of the question was worth three marks. Candidates scored well on this

section and gave correct responses such as *medical insurance, retirement plans, housing allowances, company car and payment for fitness/wellness programmes.*

For Part (c), worth eight marks, candidates were required to write a letter of resignation based on a given scenario. This part of the question was handled well by most candidates. Candidates were able to indicate the different parts of the letter — *address and date, salutation and complimentary close, body of letter to include reason for leaving job as well as an expression of thanks to the employer.*

Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 7.35.

Question 5

This question examined candidates' knowledge of the functions of the human resources department.

For Part (a), candidates were required to list two tasks other than 'considering completed application forms' that the human resources clerk would be required to perform. This part of the question was worth two marks. Examples of correct answers provided by candidates included *writing and placing job advertisements/vacancies in the media, short listing applicants and selection of the right person for the job.*

For Part (b), candidates were required to identify four areas of welfare that can be provided by a company to show that employees are valued. The majority of candidates responded satisfactorily to this part of the question, which was worth four marks. Candidates gave favourable responses such as *access to subsidized health insurance, provision of staff cafeteria, providing comfortable chairs and desks/furniture, involving retired staff in social activities, visiting staff on sick leave or hospitalized, and providing free counseling services, for example, in case of bereavement/divorce.*

In Part (c) (i), candidates were required to outline three activities that an employee should undertake in preparation for a job induction session. This part of the question was worth three marks. Candidates' performance on this section was only fair as several of the responses given were unrelated to the concept of induction. Candidates were expected to give responses such as *learning about the organization's values and history, prepare a list of questions that he would like answered, and research the industry to gain basic knowledge to help him to be productive in his job.*

In Part (c) (ii), candidates were required to state three challenges a new employee, Mr Rajesh Boola, is likely to face in his new role after being deployed from the human resources department to the factory and transport department. This part of the question, worth three marks, was fairly well done. Some candidates submitted favourable responses such as *acceptance/perception of new staff, stress and fear of ability to perform to the best of his ability in a new department, issues regarding human and physical resources, and speed at which he can adapt to his new role and responsibilities.*

Part (c) (iii), which was worth three marks, required candidates to describe three desirable attitudes likely to lead to Rajesh's success in the department. Candidates seemed to have a good grasp of this aspect of the syllabus and supplied satisfactory responses such as *dependability, team spirit, cooperation, honesty/integrity, and tolerance/respect/courtesy*.

Marks ranged from 0 to 13 and the mean was 5.99.

Question 6

This question tested candidates' knowledge of purchasing and stock control procedures.

For Part (a), which was worth two marks, candidates were required to write any one of the following acronyms in full and explain what each means: (i) COD and (ii) E & OE .

This segment of the question was satisfactorily done. Most candidates were able to give the correct meaning for COD which is *cash on delivery* and were able to explain the meaning, that is, *the buyer pays the bill only when the goods are delivered*. However, E & OE, which means *errors and omissions excepted*, proved more challenging to candidates. This means that *the seller is entitled to make any change in the prices quoted on the invoice if there is an error or omission*.

For Part (b), candidates were required to state two reasons for keeping control of stock. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this part of the question and were able to give correct responses such as *maintaining adequate supplies, preventing pilferage, avoiding wastage/deterioration and monitoring availability of capital*. This part of the question was worth two marks.

For Part (c), worth two marks, candidates were required to define the terms 'continuous or perpetual inventory' and 'annual inventory'. This section was satisfactorily done as candidates were able to define correctly 'continuous or perpetual inventory' as *the recording or receipts and issues from stock as they occur and the maintenance of a running balance*. Annual inventory, on the other hand, is defined as *the process which is carried out once a year for the end-of-year financial accounts required by law*.

For Part (d), candidates were required to use the information on the given stock list to complete the stock record forms which were provided. This part of the question was worth nine marks. Candidates performed unsatisfactorily on this segment of the question; most of them failed to complete the forms with the appropriate data required.

Marks ranged from 0 to 13 and the mean was 4.39.

Question 7

This question tested candidates' knowledge of the functions of the sales and marketing office with particular focus on the duties of a marketing clerk, uses of a mailing list and the preparation of quotations.

In Part (a), worth three marks, candidates were required to state three key functions performed by a marketing clerk. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this segment of the question and were able to submit correct responses such as *assists in organizing promotional activities, assists in preparing press releases, prepares and maintains mailing lists, assists in packaging and delivery, prepares advertising materials and makes travel arrangements for marketing purposes.*

For Part (b), candidates were asked to state three uses of a mailing list. Candidates performed creditably on this segment of the question, giving correct responses such as *it serves as reference of a current list of customers, clients and subscribers and it saves time in locating names and addresses of valued customers and subscribers.* This part of the question was worth three marks.

For Part (c) (i), candidates were presented with a scenario in which they were to assume the role of a marketing clerk with responsibilities for promotional activities. The first task was to recommend a four-point strategy to keep a client (Mr Bennett), who is interested in buying six sports utility vehicles, informed of promotional activities.

Candidates performed satisfactorily in this section and gave correct responses such as *keep a tickler to follow up on Mr Bennett's enquiry, supply Mr Bennett with up-to-date sales literature as soon as it becomes available and supply him with relevant website links on the proposed vehicles.* This part of the question was worth four marks.

Part (c) (ii), worth five marks, required candidates to use the form provided to prepare a quotation for Mr Bennett using the information given in the enquiry. Candidates performed unsatisfactorily on this segment of the question as many candidates failed to complete the form accurately and omitted important details such as *the date, quotation provided for and the terms of sale.* In addition, candidates failed to calculate accurately the *total price, discount, and the price less discount.*

Marks ranged from 0 to 12, and the mean was 3.66.

Question 8

This question tested candidates' knowledge of the factory, despatch and transport offices. This question was the least popular of the four optional questions.

For Part (a), candidates were asked to identify two types of factory records that a clerk who works in the factory, despatch and transport offices would use. Candidates' performance in this section was only fair as many candidates failed to attempt this section and to supply correct responses

such as *planning master, material schedule, job card/job record, time card, shift roster, progress card/production control card*. This part of the question was worth two marks.

Part (b), worth two marks, required candidates to explain any two of the following terms: (i) progress chasing, (ii) overheads and (iii) quality control.

With the exception of ‘quality control’ which is defined as *ensuring that the company’s quality standards are being maintained*, the other two terms were inappropriately defined. Correct responses required from candidates should have included:

- Progress chasing — checking on the progress of items on the assembly line and completing a progress advice form to be compared with the planning chart.
- Overheads — the percentage of the cost which cannot be traced to an individual product but which is incurred in the production process, such as factory lighting, water, factory rates and fuel.

For Part (c), worth two marks, candidates were required to explain two purposes of the delivery note. This segment of the question was satisfactorily done as candidates gave correct responses such as *it is used to get a signature from the customer as acceptance of the goods, the customer keeps this for his records, the second signed copy serves as evidence to indicate that the goods were delivered to the address and indicates that it was received*.

For Part (d) (i), candidates were required to outline five actions which should be taken by the despatch and transport office to ensure delivery of an order to a customer. In most instances, candidates who attempted this section scored satisfactorily and submitted correct responses such as *prepare documents for the despatch of goods — delivery note — and schedule delivery, liaise with accounts department to confirm cost, get invoices and prepare destination sheet for the transport*. This part of the question was worth five marks.

For Part (d) (ii), worth four marks, candidates were presented with a scenario in which several failed attempts had been made to deliver goods. On the first attempt, poor directions were given to the driver who eventually returned to the office and on the second attempt, the customer was not at home. Candidates were required to state four actions that should have been taken to avoid the problems.

This part of the question was satisfactorily done. Candidates gave acceptable responses such as *call the client and get specific and correct directions to the home, arrange a mutually convenient time to deliver the goods, reschedule the delivery time and ensure that the delivery person has mobile communication equipment and is able to contact the office and customer*. This part of the question was worth four marks.

Marks ranged from 0 to 13 and the mean was 5.90.

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

This case was developed mainly from Module X — Sales and Marketing — and to a lesser extent on Module II — Communication.

The case focused on the opening of a newly registered, middle-sized production company in Grenada. The company was in the process of developing a new fruit bar from Caribbean fruits and required a marketing clerk to assist with this launch. The scenarios based on the case centered on tasks the marketing clerk would have to perform such as carrying out a market research study, summarizing and presenting the results of the study, as well as designing promotional material for the launch of the new fruit bar.

Candidates were required to apply analytical and evaluative skills to respond appropriately to the questions.

Question 1

Candidates were required to prepare an advertisement for the position of marketing clerk to appear in the weekend newspaper. They were to use the information given to prepare the advertisement.

The majority of candidates was able to score maximum marks for this question and included in the advertisement information relating to the *description of the person for the job, qualifications, personality, experience and duties*. This question was worth six marks.

Question 2

Candidates were required to suggest three marketing strategies that would effectively promote the new fruit bar. Most of them were able to identify marketing strategies used for a product line and submitted correct responses such as *distribution of samples, 'promotions – buy one, get one', advertisements and create a 'blog' entry online to discuss the product*. However, only very few candidates suggested *introducing the product at a low cost* as a strategy.

Question 3

This question had two parts. Part (a), worth three marks, required candidates to write three questions to be included in a questionnaire designed to find out how feasible the introduction of such products would be in the Caribbean. The majority of candidates were able to formulate reasonable responses which included questions on *the cost of the product; type of product;*

availability of raw material; health perspective and packaging.

Part (b) required candidates to suggest the most appropriate type of research method they would use to carry out a research on the new fruit bar and to give three reasons to justify the response. Candidates gave *survey/questionnaire* as the best method to use to conduct research, and gave reasons such as *information can be gathered quickly, it is an easier method of collecting data, it is inexpensive and both manual and electronic means can be used to gather information.* This part of the question was worth four marks.

Question 4

Candidates were required to write a short report summarizing the results of the research, and to identify one recommendation for developing this new product.

The majority of candidates was able to produce the report from the information given and included relevant information in the body of the report. However, candidates omitted the heading for the report and therefore failed to score the mark allotted to it. For the recommendation, some candidates again reported findings rather than stating a recommendation. An expected suggested recommendation could be as follows:

- recommend that product is not only introduced or advertised regionally, but globally, or
- that other Caribbean countries invest in the introduction of product line

This question was worth six marks.

Question 5

Candidates were required to state two ways each in which a multimedia projector and graphs/charts could be used to enhance the presentation of the report for the board of directors.

This question was fairly well done by most candidates who gave correct responses for the multimedia projector including *it allows everyone in the room to see presentation, allows for direct engagement which adds impact to presentation and having a display on large screen facilitates more effective, free flowing discussions.*

Candidates stated that using charts or graphs in the presentation *makes it easier to understand numerical data, enables the summary of a large set of data in visual form and allows for comparisons in growth.*

This question was worth four marks.

Question 6

Candidates were required to develop a check list in chronological order, to be sent to invitees, asking them to indicate the most convenient days and times for the conference at which the fruit bar would be introduced to potential investors.

Most candidates were able to place the information given in chronological order. Candidates were expected to put in check boxes and instructions for invitees. Most candidates were able to score four of the five marks allotted to this question.

Question 7

For this question, candidates were required to prepare a departmental budget outlining the overall costing of the conference. The budget should include overall revenue and monies spent. Candidates were also required to calculate the profit or loss of this event.

The responses to this question were only fair. Candidates were expected to setup the budget showing clearly income, expenses and profit as follows:

Budget for Fruit Bar Conference
To be held on ----- May 2012

Revenue		
<u>Actual</u>		
Sponsorship	\$5,000.00	
Department Funds	\$3,000.00	
<u>Intended</u>		
Sale of Books	\$1,000.00	
Registration fees	\$2,000.00	
Total Revenue		\$11,000.00
Expenses		
Rental	\$1,000.00	
Hotel accommodation	\$3,200.00	
Material & stationery	\$250.00	
Food & refreshment	\$2,500.00	
Miscellaneous	\$500.00	
Total Expenses		\$7,450.00
Profit		\$3,550.00
Profit = Revenue – Expenses \$11,000 - \$7,450 = \$3,550		

This question was worth five marks.

Question 8

This question required candidates to develop a short radio advertisement which should focus on promoting the conference, its purpose as well as the location, time, date and registration fee. The advertisement should be very persuasive to attract as many persons as possible to attend the conference.

The question was satisfactorily done with the majority of candidates designing advertisements which included pertinent information in a persuasive manner.

This question was worth five marks.

Question 9

For this question, worth five marks, candidates were required to draft a banner that could be used to advertise the conference. The banner should include the *name of the conference date, day and time, banner theme and company logo*.

Candidates scored satisfactorily on this question. However, most candidates were not familiar with the term 'logo' or were not able to differentiate between a logo and a decorative design.

Question 10

Candidates were required to use the information given about the conference to prepare a welcome address to be delivered at the conference.

Candidates performed satisfactorily on this question, as they scored marks for:

- addressing the audience
- welcoming the audience
- stating the purpose of the conference
- repeating the welcome or giving an appropriate closure

This question was worth four marks.

The overall performance on this paper was satisfactory with marks ranging from 0 to 47, and a mean score of 27.06.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- More exposure to questions examined on Paper 032.
- Since most candidates who sit this examination are private candidates, upon registering for the examination, they should be informed that they need to be guided by the syllabus, recommended texts and support materials.
- Candidates should visit the CXC website and read comments presented in the subject reports to assist them in identifying their strengths and weaknesses.
- Candidates need to practise completing forms accurately, since this is one of the areas of poor performance.
- In responding to questions, candidates should take note of key words to guide them in presenting information in a logical and organized manner.
- Private candidates should also consider seeking assistance from experienced teachers in the school system.