

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 2004

OFFICE PROCEDURES

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GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION

JUNE 2004

GENERAL COMMENTS

Presently the CSEC examination in Office Procedures is offered at the General Proficiency level only in January and June of each calendar year. The subject continues to be popular with students of the Business subjects as evidenced by the increase in the population assessed this year. The examination consists of four papers: Paper 01 – Multiple Choice; Paper 02 – Short Answer Essay; Paper 03/1 – the School Based Assessment (SBA), and Paper 03/2 – the Alternative to the School Based Assessment.

A satisfactory number of the stated objectives represented all of the Units in the Syllabus in this examination. The responses from the candidates indicated that they were knowledgeable about each of the objectives tested.

The overall performance in the compulsory section of the examination was satisfactory. There were however some very good responses in both the compulsory and optional sections of the examination. The deficiencies that were seen will be addressed in this report in the detailed comments on the individual questions.

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

In this paper the knowledge and application of important facts, concepts, principles, processes and procedures involved in routine clerical and office activities were tested. Candidates performed very well on this paper with 64 per cent of them achieving Grades I – III an increase over 2003, when 61 per cent achieved the same.

Paper 02 – Essay

This paper consisted of two sections. Section 1 which was compulsory, was based on Units I – VI and Unit XII of the Syllabus. In this examination, candidates were required to answer all of the four questions. This candidate population is to be commended for responding to all of the questions.

Section II was optional and was based on Units VII – XI of the Syllabus. It was a test of the knowledge and procedures associated with specialised office activities and routines. Candidates were required to answer two of the four questions.

The performance of candidates on Paper 2 showed a significant decline compared to that of 2003 when 71 per cent of the candidates obtained Grades I – III. In 2004, 65 per cent achieved Grades I – III. Candidates' performance on the Application profile of this paper was generally satisfactory.

Paper 03 – School Based Assessment (SBA)

The School-Based Assessment of the examination was based on the Broad topic: **Managing the Human Resource Element in a Dynamic Work Environment**, and objectives were tested from Units VII and XII of the syllabus.

Candidates gave a highly satisfactory performance on this paper. Approximately 91 per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I - III. This figure is comparable with 2003 when 90 per cent of the candidates achieved the same.

The candidates submitted responses of a high quality which indicated that the topic was within their competence. The candidates' creativity was evident in the variety seen in their responses.

Paper 03/2 – Alternative to the School Based Assessment

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

The performance of candidates in this Alternative Paper showed a decline in 2004. Sixty-four per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I - III, compared with 79 per cent in 2003.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 02 – Essay

Section I comprised four compulsory questions.

Question 1

In this question, candidates were asked to describe two ways in which good interpersonal relationships in the workplace affect customers, co-workers and the business itself.

Some candidates did not respond about *good interpersonal relationships*, but answered in the negative stating instead the adverse effects of not having good interpersonal relations in the workplace. Based on the responses of those candidates who had the correct focus, identification of the benefits of good interpersonal relationships to the business was challenging for them. Their responses focussed on the benefits of good interpersonal relationships to the persons associated with the business and not the business itself.

In section (b) candidates were required to identify one type of operator-assisted telephone call. Most candidates were able to identify calls as *directory assistance*, *person-to-person*, *collect* and *conference*.

In section (c) candidates were required to draft the Chairman's Agenda using the details given in the question. Generally, candidates acknowledged that the document had to be headed with the name of the organization, and that the notice for the meeting should include the name, type of meeting, date, venue and time of the meeting. While most candidates were able to use the information given to itemize the agenda, a few candidates re-wrote the agenda items as a paragraph, exactly as was stated on the question paper.

Very few candidates demonstrated that the Chairman's agenda needed to have a separate column for notes, which is its main point of difference from other agendas.

Question 2

In section (a) of this question candidates were asked to list one advantage and one disadvantage of pre-paid and post-paid phone services. Generally they identified advantages such as the prepaid service enabled the user to limit spending whereas the postpaid service allowed for unlimited access in air time. The disadvantages identified were that the payments on post paid service could be exorbitant if not monitored whereas the prepaid service may not be available in an emergency due to lack of funds.

In section (b) candidates were required to briefly describe the postal services; Poste Restante, Recorded Delivery and Registered Mail. The responses indicated that most candidates had some

understanding of the services offered, however they were vague and in many cases suggested that there was not an in depth understanding of the objective that was tested.

In section (c) candidates were asked to arrange names in correct order for indexing and then arrange the same list in alphabetical order. There were a few good responses; however the majority were generally poor. Most candidates did not use the surname as the first indexing unit where the name included personal names. Some candidates seemed unclear about the term 'indexing order', so that the indexing order was incorrect but the alphabetical order was written with the correct indexing units. Some candidates did not know how to treat "The" and "&" in the names of Companies.

Question 3

In section (a) candidates were required to schedule appointments for an executive. The responses were satisfactory for the most part, although some candidates interpreted the question as having to manage visits to the organization.

In section (b) candidates' knowledge of the procedure to be followed with regard to the circulation of Minutes, after a meeting was tested. Generally, this section was done well as candidates acknowledged that the Minutes had to be drafted and that the Chairperson had to approve them. Further, they stated that a copy should be filed and that copies were to be sent to members. Some candidates ignored parts of the stimulus and listed instead the steps to be taken following a meeting, such as cleaning the room, putting away materials.

In section (i) of part (c) candidates were asked to list four methods of payment, which can be used by someone travelling to a foreign country. Although there was a variety of responses to this section, they were generally weak. In section (ii) therefore, the rationale given for the selection of the method of payment had no basis, if the candidate could not identify acceptable ways to pay for expenditure in a foreign country.

Question 4

In section (a) candidates were required to list different sources of information for job vacancies. This was done satisfactorily. A few candidates however listed the requirements needed to qualify for a job which were mainly academic qualifications and skills. In a few cases, candidates listed reasons for accepting a job, instead of the source from which one could obtain information about job opportunities.

In section (b) candidates' knowledge about the type of information that can be obtained from travel agencies was tested. The performance in this part of the question was satisfactory.

In section (c) candidates' ability to write a letter of acceptance for a job offer was tested. Some candidates performed fairly well, but many displayed poor letter-writing skills. Some of the candidates did not use the stimulus material given and included their personal information instead. Other weaknesses in the responses included non inclusion of the inside address, not addressing the Human Resource Manager, non-identification of the position being offered or applied for, errors in spelling, grammar, punctuation and expression.

Section II was comprised of four optional questions.

Question 5

In section (a) candidates were required to list three reasons why the Human Resource office would conduct periodic interviews with employees. Some candidates failed to obtain marks for this part of the question because they referred instead to the job interview process. Those who earned marks mentioned reasons such as: to determine training needs, for updating employee records, the deployment of staff, and to get the employees' point of view about various issues in the organization. Some candidates seemed to have no knowledge of the content related to the objective that was tested and responded with irrelevant answers.

In section (b) candidates were asked to identify the reasons why a company may experience high labour turnover. Among the more popular responses were: low wages, unsatisfactory work conditions; limited opportunities for promotion; increase in workload with no support and the absence of mechanisation.

In section (c) candidates were provided with a form entitled Statement of Account on which they were required to record six given transactions. Most were able to complete the form with satisfactory results. A few errors were made in writing the name of the buyer. The responses of some candidates indicated that they did not have sufficient knowledge of the debit and credit entries, and were unable to access most of the marks awarded for this question.

Question 6

In section (a) candidates were asked to state the reason for having the notation *E & OE* on invoices. Most candidates gave satisfactory explanations which indicated that the notation allowed the vendor to reserve the right to make changes on the invoice if any errors were made on the part of the vendor with respect to the quantities or prices quoted on the order.

In section (b) candidates were asked to list the steps involved in the purchasing procedure. Most of the responses indicated the candidate had a satisfactory knowledge of this objective. Next, candidates had to complete transactions which had to be entered in a Cash Book. Most of the responses were satisfactory as they were entered in the appropriate columns, and the cash Book was balanced accurately.

Question 7

In part (a) of this question candidates were asked to suggest six reasons why it is necessary for a stock clerk to maintain accurate records in a large business. The most popular responses to this question were that accurate records are necessary to ascertain that sufficient stock was available, and to identify items that are overstocked in order to detect pilferage. Very few candidates were able to show a relationship between the need for accurate records and the company's policy regarding stock valuation, monitoring trends, profit analysis, budgeting or capital allocation.

In part (b) candidates were presented with four business cards from suppliers. They were required to classify the cards in the Index of Suppliers using firstly the name of the business and secondly the expertise or service offered. Most candidates were able to access the marks awarded for this part of the question. They were able to organise the index of suppliers using the names of the business. They were unable however, to organise the index according to the services offered. Also, some candidates wrote the name of the expert rather than the expertise or service offered. Very few candidates listed the names in alphabetical order, as is required in records management.

Question 8

In section (a) candidates' knowledge about procedures in the factory office was tested. They were asked to state the importance of having a list of tools, the Materials Report and the Operator's Job and Time Ticket in the production planning process. Generally the responses were vague and unsatisfactory. Candidates did not demonstrate in-depth knowledge of this objective of the syllabus.

In section (b) candidates were presented with a Time Card which they had to complete for an employee using the stimulus material given. The time sheet was completed satisfactorily by most candidates. However, the calculation of the hours worked and computation of the rate of pay, presented a challenge to several candidates. This was a however the most popular question in this section.

Recommendations to Teachers

1. Incorporate simulation or role-play in teaching methods/activities to reinforce the principal concepts taught, in this way misconceptions would be easily detected based on the choices made by the candidates during the simulation.
2. Use a model office, to give students an opportunity to conduct routine office activities like filing, using an index, getting information from the telephone directory.
3. Expose candidates to information about the available services such as those in the banking sector, from other territories in the region.
4. Develop a glossary of terms for each unit in the syllabus to assist candidates with explanations, definitions and descriptions.
5. Students should be given projects and research assignments on *Job Exploration* which simulate the type of activities in which they will be engaged upon graduation from Secondary School.
6. Provide opportunities for the practice of formatting letters and responding to different types of letters, paying specific attention to grammar and spelling of words that are used often.
7. Candidates should have more practice with reading questions and identifying the content from which the response should come.
8. Develop written examples of model answers to assist students as they develop responses to different questions on the past papers.
9. Expose students to different types of forms used in business.
10. Engage in collaborative delivery of topics with other teachers of the business subjects and the language area.

School Based Assessment (SBA)

The broad topic was sub-divided into the following sub-topics. Candidates were also allowed to select their own topic derived from the broad topic assigned.

The sub-topics were:

1. Emerging Office Careers at the Entry Level
2. Equal Opportunities in the Office
3. Gender Issues in the Office
4. Re-Defining Roles in the Office
5. The Office – A Safe Place to Work
6. Coping With Change
7. Ergonomics in the Office
8. The Modern Challenges of the Job Search
9. Accountability for Performance in the Workplace
10. Rights and Responsibilities of the Office Worker

The list below shows the areas of the School-Based Assessment in which the candidates' performances were highly satisfactory.

- (i) Area of Investigation
- (ii) Scope of the Investigation
- (iii) Objectives of the Research
- (iv) Selection / Description of the Sample
- (v) Methods of Collecting Data

The main areas of weakness were the Review of the Literature and the Analysis of Data.

Recommendations to Teachers

1. Liaise with the Ministry / Board of Education to ensure that the topic being researched is the current one assigned by the Caribbean Examinations' Council.
2. Encourage group work, however, each student must submit an INDEPENDENT project.
3. Do NOT submit photocopied projects.
4. If problems are encountered during the exercise of supervising / guiding students, teachers should seek assistance from the Local Registrar or the local education department in a timely manner that would facilitate the submission of projects by the deadline date for the territory.
5. Insert the detailed Mark Scheme in EACH student's portfolio so that the CXC Moderators can follow the procedure used to award marks.
6. Do NOT award half marks.

Paper 03/2

The case detailed some of the feelings experienced by a secondary school graduate awaiting a job. On acquiring a position he learned quickly and soon began to seek promotion to a position in another department.

Generally, the candidate population responded favourably to Paper 03/2 and the overall performance was satisfactory. There were indications however, that some candidates had limited knowledge of the syllabus and more specifically, the functions of the Human Resource Department.

Question 1

Candidates were required to identify sources from which the school leaver in the case could obtain information about available positions. The responses were generally good and included newspapers, radio and television, the internet, unsolicited applications, and word of mouth. Most candidates were able to list more than one correct source in order to access the marks awarded for this question.

Question 2

In the first part of this question candidates were required to identify two reasonable expectations that employees may have of their supervisors. Generally the responses were satisfactory. Candidates expected their supervisors to be fair, to show respect to all employees, assist where necessary, and give unambiguous guidelines and directives. There were some responses however, that were vague and inappropriate and centred on the employer rather than the supervisor.

In the second part of this question candidates were asked to identify two responsibilities that employees have to their employers. The responses were satisfactory and were generally more appropriate than those given in the first section. Candidates expected employees to be respectful, trustworthy, productive and conscientious.

Question 3

In this question candidates' understanding of the type of issues considered before hiring someone for a vacant position was assessed. The responses were generally good. Some of the considerations were qualifications, skills, expertise, department, references and performance at the interview.

Question 4

In this question candidates' ability to organise a list of publications as they would appear in a bibliography was tested. This proved to be difficult for most candidates and the very poor responses are an indication that candidates lacked knowledge of the content and practice with this activity. Greater attention should be paid to this topic as this is a process which will be required for tertiary education and possibly while conducting research on the job. The majority of candidates copied the items as they were given. The few candidates who listed the names of the authors of each publication with the surnames first, did not arrange the items in alphabetical order and failed to use the format expected in the SBAs. Several candidates made no attempt to respond.

Question 5

Candidates were required to write a letter applying for the new position of Stock Clerk in the company PIECE BY MEANS LTD as if they were already employed as a General Clerk in the same organisation. This was generally well done although a few candidates displayed poor letter-writing skills and there were instances of poor spelling and grammar. Some candidates used inappropriate format and addressed the letter to the Managing Director rather than the Human Resources Director. A few candidates used the incorrect complimentary close for the salutation they gave.

Question 6

Candidates were required to identify methods by which they could obtain information on customers' feelings about the products manufactured by PIECE BY MEANS LTD. This question was done satisfactorily, which is an indication that candidates were familiar with techniques for gathering data. Among those listed were questionnaires, observations, telephone and face-to-face interviews, suggestion boxes, and meetings with sales representatives.

Question 7

The responses to this question were generally satisfactory as most candidates were able to present a graphical representation of the data gathered about customer satisfaction. However, some of the weaknesses displayed were the failure to give the graph a title, to label the X and Y axes and the failure to use appropriate intervals. A few candidates had difficulty in plotting the graph.

Question 8

Candidates who achieved high scores in this question presented good suggestions that could be used by an employee to prepare for promotion within a company. While many candidates outlined the factors considered by management for promoting an employee, some of the responses were inadequate. Among the appropriate responses were taking additional courses, participating in in-house workshops and seminars, and displaying an appropriate attitude on the job.

Question 9

In this question candidates made suggestions about the provisions that were made by the Human Resource Department that could account for the high level of satisfaction of the staff of PIECE BY MEANS LTD. Most of the candidates gave satisfactory responses, and cited adequate wages, health and safety measures, meaningful staff appraisals and opportunities for promotion, among others.

Question 10

In this question candidates were required to make recommendations to persons waiting to be employed. The responses showed candidates' creativity and were generally relevant and satisfactory. These suggestions included doing volunteer work, taking additional classes to enhance skills, registering with an employment agency, and following-up previous applications as well as sending out unsolicited applications.