

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 2007

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION

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OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION
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GENERAL COMMENTS

Candidates' performance indicated that syllabus coverage was generally similar to that of previous years. In each paper some responses indicated that candidates were prepared for the examination, while in other instances the pattern of weaknesses continued. More specific comments will be addressed separately under each paper.

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

Candidates' performance in this paper was quite consistent with performance in June 2006. The overall mean of the paper in the 2007 examination was 35.54 compared with 34.80 in 2006. The highest mark achieved was 56 out of a total of 60.

Paper 02 – Essay

This paper consisted of two sections. Section I, which comprised four compulsory questions, was based on Units I, II, III, IV and XII. These questions were attempted by the majority of candidates.

Section II consisted of four optional questions taken from Units VII, VIII, IX, X and XI. Knowledge and application of procedures associated with specialized office activities and office routines were tested. Candidates were required to answer any two questions from Section II.

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

This paper is a written examination designed for the candidates who do not have a tutor for the supervision of the SBA project (out of school candidates). It was designed to test the candidates' ability to use their personal experiences on routine office activities that they may have acquired through observation or from doing the actual office tasks as a real employee. The paper consisted of ten short answer questions based on an office case. For this examination the case focused on Modules VIII and X of the syllabus.

In this paper, candidates' performance improved in some areas over that of previous examinations. It is noted that some topics continue to challenge candidates and affect their overall performance.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 02 - Essay

Section I – Compulsory Questions

Question 1

This question tested Module I, Objectives 2 (d) and 3 (c); Module V, Objectives (a – e).

For Part (a, i) candidates were required to give two reasons for the deployment of staff in an organization. It was worth 2 marks. Many candidates were not familiar with the term ‘deployment’ and interpreted it to mean ‘promotion or a means for getting a higher salary’.

For Part (a, ii), candidates were required to state two ways in which an employee may benefit from deployment. This was worth 2 marks. Some candidates repeated the answers given in Part (a, i) above.

For Part (b), candidates were asked to list three physical objects that can contribute to ergonomics in the office. This was worth 3 marks. Many responses indicated that candidates are unaware of the meaning of the term ‘ergonomics’ and overlooked the word ‘physical’ and gave broad responses like ‘environment’, ‘space’ or simply listed equipment or the use of technology.

For Part (c), candidates were to copy in their answer booklet a table that carried two column headings ‘employee’s responsibility’ and ‘employer’s responsibility’. They were to state one activity that indicates how each of the positive attitudes ‘team-spirit and cooperation, honesty, politeness, punctuality and regularity’ can be demonstrated. This was worth 8 marks. In many cases, the responses given for employees’ responsibility were repeated under employers’ responsibility. The responses for question 1, for the most part, were unsatisfactory.

Marks ranged from 0 to 15, and the mean was 5.7.

Question 2

This question tested Module II, Objectives 1 (c), 1 (a – d), (e) and 9 (c).

For Part (a, i), candidates were required to give one advantage and one disadvantage of using electronic mail (e-mail) as a means of communication in business. This was worth 2 marks. Responses on the advantages were well known, while for disadvantages, some candidates listed situations that did not pertain directly to the use of the electronic mail, for example, electrical failure.

For Part (a, ii), candidates were asked to list three examples of visual forms of communication. This was worth 3 marks. Many candidates listed examples of written communication.

For Part (a, iii) candidates were required to state two barriers to effective communication. This was worth 2 marks. The word ‘barriers’ was a challenge to some candidates.

For Part (b) candidates were to assume the given name of the receptionist at Ambit Marketing Services. They were to draft a voice message for customers, from information that was provided. This was worth 8 marks. The majority of candidates obtained full marks.

The overall performance in this question was satisfactory. Marks ranged from 0 to 15, while the mean was 7.5.

Question 3

This question tested Module III, Objectives 1 (a - c) and 2 (a - c).

For Part (a, i), candidates were to list four steps in the information cycle of an information management system. This was worth 4 marks. Many candidates listed the steps for filing a document.

For Part (a, ii), candidates were to identify three types of information that will be found in the records management system in a school. This was worth 3 marks. The majority of candidates were able to earn full marks for this segment of the question.

In Part (b, i), candidates were required to show the correct indexing order for four names. A four-column table was provided. This was worth 4 marks. This part of the question was not done well. In many instances only the first column was used to insert personal and business names. Names with 'of' and 'of the' challenged the majority of candidates with their placement in the indexing order.

For Part (b, ii), candidates were asked to prepare the cross-reference sheet for one name. This was worth 1 mark. Many candidates were unable to earn the allocated mark.

For Part (b, iii), candidates were asked to arrange the three remaining names in alphabetical order. This part of the question was also a challenge to many candidates. This was worth 3 marks.

It is to be noted that while information management is a major topic, candidates continue to experience difficulties. The overall performance in this question was weak. Marks ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 4.7.

Question 4

This question tested Module VI, Objectives 1 (b), 2 (a), 3(a) and Module XII.

For Part (a), candidates were to state three ways in which employees, while working in reception and hospitality, could portray a positive image of the business. This was worth 3 marks. The majority of candidates provided good quality responses to this part of the question.

For Part (b), candidates were required to identify two categories of visitors to the Reception and Hospitality area. This was worth 2 marks. The majority of candidates answered satisfactorily.

For Part (c), candidates were asked to list two steps that should be followed by the receptionist when cancelling an appointment. This was worth 2 marks. This segment was also well known to the majority of candidates.

For Part (d), candidates were to develop a checklist of four factors and four considerations to help them make a decision about applying for an advertised position. This was worth 8 marks. In many instances candidates repeated the worked example in their booklet. Some demonstrated that they were unaware of the meaning of the words 'factors' and 'considerations' and their uses within the context of applying for a job.

The overall performance in this question was satisfactory. Marks ranged from 0 to 15, and the mean was 9.4.

Section II – Optional Questions

Question 5

This question tested Module VII, Objectives 1 (a), (g) and 4 (a).

For Part (a), candidates were to identify three criteria that employees may use for short-listing applicants for a job. This was worth 3 marks. Many candidates were unclear about the meaning of the term ‘short list’ and indicated post-short-listing activities, for example, interviews.

For Part (b), candidates were to state three possible reasons for the dismissal of an employee from a job. This was worth 3 marks. Candidates responded to this part of the question quite well.

For Part (c, i), candidates were to use data provided to calculate the number of working days for the given number of employees for two consecutive years. This was worth 2 marks. Simple multiplication was to be used and many candidates were unable to provide correct responses.

For Part (c, ii), candidates were to calculate the percentage of working days lost in each of the two years. This was worth 4 marks.

For Part (c, iii), candidates were to draw a comparative graph. This was worth 3 marks. This part of the question was a challenge for the majority of candidates who attempted to answer it. In many instances they were unable to draw a correct graph, for example, a bar, column or pie.

Marks ranged from 0 to 14, with the mean of 4.2.

Question 6

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

For Part (a) candidates were to state three factors that the purchasing manager of a business should consider when ordering goods. This was worth 3 marks.

For Part (b) candidates were to give three reasons for keeping control of stock in a business. This was worth 3 marks.

For Part (c), candidates were required to use the form provided and the data given, to calculate the value of inventory using the FIFO method of stock valuation. This was worth 9 marks. This segment of the question challenged candidates as they were unable to apply the ‘first in, first out’ principles to stock movement.

Generally, the performance on this entire question was satisfactory.

Marks ranged from 1 to 15 and the mean was 6.9.

Question 7

This question tested Module XI, Objectives 1, 2 and 3.

For Part (a), candidates were to state two duties performed by clerical staff in the factory office. Some candidates provided general duties instead of duties that were specific to the factory office. This was worth 2 marks.

For Part (b), candidates were to list four documents used in the dispatch and transport of goods. Overall performance was satisfactory; however, many candidates were unable to provide the names of documents relevant to the factory office. This was worth 4 marks.

For Part (c) candidates were to use the form provided to complete an accident report form to enable the factory manager to sign it. This was worth 9 marks. In spite of the instructions provided, many candidates were unable to benefit from the 1 mark that was allocated for leaving the factory manager's signature space blank.

This was the most popular of the optional questions. Marks ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 9.4.

Question 8

This question tested Module X, Objectives 1 (a), 2 (a) and Module VIII, Objective 2(a).

For Part (a), candidates were to list three factors that must be considered when organizing promotional activities for a specific target market. This was worth 3 marks.

For Part (b), candidates were to identify three persons with whom the marketing clerk may work to generate suitable packaging designs to promote their products. This was worth 3 marks.

Most candidates who answered these parts gave satisfactory responses.

For Part (c, i), candidates were presented with payroll data. They were required to calculate gross pay. For Part (c, ii) they were to calculate net wages for one week. This was worth 9 marks. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this section. Responses indicated that some candidates experienced difficulty with the calculation of gross and net wages. Many candidates did not show their working steps and simply provided an answer. As a result, they were unable to score marks for the workings seen, even if the final figure was incorrect.

Performance was weak on this question. Marks ranged from 0 to 15, and the mean was 5.8.

Paper 03/2 General Proficiency

The Alternative to the School-Based Assessment

In order to answer the ten compulsory, short response type questions, candidates were required to read the stimulus material provided in the form of a case scenario. The entire paper was worth 50 marks. Modules II – Communications, VII – Human Resource Office, VIII – Accounts Office, X – Sales and Marketing, XI – Factory Office were tested.

The Case

The case was based on Mike's Hardware Store, a family oriented business that is seeking to expand and carve a deeper niche through the use of modern technology.

Question 1

Candidates were required to design an advertisement for Mike's Hardware Store to celebrate the company's 40th anniversary. The quality of responses for this question was of a high level as the majority of candidates used their creative skills. In many instances, however, they failed to use the information provided in the question within their responses. This question was worth 5 marks. The mean was 3.6.

Question 2

Candidates were asked to identify one way in which each of the departments (Purchasing, Accounting, Advertising, Sales and Despatch) contributes to Mike's Hardware Store. This was worth 5 marks. This was generally well done. The mean was 3.5.

Question 3

Candidates were required to list two possible types of dry stock and two types of furniture stock that would be on sale. This was worth 4 marks. This was generally well done. The mean was 2.71.

Question 4

This question asked candidates to design a questionnaire for Mike's Hardware Store to gather information from customers and prospective customers on the possibility of establishing a third store. This was worth 7 marks. Many of the items submitted did not relate to the case or its content. The mean was 3.7.

Question 5 (a)

Candidates were asked to state three marketing strategies that could be put in place by Mike's Hardware store to attract customers to purchase items at competitive prices. This was worth 3 marks. Candidates' performance on this question was satisfactory.

Question 5 (b)

This question asked candidates to identify three ways in which Mike's Hardware Store can ensure customer satisfaction. This was worth 3 marks.

Question 6

Candidates were asked to identify three safety measures that should be put in place by Mike's Hardware Store in the making of furniture. This was worth 3 marks. The mean was 1.4.

Question 7

Candidates were asked to state three precautions that may be taken by employees at Mike's Hardware Store to ensure their safety at the workplace. This was worth 3 marks. The mean was 1.4.

Question 8

This question asked candidates to state three traditional duties that may have been performed at Mike's Hardware Store, but which are now done using advanced technology. This was worth 6 marks. The mean was 2.5.

Question 9 (a)

Candidates were required to identify three personal skills/qualities that the staff would display at Mike's Hardware Store if they are to maintain efficient and dependable service. This question was worth 3 marks.

Question 9 (b)

This question asked candidates to identify three documents that would be used on a regular basis in the accounts department at Mike's Hardware Store. The majority of candidates were able to secure full marks. This was worth 3 marks.

Question 10

This question asked candidates to make five recommendations to Mike's Hardware Store that are likely to ensure a low turnover of staff. This question was worth 5 marks. The mean was 2.3.

The overall performance on the paper was satisfactory. Marks ranged from 0 – 49. The overall mean was 28.6.

School-Based Assessment

The School-Based Assessment must be presented by all candidates who enter for Office Administration and do not sit the 03/2 paper. Its objective is to develop in candidates, essential research skills that will enable them to function more effectively in the world of work.

Responses indicate that some of the candidates were not satisfactorily prepared and guided in their preparation processes. Additionally, teachers' strengths in particular areas were clearly evident in some schools where the span of topics covered were very limited.

A general observation is that while criteria are identified in the guidelines for the School-Based Assessment certain criteria, in far too many instances, were not adhered to and this resulted in the loss of marks. Some instances were:

- some candidates misinterpreted the 'functions of departments'. They provided the functions of individuals;
- letters were not of a mailable quality. There were many with inconsistent styles, wording and uncorrected errors;
- the schedule of activities was not in keeping with that outlined in the mark scheme;
- failure to write with the required number of words;
- failure to provide graphics;
- some schools are using the old version of the mark scheme;
- a wide disparity between the teacher's marks and the moderator's marks.

Segments on Regulations, Health and Safety, and Staff Rules were well done in most portfolios that were moderated.

Recommendations for Overall Improvement

1. It is important that the current syllabus be used by students as part of their study and preparation for the examination;
2. Teachers should familiarize themselves with the new concepts and jargon in the subject and incorporate them in the teaching and learning processes;
3. Several student-centred strategies should be utilized to enable cooperative groups and problem-based learning approaches in an effort to strengthen and develop student performance;
4. Increase practice in the completion of forms, preparation of checklists, reception registers;
5. More teacher guidance and practice opportunities in concepts that require calculation of values of stock inventory, for example, the FIFO/LIFO methods are required;
6. Students should be encouraged to present information as much as possible, in sentence form instead of one-word responses;
7. Students should be encouraged to follow examination instructions. More attention should be paid to how they number questions, and respond the correct number of questions in each section of the paper, for example, Paper 02.