

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
CARIBBEAN SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE
JANUARY 2009**

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION

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OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATIONS

JANUARY 2009

GENERAL COMMENTS

Candidates' overall performance in the January 2009 Office Administration sitting indicated that syllabus coverage was similar to that of previous years. In each of the three papers, responses revealed that candidates were prepared for the examination, notwithstanding, weaknesses in some areas. More specific comments will be addressed separately under each paper. Three papers were offered at the General Proficiency level:

Paper 01 – Multiple choice

Paper 02 – Short answer

Paper 3/2 – Alternative to the SBA

The examination was designed to ensure broad coverage of the syllabus and the objectives tested were chosen from all the modules.

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

Candidates' performance in the 2009 paper did not show an improvement over that of January 2008. The overall mean of the paper in the 2008 examination was 40 compared with 36.51 for January 2009. Marks ranged from 0 to 56 out of a total of 60.

Paper 02 – Short Answer

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

Section II consisted of four optional questions taken from Units VII, IX, X and XI. Knowledge and the application of procedures associated with specialized office activities and office routines were tested. The overall mean for this Paper was 39.2 compared with 45.1 in 2008. Scores ranged from 0 to 69 out of a maximum of 90 marks. However, some topics continue to challenge candidates and this is reflected in their overall performance.

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

This paper is a written examination that targets private candidates who would not have the opportunity to complete SBA projects required of school candidates who are under direct supervision of their teachers. The paper was designed to test the candidates' ability to use their personal experiences on routine office activities acquired through observation or from doing the actual office tasks as a real employee. The paper consisted of ten short essay-type questions based on an office case. For this examination the case focused on Units I, II, VII, and X of the syllabus.

In this paper, candidates' performance was below that of the last two years. It is noted that some areas continue to challenge candidates and affect their overall performance. The overall mean for this paper was 20.91 compared to 28.50 in 2008 and 26.04 in 2007. Marks ranged from 01 to 43 out 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 III (Objective 1), Module II (Objective 3 (a)), and Module I (Objectives 3 (a) and (b)).

For Part (a), candidates were required to list three steps used to process a letter from receipt to filing under an appropriate heading. This was worth 3 marks. Most candidates were able to list one or two of the steps which include processing enclosures, index, code and sort, and were able to score at least one mark out of a total of three marks allotted to this part of the question.

For Part (b), candidates were required to draft a letter in response to the offer as stated in the letter given. Most candidates failed to insert "Draft", hence only about 6% of the candidates were awarded a mark in this area. In their response, some candidates used the date the letter was sent to "Staropener" rather than the date given in the question, the examination date or any date after the date given in the question. This was worth 8 marks.

In Part (c), candidates were to list one advantage and one disadvantage each of the Conventional Plan and the Open Plan. Part (c) was widely known and most candidates performed satisfactorily. Some candidates, however, were not able to clearly distinguish between the Convention Plan (otherwise known as traditional, enclosed or cellular) and the Open Plan. This was worth 4 marks.

Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 13 and the mean was 6.11.

Question 2

This question tested Module II (Objective 2), Module VI (Objective 1 (b)) and Module V (Objective 1 (a)).

For Part (a), candidates were required to list four factors that a business should consider when deciding to use the World Wide Web (WWW) as a medium of communication. This was worth 4 marks.

The majority of candidates responded satisfactorily on this part of the question, giving appropriate responses such as level of training for staff, availability of equipment/URL/Internet/Website, cost, audience and nature of the communication.

For Part (b), candidates were required to state three ways in which an itinerary could be important to a manager who has to travel abroad to address a marketing group. This was worth 3 marks.

Many candidates performed unsatisfactorily on this part of the question, seemingly misinterpreting the instructions given. The candidates gave the meaning of an itinerary instead of giving its importance to persons traveling. Some appropriate responses would include: keep manager informed, organized, and providing supplemental data, such as documents required.

For Part (c), candidates were to prepare a Notice and Agenda to circulate to members of the Marketing Department, informing them of the manager's intention to convene a meeting within two days. The meeting was scheduled to take place in the conference room where the team would elect a member to head a committee that would put the marketing plan into action so that the jeans would be available to the public by the end of the next month. This was worth 8 marks.

This segment of the question was done unsatisfactorily. Many candidates were not able to distinguish between the content relating to the notice and that pertaining to an agenda. In addition, the correct format for a combined notice and agenda was not demonstrated. The notice should include the venue, date, and time; while the agenda should show information such as "call to order, confirmation of minutes, matters arising, adjournment".

Marks ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 7.55.

Question 3

This question tested Module III (Objective 3), Module III (Objective 2 (ii)), and Module IV (Objective 2 (c)).

For Part (a), candidates were to identify three steps that should be taken with files that will no longer be used. This was worth 3 marks.

Most candidates failed to give all three steps requested. Some candidates gave steps for dealing with active/current files. However, a few candidates gave appropriate responses such as: verify that the file is no longer needed, shred/destroy, put on microfilm, or store in boxes and archive.

For Part (b) candidates were to state four ways in which a charge-out card is useful to the records management clerk. This was worth 4 marks.

This part of the question challenged many candidates who seemed to be unfamiliar with the term “charge-out card”, and gave the usefulness of the “time card” instead. A few candidates were able to give appropriate responses such as monitoring use, monitor path, and make file available to many people.

Part (c) tested candidates’ ability to prepare a Reception Register with appropriate headings and record the visitors to a company. It was worth 8 marks.

This was the most popular part of the question. Most candidates were able to use appropriate headings, such as date, name, company, address, time in/out, and included the heading of the form which is “Reception Register”. However, many candidates failed to arrange the visitors in correct chronological order according to the time of their appointments.

Marks ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 7.39.

Question 4

This question tested Module V (Objective 1 (c, e and f), Module V (Objective 3), and Module VI (Objective 1 (a).

For Part (a), candidates were to define: verbatim, proxy, and casting vote. This was worth 3 marks.

Although some satisfactory responses were given, some candidates failed to define the term “casting vote” adequately, giving interpretations such as casting a vote, or showing of hands to represent your vote. Some candidates interpreted “proxy” to mean “close proximity”, while others defined “verbatim” as verbal or oral presentation. A more appropriate response for “casting vote” would be: the vote of a chairman in making a decision when there are equal votes for and against an item under discussion. Verbatim is using the exact words as a direct quotation from oral or written text, while proxy is someone who is authorized, usually in writing, to act on behalf of another person at a meeting.

For Part (b), candidates were to list two of the duties performed in a meeting by the chairman and the secretary. This was worth 4 marks.

While the majority of candidates were able to provide correct responses, many failed to relate to the duties performed in a meeting and not duties performed before and after by the chairman and the secretary. The chairman’s duties include conducting meetings in an orderly manner and ensuring that standing orders are observed, while the secretary records and circulates minutes, records attendance, reads correspondence and assists with seating arrangements.

In Part (c), candidates were given a scenario where an executive will be attending a regional conference, given certain dates. Registration for the event must be completed in advance at the conference venue in Belize. Candidates were required to assist in making the arrangements for travel by preparing a checklist showing four things that they must do to ensure the executive member attends the conference. This was worth 8 marks.

This part of the question was generally challenging to many candidates. In preparing a checklist, instructions must be given for its completion and must be done using an appropriate format. In most instances, candidates were able to list the four things they should do to ensure the executive attends the conference. These include: registration, airline booking, taxi arrangement, itinerary and hotel accommodation.

The overall performance in this question was satisfactory. Marks ranged from 0 to 12 and the mean was 5.99.

Section II – Optional Questions

Question 5

This question tested Module I (Objective 2 (d)) and Module VII (Objective 1 (f, d)).

For Part (a), candidates were to state three reasons why a business may find it necessary to deploy staff. This was worth 3 marks.

Candidates' performance indicated that many were not familiar with the term "deploying staff" and thus were unable to give the required number of correct responses such as: exposure of employees to new skills, unethical practices such as theft and habitual lateness, restructuring objectives and reduction of personal discomfort.

For Part (b), candidates were to state three effects of staff welfare programmes within a company. This was worth 3 marks.

While some candidates gave irrelevant responses, others were able to provide appropriate responses such as: satisfied employees lower labour turnover, increased productivity and less cause for industrial actions.

In Part (c), candidates were required to outline two ways in which an employee appraisal system may benefit the employee and the organization. It was worth 9 marks.

The overall performance in this part of the question was satisfactory. Correct responses for the employee include: assessing strengths to better position them, assess weaknesses to facilitate training, motivate and identify promotional opportunities and capacities. For the organization, correct responses given include: achievement of organizational goals, help organization to cater better for individual training needs, for fair/consistent remuneration, inform organization to place employees for optimal utilization of skills and meeting Human Resource Management requirements.

Marks ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 5.43.

Question 6

This question tested Module IX (Objective 1 (a, b, e), Module IX (Objective 5) and Module X (Objective 4 (d)).

For Part (a) (i), (ii), and (iii) candidates were to define the following terms used in sales transactions: Free on Board (FOB); Cost, Insurance & Freight (CIF) and Ex Works. It was worth 3 marks.

Some responses given indicated evidence of candidates' lack of information on the definitions of the terms used in sales transactions. An expected response for FOB would be: purchase price includes all costs up to and including loading on to the carrier; CIF: price includes all costs including the insurance of the shipment; while Ex Works means the cost of goods is the basic price and does not include shipment costs.

For Part (b), candidates were to state three ways in which the use of modern technology at "point of sale" check-out counters has facilitated inventory control. This was worth 3 marks.

This segment of the question presented some difficulty to many candidates who should have included in their responses: perpetual inventory, signals reorder, more ready assessment of trends and unique identification of items through barcodes.

For Part (c) (i), candidates were to use the Purchase Order Form provided to complete an order in the Purchasing Department. This part of the question was well done. The majority of candidates obtained maximum marks. This was worth 7 marks.

For Part (c) (ii), candidates were asked to calculate the revised purchase order total, given a quantity discount of 2% which has been applied to the price of the envelopes. The performance on this part of the question was satisfactory. This was worth 2 marks.

This question was attempted by the majority of the candidates. Marks ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 6.91.

Question 7

The question tested Module X (Objective 1 (d)), Module X (Objective 2 (i)) and Module X (Objective 4).

For Part (a), candidates were asked to give three reasons why it is important for the sales and marketing office to engage in customer follow-up. This was worth 3 marks. Some responses indicated candidates' inability to give three clear reasons which should include: finding out what consumers need, determining whether the product was satisfactory and to maintain the company's clientele.

For Part (b), candidates were to list three duties of a clerk in the sales department. This was worth 3 marks.

This segment of the question was satisfactorily done and included: preparation of documents, maintenance and filing of records, liaise with departments and demonstrate good customer service/relationship.

For Part (c), candidates were required to compute the discount and other charges to reconcile an account as certain discounts were omitted from a customer's invoice which was shown in an incomplete record. It was worth 9 marks.

Many candidates computed the correct discount and other charges to reconcile the account. However, some candidates incurred errors in computing the discount and the totaling process.

This question was also a popular optional question. Marks ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 7.75.

Question 8

This question tested Module XI (Objective 1 (b)), Module XI (Objective 2 (d) and Module XI (Objective 3(ii) (a)).

For Part (a), candidates were to state two ways in which ensuring quality control of goods produced in a factory will be of benefit to the factory and customer. It was worth 4 marks.

Candidates' responses to part (a) were satisfactory which included for the factory: optimize materials/skills, save capital, and maintaining reputation and goodwill, while for the customer: better confidence in the product/manufacturer and recommendation to others.

For Part (b), candidates were to identify two ways in which a carefully completed cost card would benefit a company responsible for the production of goods and the provision of services. This was worth 2 marks.

Responses to this part of the question indicated that candidates had difficulty in providing appropriate answers which should include: more accurate pricing, better profit/loss analysis and analysis of internal systems.

For Part (c), candidates were to use the information provided to complete a delivery schedule, given a layout of Mongouge. They were to copy the headings "Destination" and "Client" in their answer booklet and indicate the vehicle, vehicle number and the driver, showing a logical delivery sequence. It was worth 9 marks.

Some candidates were unable to satisfy the requirements of this question. The responses indicated that many candidates had challenges in completing a logical delivery sequence, failed to design the form as required and state the name of the document they were preparing.

This was not a popular optional question. Marks ranged from 0 to 13 and the mean was 8.64.

Paper 03/2

The Alternative to the School-Based Assessment

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

The Case

The case was entitled “The Rise and Fall of Apex Inc.” It highlighted a large service complex that offers training in the use of office supplies and equipment in an ideal business environment. Despite their effort to provide quality service to clients, coupled with good customer relations, they had to face stiff competition from other firms to remain viable. Salaries for staff and scholarships for employees were posing a huge financial constraint and an immediate answer would be to increase the fees for training. This spelt trouble for Apex Inc. as fewer persons began to register for training.

Question 1

Candidates were required to state one way in which each of the following: file folders, treasury tags and CD-ROMS are used at the company on a daily basis in the training of clients. This was worth 3 marks. The mean mark was 1.88.

Some candidates seemingly overlooked the part of the question that referred to the training of clients, and gave definitions instead. Appropriate responses would include: the file folder could be used for the teaching of principles of records management and to hold training materials; the treasury tags could be used for teaching principles of filing and to secure training materials, while CD Roms could be used for teaching principles of storage on the computer or to store content/information for training.

Question 2

Candidates were asked to identify four corresponding modern replacements for manual typewriters, telex machines, spirit duplicators and PMBX switchboards, and state the purpose of each piece of modern equipment. This was worth 8 marks. The mean mark was 4.44.

Most candidates gave the computer or word processor as the correct response to manual typewriters, and computer modem with e-mail and Internet, telephone or fax machine for the telex machine. Others failed to give the photocopier and Risograph to replace the spirit duplicator, and the PABX switchboard with answering machine to replace the PMBX switchboard.

Question 3

Candidates were required to state two ways in which the layout of furniture and lighting as two ergonomic factors contribute to enhancing the workplace. This was worth 4 marks. The mean mark was 1.69.

Some candidates failed to state how the two factors contribute to enhancing the workplace. Expected responses for the layout of furniture should include: proper layout speaks to optimal use of floor space and employees' comfort for increased productivity; while lighting, when evenly distributed promotes proper illumination, free of shadows/glare on computer screens to allow employees to work efficiently.

Question 4 (a)

This part of the question asked candidates to identify three methods of gathering information in a survey of clients' needs and concerns about new and improved services. This was worth 3 marks.

Most candidates responded correctly by stating: interviews, questionnaires, observation, suggestion box/help desk for collection of complaints, and focus groups/stakeholders as methods to gather information.

Question 4 (b)

In this part of the question, candidates were to design an instrument with four items to be used in one of the methods they identified in 4 (a). This was worth 4 marks

Some responses to items given by candidates were irrelevant to the issues outlined in the case. Responses should have included: What types of office supplies are used in training clients? What modern equipment is procured to replace traditional equipment? What is the quality of service given to clients? What health and safety measures are practised by the business?

Question 5

Candidates were asked to state three health and safety precautions that Apex Inc. should implement to ensure that clients are adequately protected. This was worth 3 marks. The mean mark was 1.08.

Correct responses given included: safety equipment (fire extinguishers, security cameras, smoke detectors), protective clothing where necessary, safety signs, handrails, first aid kit, training, and adequate room/proper lighting.

Question 6

Candidates were asked to identify three things, other than increasing fees, that Apex Inc. could do to ensure their survival in a highly competitive market. This was worth 3 marks. The mean was 1.32.

Among the appropriate responses given by the candidates were: freeze salaries, fund raising, vigilant in spending patterns, diversify and strategic management.

Question 7

This question asked candidates to state four computer applications that Apex Inc. could offer to their clients to make them marketable. This was worth 4 marks. The mean mark was 1.26.

This was satisfactorily done and included the following responses: Word, PowerPoint, Excel, Access, Publisher and Quicken.

Question 8

Candidates were required to state four jobs/professions in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and for each job/profession identified, state its function. This question was worth 8 marks. The mean mark was 2.52.

Correct responses given for ICT jobs/professions included: Data Entry Operator, Technicians, IT Teacher, Computer Sales Reps, ICT Managers, Systems Analysts, and Graphic Designers. Most candidates indicated a good knowledge base of the functions of the majority of the professions identified.

Question 9

This question asked candidates to draft a memorandum to all members of staff, from the managing director, inviting them to a meeting to discuss the restructuring programme of the company. The meeting was scheduled for the main Conference Room at 2:00 p.m. on Monday, January 19, 2009. The question was worth 6 marks. The mean mark was 3.30.

Some candidates failed to include the heading "Memorandum" and to insert the sub-headings: To, From, Date and Subject. The content for the body of the memorandum was satisfactorily done based on the information given, and correct grammar, spelling and structure were used.

Question 10

This question asked candidates to state two ways in which Apex Inc. could seek to maintain good interpersonal relationships with employees during the restructuring process. This was worth 4 marks. The mean mark was 1.77.

Generally, candidates included correct responses such as: open communication with staff, put support systems in place, develop trust, be honest, act fairly/impartially, set appropriate timelines, and negotiate in good faith.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERALL IMPROVEMENT

1. Candidates should acquire a personal copy of the syllabus and incorporate it in the process of their examination preparation. The use of past papers would be of invaluable help in time management and preparation for the actual examination.
2. Greater emphasis should be placed on the later modules of the syllabus and newer content areas to develop a clear understanding of examination requirements and guidelines, and in keeping with current trends and practices at the workplace.
3. There should be increased practice in the completion of forms and other documents, especially preparation of drafts, checklists, registers and travel schedules.
4. Candidates should be aware of the rules of grammar, spelling, structure and presentation in Office Administration activities and apply these competently.