

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 2010

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION

GENERAL PROFICIENCY

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GENERAL COMMENTS

The Office Administration examination is offered in January and May/June each year. There was a candidate entry of approximately 17,800 in May/June 2010. Seventy-eight per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I – III. The mean score for the examination was 106.67 out of 200 marks.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

Paper 01 consisted of 60 multiple choice items. The mean on the paper was 32.18 and the marks ranged from 0 to 56. Sixty-two per cent of the candidates earned 30 marks or more.

Paper 02 – Essay

This paper consisted of two sections. Section I comprised four compulsory questions and was based on Units I, II, III and V.

Section II consisted of four optional questions taken from Units VII, VIII, IX, X, and XI. Candidates were required to answer two questions from Section II. The mean on the paper was 43.03 out of a possible 90 marks. Approximately 47 per cent of candidates earned at least half of the maximum mark on this paper.

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

This paper targeted candidates who were registered in private institutions and would not have completed the School-Based Assessment. The paper tested candidates' ability to use their personal experiences on routine office activities acquired through observation, or as employees in an actual office. The paper consisted of ten structured questions based on a case study. For this examination, the case focused on Units II, III, IV and V of the syllabus.

The mean on the paper was 22.64 out of a possible 50 marks. Approximately 40 cent of the candidates earned at least half of the maximum mark on this paper.

Paper 02 – Essay

Section I - Compulsory Questions

Question 1

This question tested Module I (Objectives 1 (b) and 5 (a-f)).

In Part (a) (i), candidates were asked to identify three channels, other than the consumer, that a manufacturer or producer may use to distribute his goods and services. This was worth 3 marks. For Part (a) (ii), candidates were required to state two roles that the office should perform in the exchange of goods and services. Most candidates responded competently. It was worth 2 marks.

For Part (b), candidates were required to complete the organization chart that was provided to show the positions for general manager, secretary and administrative assistant. This part of the question which was worth 2 marks was answered satisfactorily.

Part (c) of the question was based on a short scenario. Candidates were to state two ways in which the applicant could contribute to efficiency in the organization by her use of literacy, word processing, time management and problem-solving skills. Many candidates provided definitions for these terms and did not indicate how they contributed to the efficiency of the organization.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 6.45.

Question 2

This question tested Module II (Objectives 6 (a-g) and 8).

For Part (a) (i), candidates were required to state three techniques that an employee should display in answering the company's telephone. Candidates' misinterpretation of this question resulted in their provision of examples instead of techniques. This was worth 3 marks. For Part (a) (ii), candidates were expected to list three types of information that may be found in the telephone directory. This was worth 3 marks.

For Part (b) (i), candidates were to state one reason why knowledge of time zones is important in business. This was worth 1 mark.

Part (b) (ii) asked candidates to copy the table with named countries and the number of hours that they were either behind or ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). They were then required to calculate the time for the three countries and indicate the time using the 12-hour clock. Some candidates miscalculated while others did not write the time in its correct format to include 'a.m.' or 'p.m.'. This was worth 3 marks.

For part (b) (iii), candidates were to convert time provided in the 12-hour clock format the 24-hour clock format. The performance of candidates indicated that they were challenged with calculating time and its conversion to the 24-hour clock. Some incorrect responses included the use of 'a.m.' or 'p.m' when they should have stated 'hours'. This was worth 5 marks.

Overall performance on this question was satisfactory. The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 7.50.

Question 3

This question tested Module III (Objectives 1 (i)(b), (iii) and 2 (a)).

In Part (a) (i), candidates were asked to state two reasons for preserving records in a business. This was worth 2 marks. For Part (a), (ii), candidates were required to identify two means by which data may be preserved. It was worth 2 marks.

For Part (a) (iii), candidates were to provide one task for each of the three duties that the records management clerk is expected to perform. This was worth 3 marks. This part of the question presented the most difficulty to candidates who defined the terms instead of providing tasks.

Part (b), asked candidates to arrange a list of names in an alphabetical filing system. The names were similar in their spelling and filing arrangement. This factor proved challenging for some candidates who were unable to use the specific rules that applied to the alphabetic placement. Many candidates were able to obtain partial marks for segments of the list that were correctly ordered.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 9.49.

Question 4

This question tested Module V (Objectives 1 (a, g), 5 (d) and Module II (Objective 3 (b)).

In Part (a) (i), candidates were asked to state one follow-up activity of a meeting that should be performed by the chairperson. This was worth 1 mark. In Part (a) (ii), candidates were required to state three reasons for sending copies of minutes of the previous meeting to members ahead of the next meeting day. This was worth 3 marks.

For Part (b), candidates were required to list three items of business that may be included on the agenda of a meeting. It was worth 3 marks.

For Part (c), candidates were to draft a memo; for the general manager's signature, to all members of staff, to explain the problem of dwindling attendance at meetings. In addition, candidates were to suggest four actions that can be taken to deal with the problem.

Part (b) was widely known and candidates offered many correct responses. However, for Part (c), many candidates wrote letters instead of memos. They disregarded the instruction to prepare a draft to be signed by the general manager and instead advanced information as if they had the final word, while offering very severe penalties that were outside of accepted labour practices.

The marks for this question ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 5.07.

Question 5

This question, which was the most popular of the options in Section II, tested Module VII (Objective No.1) and Module IX (Objectives 3 and 4).

In Part (a) (i), candidates were required to state two reasons for the conduct of an induction programme by the human resource management office. Many candidates offered responses that did not reflect the requirements of an induction programme. This was worth 2 marks.

In Part (a) (ii), candidates were to state two purposes for appraising employees in an organization. This was worth 2 marks.

For Part (b), candidates were required to identify two duties of the purchasing clerk. This segment of the question was well done by the majority of candidates. It was worth 2 marks.

For Part (c) (i), candidates were to use the form provided to complete a purchase requisition. This was worth 5 marks. In Part (c) (ii) candidates were to complete the order form provided. This was worth 4 marks.

The performance of candidates on this question was generally good. The marks ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 8.80.

Question 6

This question tested Module VIII (Objectives 2 and 9).

For Part (a) (i), candidates were asked to list three items of information that the accounts clerk may place on an employee's Pay Advice. It was worth 3 marks. In Part (a) (ii), candidates were required to state three reasons usually considered for paying an employee by cheque. This was worth 3 marks.

In Part (b), candidates were asked to use the form provided to record transactions of the Petty Cash Book, balance the book and restore the Imprest. Common challenges for candidates were recording transactions under the appropriate headings and restoring the Imprest.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 7.98.

Question 7

This question tested Module X (Objectives 2, 3 and 4).

For Part (a) (i), candidates were required to state one function each of the fax machine, computer and answering machine as used in the sales and marketing department. It was worth 3 marks.

In Part (a) (ii), candidates were to identify three machines used in the sales office, apart from those named in (a) (i). This was worth 3 marks.

In Part (b), candidates were presented with questions based on a scenario and were asked to use the form provided to prepare an invoice to reflect the given sales transaction. This was worth 5 marks. In (ii), they were expected to calculate the cash discount if the account is paid up within 20 days, while in (iii) they were to calculate the payment that was required if the bill is settled with a late fee in effect. In both instances, the questions were worth 2 marks each.

The question requested that candidates show all working and many candidates did not adhere to this request. As a result, candidates who made errors in the final calculation could not be given partial credit. This segment of the question proved very challenging for some candidates.

The marks for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 6.03.

Question 8

This question, which was the least popular of those in Section II, tested Module X (Objectives 1 and 2).

For Part (a) (i), candidates were required to list three specific duties performed by a clerk in a factory office. It was worth 3 marks. In Part (a) (ii), candidates were to state three ways in which a factory office can ensure that goods are completed on schedule. This was worth 3 marks.

In Part (b), candidates were provided with a flow chart that showed the movement of documents between the factory office and the despatch and transport office. In Part (i), they were expected to identify four documents that move in both directions between the factory office and the despatch and transport office. This was worth 4 marks.

For Part (b) (ii), candidates were to state three ways in which the factory office and the despatch and transport office may depend on each other for the efficient operation of a business. This part was worth 3 marks and offered the most challenge to candidates who responded to this question. Many candidates provided the same response for each instance.

In Part (b) (iii), candidates were to explain two problems that may arise if both departments are unable to coordinate their activities. This was worth 2 marks.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 13 and the mean was 3.89.

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

The case discussed a firm of young attorneys and its office staff. The key clerical positions included that of the receptionist/telephonist and the administrative assistant. The receptionist/telephonist was overwhelmed by her duties and asked management for assistance. The case and questions introduced a variety of prevailing situations that occur. It challenged candidates to offer reasonable and workable solutions to these issues in an analytic manner.

The overall performance of candidates on this paper was unsatisfactory. The mean was 22.64 with total marks obtained ranging between 1 and 40 out of a maximum of 50.

Question 1

This question tested Module IV (Objective 4 (a)) and Module II (Objective 2 (e)). It required candidates to state four procedures that must be followed by the receptionist when performing each of the duties of maintaining a tickler file and receiving parcels. This question was worth 8 marks.

Many responses indicated that candidates were unaware of the tickler file and how it was to be maintained. However, they provided more appropriate information on receiving parcels and were able to obtain more marks for this part of the question.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 8 and the mean was 2.35.

Question 2

This question tested Module IV (Objective 2 (c)).

An outline of a reception register was provided for candidates to complete the headings and enter details of callers in the order in which they visited the firm, based on the details given. Candidates were also instructed to use the 24-hour clock to record the times. This was worth 5 marks.

The responses of candidates who were unable to gain marks included instances where they did not follow instructions or neglected to insert accurate information.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 5 and the mean was 2.27.

Question 3

This question tested Module IV (Objective 1 (a)). It asked candidates to state three ways in which a trainee receptionist could perform her duties in a manner that would maintain a good relationship between the organization and members of the public. This was worth 3 marks.

The majority of candidates offered appropriate responses to this question.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 1 to 3 and the mean was 1.08.

Question 4

This question tested Module IV (Objective 3 (a)). Candidates were asked to complete the appointment book provided with details of visits made by specific individuals at stated times. This was worth 3 marks.

In some instances, information was misplaced in columns or important information was not copied accurately, although provided in the question.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 1 to 3 and the mean was 1.80.

Question 5

This question tested Module IV (Objective 2 (ii) (b, c, d)). It required candidates to state one way in which the receptionist would demonstrate qualities of discretion, tact and initiative. It was worth 3 marks.

In instances where marks were not awarded, candidates were not aware of the meaning of the terms and as a result were unable to provide the required information.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 1 to 3 and the mean was 1.07.

Question 6

This question tested Module IV (Objective 2 (d)). A paragraph representing an extract from a telephone message was given and candidates were required to use the information to complete the telephone message form provided. Candidates responded satisfactorily to this question. It was worth 8 marks.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 1 to 8 and the mean was 4.27.

Question 7

This question tested Module IV (Objective 2 (a, d)). In Part (a), candidates were required to identify improper actions by the trainee receptionist in (i) receiving unexpected visitors and (ii) answering the telephone. This was worth 4 marks.

In Part (b), candidates were required to suggest proper procedures to correct the actions identified in Part (a). This was worth 4 marks.

In some instances, the question was misinterpreted. However, the majority of candidates were able to provide appropriately worded responses.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 8 and the mean was 4.24.

Question 8

This question tested Module IV (Objective 2 (f)). It provided a drawing of a reception area that was in disarray. Candidates were asked to recommend five ways in which the reception area could be improved to make it more comfortable and attractive to visitors. This was worth 5 marks.

The majority of candidates were able to provide satisfactory responses to the question.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 1 to 5 and the mean was 3.33.

Question 9

This question tested Module IV (Objective 2 (f)). It asked candidates to offer suggestions for arrangements that should be put in place the day before a meeting. It was worth 4 marks.

In general, meaningful responses were provided for this question. In other instances, some candidates misinterpreted the question and indicated information that did not pertain to preparation for a meeting and the actions to be taken.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 1 to 4 and the mean was 2.21.

Question 10

This question tested Module IV (Objective 2 (b)). It asked candidates to recommend the correct way to introduce a visitor. It was worth 3 marks.

The content required to respond to this question was not well known, as the protocol of making introductions was not correctly stated.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 3 and the mean was 0.50.

Paper 03/1 – School-Based Assessment (SBA)

The SBA component of the Office Administration Syllabus is designed to give candidates an opportunity to apply skills, knowledge, attributes and attitudes acquired in Office Administration classes during the secondary school experience. This is demonstrated through the compilation of a project which synthesizes skills in letter writing, structuring a questionnaire, developing a work plan, observing equipment employed in business, researching information by means of reading, or through interviews and analysing data obtained noting the strengths, weaknesses and limitations. This information is then compiled in a report complete with title page, table of contents and bibliography.

Title Page

In general, candidates were able to present the Title Page with the required information such as the names of the teacher, school, candidate, examination body and the subject under examination.

Table of Contents

Most candidates displayed sections, as detailed in the marking scheme, in the left-hand column, with page numbers aligned in the right-hand column. Very few candidates used leader dots to align the content with the page numbers.

Project Title

The topics selected were often not carefully structured, with the result that some were too broad and, in a few cases, outside the scope of the syllabus. Teachers are reminded that this topic must be related to the objectives in the syllabus and framed in a manner to indicate that the candidate is examining or researching some specific area which has some educational or social value from which he or she will learn. The topics should not be too broadly stated, thus creating an overwhelming workload for the candidate.

Aims

The aims must be stated clearly. They must state precisely what the candidate is setting out to do. Many candidates failed to state these in a manner which limited them to the title of the project.

Function

This should be the function of the department under observation as it relates to the title of the project. Many candidates failed in this aspect of the project.

Correspondence

Many candidates failed to follow the general principles of letter writing. This should be a letter composed by the candidates seeking permission to carry out the research. In instances where the letter is written as a form letter by the school, candidates are required to write their own letter stating the objective to be achieved by the individual researcher. Attention must be paid to the format of the letter: return address, date, addressee, salutation and complimentary close, paragraphing, grammar and enclosure. The letter should be signed by the candidate.

Methodology

Apart from the specimen, candidates are required to submit particulars of why that instrument was chosen instead of some other method of gathering information for the project. They are also required to explain how they used the instrument. This section was poorly done by most candidates as they failed to justify use of the instrument.

Questions

This was done satisfactorily by most candidates. However, a few candidates did not submit relevant questions. The questions were often taken from the questionnaire.

Schedule of Activities

Most candidates submitted a schedule of activities, listed the sequence as they progressed through the research and made appropriate comments. In some cases, it was evident that candidates were unsure of what was required of them and listed less than the minimum required activities.

Regulations/Policies/Legislation

Evidence of a piece of legislation is designed to sensitize candidates to an awareness of the laws governing the workplace. It would be useful therefore if they obtained a copy of the relevant legislation or make reference to the specific regulation and what it is intended to do. The same would apply to the policies of the organization and rules relating to employees which the candidate may have been subject to.

A policy is a deliberate plan of action to guide decisions and achieve goals. Policy may also refer to important organizational decisions such as spending priorities and choosing among them on the basis of the impact they will have. There may be management, financial and administrative policies designed to reach explicit goals. For example, an organization may accept a legal and moral obligation to ensure that staff are not subjected to sex discrimination through harassment, bullying or workplace violence by ensuring that in the event of alleged discrimination, harassment, bullying or workplace violence, a staff member, or his/her representative, may refer the matter to the Human Resource Manager or notify a union representative.

Legislation or statutory law is law which has been enacted by the governing body and actively regulates the operation of the business. Examples are the Company Act, Shop and Factory Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act.

Staff Rules

These rules are generally established by management and apply to all staff or categories of staff, except where specifically provided, and may include the candidate who is doing the research. An example with regard to employees in a legal firm: 'Employees shall not solicit, accept or agree to accept any gifts or gratuities from persons having or likely to have any official transaction.'

Presentation

Whereas some candidates presented a well written report, many wrote brief notes on the findings. Many candidates were not able to state what they had accomplished by doing the research. They seemed able to express the challenges they encountered but were unable to do the same with the problem-solving strategy used to overcome the challenges.

Business Forms

The business form used in the project must be related to the business under consideration. Some candidates simply included forms that had no relevance to what they set out to do. The forms and the title must be related.

Bibliography

Most candidates were unable to obtain the maximum marks allotted for this section as they did not complete the listing of resources used or Internet sites referenced. Although some candidates may not have access to all types of media, the medium used should be stated.

Office Equipment

As required by the mark scheme, the equipment stated in the SBA must be equipment observed or used in the business studied. Candidates are required to list the equipment, state its use, and its suitability for the specific function in the business under consideration. Most candidates referred to the equipment employed by them in the preparation of the SBA.

It is evident that there are some teachers who are not familiar with the revised mark scheme as the projects were not in compliance with the current requirements. In a few instances, schools submitted SBAs that were based on the 2004 syllabus and mark scheme.

Those candidates who scored high in the SBA exhibited extensive research skills on the topic they had selected, whereas those who obtained lower marks, generally did not comply with the requirements of the syllabus.

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS TO TEACHERS

1. Create a glossary of commonly used terms and ensure that all students are familiar with these terms.
2. Expose students to past examination papers and case studies.
3. Prepare sample letters for students that apply to a variety of situations.
4. Plan activities which will assist in the development of students' observation and research skills.
5. Increase opportunities for practice in completing forms, writing letters and memos, and responding to situational type questions.
6. Include exercises that require numerical computations in the instructional process.