

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 2011

**OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

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GENERAL COMMENTS

Candidate performance improved in June 2011. Eighty-eight per cent of candidates achieved Grades I–III compared with 71 per cent in 2010. The mean score for the examination was 118.65 out of 200 marks.

There were some encouraging responses to questions in all three papers of the General Proficiency examination. This revealed that candidates were prepared for the examination, notwithstanding some areas of weaknesses. These areas are addressed in the detailed comments on individual questions.

- Paper 01 — Multiple Choice
- Paper 02 — Short Answer
- Paper 031 — School-Based Assessment (SBA)
- Paper 032 — Alternative to School-Based Assessment (SBA)

The two profiles tested in the Paper 01 examination and used in the assessment of Office Administration are (i) Knowledge and Comprehension, and (ii) Application.

Candidates' performance on the 2011 paper showed an improvement over that of June 2010. The overall mean was 34.75 compared with 32.18 for July 2010. Marks ranged from 1 to 59 out of a maximum of 60.

Paper 02 also assessed Knowledge and Comprehension and Application of procedures and processes associated with specialized office activities and office routines.

This paper consisted of two sections. Section I comprised 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 tested. Candidates were required to answer two questions from Section II. Therefore, candidates were asked to attempt a total of six questions from this paper. The overall mean for this paper was 50.32 compared with 43.03 in 2010. Marks ranged from 0 to 83 out of a maximum of 90. There are, however, some areas that continue to pose difficulty to candidates and this is reflected in their overall performance.

Paper 032 took the form of a written examination that targeted private candidates who would not have the opportunity to complete School-Based Assessment (SBA) projects as school candidates. The paper was designed to test 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, with sub-sections, based on a case study. For this examination, the case focused on Module II of the syllabus which covers communication.

It is noted that while some areas continue to pose a challenge to candidates, overall performance improved on this paper improved over that of the 2010 examination. The overall mean for this paper was 27.06 out of a maximum of 50, compared with 22.64 in 2010. Marks ranged from 0 to 47.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 02 — Short Answer

Question 1

The first part of the question tested candidates' knowledge of the requirements of the work environment.

For Part (a) (i), candidates were required to identify one other right included in the labour laws of any Caribbean country except the right to freedom of association and assembly. For the most part, candidates were unable to identify a labour law and confused labour laws with human rights issues. This part of the question was worth one mark.

For Part (a) (ii), candidates were required to identify two desirable attitudes that employees should demonstrate in the workplace. This segment of the question was fairly well done. Part (a) (ii) was worth two marks.

Part (b) focused on procedures dealing with inactive files. Part (b) (i) required candidates to state one way in which a company may dispose of each of the following types of files: non-confidential and confidential.

Most candidates were able to identify shredding as a means of destroying confidential files, although many candidates also used this process for non-confidential files. This part of the question was worth two marks.

Part (b) (ii) required candidates to identify two types of files which are usually archived. Many candidates who attempted this section were unfamiliar with the term 'archived' and failed to give appropriate responses such as *non-active files* and *closed/dead files*. Part (b) (i) was worth two marks.

Part (a) tested candidates' knowledge of preparing follow-up letters. Candidates were required to write an appropriate follow-up letter to Mrs Penny Wise, the Director of the Human Resource Division, in response to a stated scenario. This section was satisfactorily done with some candidates obtaining maximum marks. In some cases though, candidates omitted the date from the letter, while others were not able to match the salutation to an appropriate complimentary close. This part of the question was worth eight marks.

Marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 7.80.

Question 2

Part (a) of this question examined candidates' knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of a receptionist.

Part (a) (i) required candidates to state two practices which would assist in keeping the reception area tidy. Generally, candidates' performance on this section was unsatisfactory as they failed to give responses such as *stack newspapers/files/magazines neatly*, *pin notices on notice boards properly*, and *organize/arrange blinds/curtains/seating neatly*. It was worth two marks.

Part (a) (ii), required candidates to identify two items of information that may be found on a business card. Most candidates were able to score one of the two marks awarded in this section.

Part (a) (iii) required candidates to copy and complete a table given and to suggest professional alternatives for unprofessional responses used by a temporary receptionist. It was noted that many candidates retained the term *Hello* in Part (a) of the question, even though they continued the statement by stating a more appropriate greeting and announcing the name of the firm.

The use of the colloquialism, *eh*, in Part (c) was not understood by many candidates. Many of the candidates lost marks because they offered the wrong alternative. This was worth four marks.

Part (b) focused on the importance and use of reminder systems in the office. Part (b) (i) required candidates to provide three points describing how a tickler system works. In most instances, candidates gave a definition of the tickler system but were unable to state how it works. Very few candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of how the tickler system works for both reminder and follow-up. Correct response such as *reminder notes or documents are placed behind specific dates and months, daily checks must be made to determine whether the note or document should be acted upon or followed up, and if there has been no reply, the document is passed to the responsible party for action*, were not frequently provided by candidates.

Part (b) (ii) required candidates to copy a diary sheet in their answer booklet and complete it using the information given. Candidates performed satisfactorily with the majority of them scoring maximum marks or three of the four marks allotted to this section.

Marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 15 with a mean of 8.38.

Question 3

Part (a) examined the role and functions of the office, with respect to the production of goods and the collection and processing of data.

For Part (a) (i), candidates were required to explain the terms *collecting data, processing data, and producing goods*.

The majority of candidates provided responses which reproduced the root of the questions and, therefore, were not explicit in their responses. In some instances, however, candidates could give clear explanation to the terms. This part of the question was worth three marks.

For Part (a) (ii), candidates were required to differentiate between 'goods' and 'services'. For the most part, candidates demonstrated an understanding of both terms and supplied satisfactory responses. This was worth two marks.

For Part (a) (iii), candidates were required to state two reasons for preserving information in an organization. This section was handled well by candidates who were able to score the two marks allotted.

Part (b) focused on the desirable attitudes and attributes of office personnel as well as the importance of good relationships. For Part (b) (i), candidates were required to write a memo to be emailed to Mr Pryce, expressing their disappointment with his conduct at the workplace and stating the impact of his frequent lateness on the achievement of goals in the department.

This part of the question was satisfactorily done by most candidates. However, some candidates failed to utilize the correct format for writing a memo using the document name *Memo* and accompanying features such as *To, From, Date, and Subject*. Part (b) (i) was worth four marks.

For Part (b) (ii), candidates were required to state two actions that as a supervisor, they should take, and two actions that Mr Pryce should take to improve the efficiency of the department. This section was fairly well done. Candidates were able to differentiate between the supervisor's role and the subordinate's role. This part of the question was worth four marks.

Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 9.99.

Question 4

This question examined candidates' knowledge of channels of communication and communication formats commonly used in the office.

For Part (a), candidates were required to state one example of each of the following four methods of communication: (i) oral (ii) electronic (iii) visual and (iv) written.

This part of the question was handled well by most candidates who earned the maximum marks allotted. Part (a) was worth four marks.

For Part (b), candidates were asked to state three items of information that should be given to the hotel reservations clerk when making hotel reservations. Candidates were familiar with this aspect of the syllabus and gave favourable responses such as *name, address, and telephone number of person for whom the room is being reserved, type of room required: single, double or suite, length of planned stay, and date and time of arrival/departure*. Part (b) was worth three marks.

For Part (c) (i), candidates were given a message form on which they were required to record the relevant points of a given message. Most candidates were able to record the information on the form appropriately and scored maximum marks. However, some candidates failed to include all the details of the message. This part of the question was worth six marks.

In Part (c) (ii), candidates were required to state two actions that Ms Powell may take to ensure the accuracy of a telephone message. The majority of candidates responded satisfactorily to this part of the question which was worth two marks

Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 11.22.

Question 5

This question examined candidates' knowledge of the duties of a clerk in the accounts office, the calculation of different types of discounts and the factors that contribute to employee turnover in an organization.

For Part (a), candidates were required to state two attributes of an accounts clerk. In some instances, candidates provided correct responses such as *accuracy/neatness/legibility, honesty, confidentiality, and reliability*. However, some candidates failed to distinguish between attributes and skills. This part of the question was worth two marks.

For Part (b), candidates were to state how the accounts office of a manufacturing firm interacts with the following offices: (i) factory, (ii) human resource, and (iii) transport.

In most instances, candidates demonstrated sound knowledge of the named offices and their functions, but were unable to state effectively how the accounts office liaises with each of the named offices. Part (b) was worth three marks.

Parts (c) (i), (ii) and (iii) required candidates to calculate trade discounts and cash discounts (if paid within a specific time period). Most candidates demonstrated some level of competence in performing the required calculations. However, some candidates failed to carry out the tasks using a sequential approach and showing calculations. This part of the question was worth six marks.

Part (d) (i) required candidates to list one internal factor that may contribute to high labour turnover in an organization. Candidates seemed to have a good grasp of this aspect of the syllabus and supplied satisfactory responses such as *poor working conditions, low salary, and lack of training opportunities*.

Part (d) (ii) required candidates to list three measures that an employer may adopt to remedy a situation of high labour turnover. Candidates were able to satisfactorily list measures such as *improve working conditions, provide incentives, increase morale, and offer higher salaries*.

This question was, however, not a popular optional question. Marks ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 5.50.

Question 6

This question tested candidates' knowledge of the role and functions of the human resource department, with particular focus on appraisals, training and disciplinary procedures.

For Part (a), candidates were given two functions of the human resource department: *administering performance appraisals* and *training*. For each of the functions given, candidates were required to state two activities that should be completed by the department in performing the stated functions. In many instances, candidates performed unsatisfactorily in this section as they could not clearly state the activities carried out in either function. This part of the question was worth four marks.

For Part (b), candidates were required to state two actions an employer may take to discipline employees. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this section, giving responses such as *reprimands/counseling, warnings/meetings, memos on their conduct for the records, and dismissals*. Part (b) was worth three marks.

For Part (c) (i), candidates were required to copy a given table in their answer booklets. For each of the aspects outlined in the table, they were to outline two benefits that an employee may derive from statutory provisions. An example of each aspect was done for the candidates. This was not well done. In most instances, candidates were unable to outline the benefits that an employee may derive from the statutory provisions. This part of the question was worth six marks.

For Part (c) (ii), candidates were required to state three actions that the clerk should carry out to ensure that the process of shortlisting applicants is fair. Many candidates were not familiar with the term *shortlisting* and failed to give expected responses such as *including suitable prospective candidates from list to be interviewed; setting aside all applicants that do not qualify for the job; and reviewing applications carefully and selecting candidates with appropriate academic qualifications*. Part (c) (ii) was worth three marks.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 4.94.

Question 7

The question tested candidates' knowledge of the functions of the purchasing and accounts offices.

For Part (a), candidates were asked to identify four duties of a clerk in the accounts office. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this section and indicated responses such as *preparing statements of accounts, totalling time cards, and preparing cash summary sheets*. This part of the question was worth three marks.

For Part (b), candidates were required to write any one of the following abbreviations in full and explain what each means: (i) COD and (ii) E & OE.

This segment of the question was moderately done. Most candidates were able to give the correct meaning for COD, which is *cash on delivery* but were unable to explain its meaning, that is, *the buyer pays the bill only when the goods are delivered*. However, E & OE, *errors and omissions excepted* proved more challenging for the 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*. Part (b) was worth two marks.

Part (c) (i), worth four marks, required candidates to use the information given in a table to calculate the weekly gross pay and net pay. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this segment of the question, stating correctly the gross and net pay. Some candidates, however, could not differentiate between gross and net pay and substituted the gross pay for net pay and vice versa.

Part (c) (ii) required candidates to calculate the total net salary, if Ms Hart was also given a commission of 20 per cent of her net pay. Many candidates were able to calculate the total net salary correctly. Part (c) (ii) was worth two marks.

For Part (c) (iii), worth three marks, candidates were required to copy a cheque in their answer booklets and complete it. The cheque should show the total salary paid to Anne Hart for the week. The cheque should be signed by Mr Dave Watts, the accountant. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this section.

Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 7.88.

Question 8

This question tested candidates' knowledge of the duties and responsibilities of a clerk in the factory office including the completion of forms used in this office.

For Part (a), candidates were asked to list three duties of a clerk in the factory office. Candidates' performance on this section was only fair as many candidates failed to attempt this section and to supply correct responses such as *preparing statements of accounts, totaling time cards, and preparing debit and credit notes*. Part (a) was worth three marks.

Part (b), worth three marks, required candidates to identify three documents, other than a job card, that are used in the factory office. Like part (a), some candidates did not respond to this section and others who attempted it could only correctly list one document.

For Part (c), candidates were required to complete a job card, using the form provided. Candidates were given the information for the job card. In most instances, candidates who attempted this section scored maximum marks. The performance on this section was satisfactory. Part (c) was worth nine marks.

The marks obtained for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 8.60.

Paper 032 — Alternative to School-Based Assessment

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

The Case

The case focused on a fictitious school, Fairview Secondary, and its plan to introduce a textbook loan scheme. In the past, secondary school students in Fairview were responsible for purchasing their textbooks. However, many students were unable to purchase books because of the high cost. To ensure that all secondary school students have access to books, the Fairview Education Board is planning to introduce a free textbook loan scheme. Under the proposed scheme, students will be supplied with the books for each subject and will be required to return them at the end of the school year.

Question 1

Candidates were required to construct three questions to be included in a questionnaire to find out what parents think about receiving books from the loan scheme. Although this part was fairly well done, some candidates phrased the responses in statement form, instead of in the form of questions. This question was worth three marks.

Question 2

Candidates were provided with the results of the questionnaire and were asked to use a bar chart to illustrate these results. They were to calculate the number of parents who supported the textbook loan scheme and those who did not. Although in most instances candidates earned the maximum marks, a small percentage of them miscalculated and presented incorrect responses. This question was worth five marks.

Question 3

Candidates were required to write a short paragraph highlighting the results of the questionnaire and to inform the Fairview Education Board if it should introduce the textbook loan scheme in the schools. They were required to justify their responses. Performance in this section revealed that many candidates had difficulty responding favourably to this question as some of them supplied only findings, others only results, while others gave justifications without supplying either findings or results. This question was worth six marks.

Question 4

In this question, candidates were asked to use specific information to prepare an advertisement to be placed in the local newspaper, inviting publishers to submit three copies each of textbooks in the categories of Information Technology and Office Administration

For this question, most candidates supplied the components requested and received partial marks. However, many candidates failed to demonstrate awareness of the way an advertisement should be displayed by simply producing a short paragraph. This question was worth six marks.

Question 5

In this question, worth eight marks, candidates were asked to prepare a letter to the Education Board in response to the advertisement to submit an Office Administration textbook and to include three reasons why the textbook should be included in the loan scheme. Many candidates failed to demonstrate correct layout of a letter, including the addresses and date placement, and many of them failed to match the salutation with the complimentary close. In addition, in most instances, the enclosure notation was omitted. This question was poorly done.

Question 6

Candidates were asked to prepare a report on the suitability of books for the loan scheme. They were asked to supply an appropriate title for the report and to outline four features of the textbook that may encourage students to use it. This question was done well, most candidates scored the full four marks.

Question 7

This question asked for candidates' responses regarding the reason a call was not answered after supplying different time zones. This appeared easy for the majority of candidates, but some of them lost a mark because they failed to mention the time difference. This question was worth two marks.

Question 8

In this question, worth four marks, candidates were instructed to write a letter to one of the suppliers of the textbook informing them that the textbooks are needed urgently. In addition, candidates were required to suggest two other methods of communicating with the suppliers, giving one reason for using each of the proposed methods.

This question was handled fairly well as most candidates were able to list the telephone and email as alternative methods, but in some instances, they failed to supply the advantage of using each method.

Question 9

Candidates were required to calculate the shipping and handling costs for the books. They were given a list of shipping costs for the Freight Xpress courier company. The question asked candidates to calculate the total cost of shipment. While some candidates had a problem calculating the correct costs of shipment, many others scored satisfactorily on this question. This question was worth five marks.

Question 10

This question required candidates to design a flyer for distribution to students, identifying four ways to care for textbooks. In most instances, candidates' responses were very imaginative and they applied creativity in designing their flyers. On the whole, candidates seemed to have enjoyed answering this question which was worth six marks.

The overall performance on this paper was satisfactory. The marks ranged from 0 to 47 and the mean score was 27.06.

Paper 031 — School-Based Assessment (SBA)

The SBA component of the Office Administration course is an integral part of students' assessment which is covered by the syllabus. It is designed to assist students with the acquisition of specific knowledge, skills, attributes and attitudes during the secondary school experience, for application in a practical manner. This single guided research project is intended to develop in students the basic skills of research and should lead to a sense of accomplishment as they collect data in a scientific manner.

The information gathered through various methods such as interviews, observations, questionnaires, the Internet, or by means of primary and secondary sources is compiled in a report, complete, inter alia, with title page, table of contents and bibliography. This paper was worth 50 marks.

Title Page

In general, candidates were able to present the title page with the required information such as the name of the teacher, school, candidate, examination body, and the subject under examination. However, a few candidates lost a mark for omitting the teacher's name.

Table of Contents

Most candidates were able to prepare suitable tables of contents with appropriate headings and page numbers, as detailed on the mark scheme. In some instances, candidates used ranges to complete the TOC, for example, Report..... 9–12. This should not be encouraged. The report, which starts on page 9, is adequate. Any subsequent headings would indicate on which page each sub-section starts. Students, however, should ensure that the table of contents is complete and should cover the entire body of the project.

Project Title

The topics selected were invariably not carefully structured, with the result that some were too broad and in a few cases, outside the scope of the syllabus. It must be noted that topics must be related to the objectives in the syllabus and framed in a manner to indicate that the student is examining or researching some specific area which has some educational or social value from which he/she will learn. The topic should not be too broadly stated, thus creating an overwhelming workload for the student. The department being investigated must be specifically stated.

Aims

The aims should be stated clearly and must state precisely what the student is setting out to do. Many students failed to state these in a manner which limited them to the title of the project. The aims must be clearly linked to the title.

Functions

Several students scored full marks in this section once the department was identified. However, those students who scored zero gave functions of the business studied and not the department itself. In a few instances, students gave the duties of the clerk in the department.

Correspondence

Generally, the letters presented were generated from the students and contained the relevant content. However, many students failed to follow the general principle in letter writing. Formatting was the main issue identified as it relates to the date, line-spacing and appropriate matching of the salutation with the complimentary close. The salutation should give an indication of what form the complimentary close should take, for example, named person (Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms/Dr Brown — Yours sincerely); and unnamed person (Dear Sir/Madam — Yours faithfully/respectfully). ‘Yours truly’ is not acceptable. In many instances, the students /writers did not sign the letter.

Methodology

Most students did not explain how and why the instruments were used or why the instrument chosen was used over the others. In some cases, the instruments themselves were not properly constructed. Some students failed to include the data gathering instrument in the appendix.

Questions

This was done satisfactorily by most students, although some of the questions submitted were not relevant. Questions should be linked to both the title of the project and its aims. Students should avoid giving statements and answers for questions.

Schedule of activities

Several students failed to produce a table showing 10–12 activities. In most cases, the comments did not relate to the activities given. In a few instances, the activities stated were relevant to what happened in the business and not the project. Comments given should support the follow-up actions or decisions taken.

Regulations/Policies

From the responses given to this area, it was evident that several students had difficulty distinguishing between company policy and legislation governing the workplace. In many instances, students failed to state how they became aware of the legislation. However, the ‘Health and Safety Practices observed’ section was done satisfactorily. Many students were able to state the staff rule but failed to state how they had to comply with the stated rule while carrying out the project.

Report Presentation

Generally, reports did not include charts or graphs or meet the requirements of 500–750 words. In some instances, the reports did not depict the true findings of the research as related to the aims or the data-gathering instrument presented. Some students failed to state what they had accomplished by conducting the research or to present meaningful problem-solving strategies.

Business Forms

Business forms used in the project must be related to the department under consideration. In a few instances, students simply included forms that bore no relevance to what they set out to do.

Bibliography

Many students failed to obtain the maximum marks allocated for this section as they did not complete the listing of resources used or the Internet sites referenced.

Office Equipment

As indicated in the mark scheme, the equipment stated in the SBA must be equipment observed or used in the department studied. Although many students were able to identify the equipment used, their comments did not relate to the suitability of tasks in the business. Rather, their comments were based on how the researcher used the equipment to complete the project.

Major Strengths

Neat and well organized, word-processed projects.

Weaknesses

- Failure to attach to the project a current mark scheme to show how the students was marked
- Failure to state how students became aware of the legislation regulating the workplace
- Failure to state the department of the organization under study
- Incorrect sources of information
 - For persons interviewed: date, place and job title
 - Publications: Use APA or MLA or other approved styles
 - Internet sites: address of the website, name of authors and organizations
- Some schools submitted SBAs that were based on the old mark scheme, hence, there was a wide disparity between the teacher and the moderator's marks.

For the SBA, marks ranged from 0 to 50. The mean score was 34.29.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO TEACHERS:

- Ensure that all students gain access to a copy of the current mark scheme for the SBA component to use as a guideline for successful completion of the project.
- Encourage students to pay keen attention to detail in order to maximize on the marks allocated.
- Monitor students consistently throughout the project to ensure that it is done correctly and that the stipulated guidelines in the current syllabus are being pursued.
- Give more exposure to Paper 032 type questions.