

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

**REPORT ON CANDIDATES' WORK IN THE
CARIBBEAN SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE® EXAMINATION**

JANUARY 2013

**OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

**Copyright © 2013 Caribbean Examinations Council
St Michael, Barbados
All rights reserved.**

GENERAL COMMENTS

The Office Administration examination is offered in January and May/June each year. In January 2013, some 1 059 candidates sat the examination compared with the 2012 sitting when 1 349 candidates wrote the examination. Approximately 85 per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I–III compared with 83 per cent in 2012. There were specific areas of weakness which are addressed in the detailed comments on individual questions.

Three papers were offered to ensure broad coverage of the syllabus and accessibility to a wider range of the candidate population. The objectives tested were chosen from all the modules. The papers offered are

Paper 01 – Multiple Choice

Paper 02 – Short Answer

Paper 032 – Alternative to School-Based Assessment (SBA)

Paper 01 consisted of 60 multiple choice items covering the entire syllabus. The items were set to cover Knowledge of content areas and Application of the knowledge. The overall mean was 35.06 compared with 36.40 for January 2012. Marks ranged from 10 to 57 out of a maximum available score of 60. Performance this year was consistent with that of 2012.

Paper 02 also assessed Knowledge and Application of procedures and processes associated with specialized office activities and routines. The paper consisted of eight questions which were further divided into two sections. Section I comprised four compulsory questions covering Modules I–VI and Module XII. Section II consisted of four optional questions taken from Modules VII–XI. Candidates were required to answer two questions from Section II. In total, they were required to answer six questions from this paper. The overall mean for this paper was 39.88 compared with 40.69 in 2012. Marks ranged from 0 to 73 out of a maximum of 90.

Paper 032 took the form of a written examination that targeted private candidates who would not have had the opportunity to complete SBA projects as school candidates. The paper consisted of ten short, structured essay-type questions and was designed to test candidates' ability to apply their knowledge to the interpretation of a case using content from Module XII, Recruitment and Orientation; and to a lesser extent, on Modules II and VII which deal with communication and Human Resources, respectively.

It was evident from the performance on this paper that some areas continue to challenge candidates and in the final analysis affected their overall performance. The overall mean for this paper was 33.40, an increase over the 27.39 in 2012. Marks ranged from 4 to 46 out of a maximum of 50.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 02 – Short Answer

Section I

Section I which comprised four questions, was compulsory, and each question was worth 15 marks.

Question 1

This question tested candidates' understanding of

- the functions of the general administrative office
- the knowledge and skills required to satisfy the requirements for a job in the reprographics department and their ability to compose a memorandum.

Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 6.30.

For Part (a), candidates were required to state some functions of the general administrative office. Generally, candidates were able to identify the three functions requested and gave responses such as: *receiving, processing and disseminating information; presenting data; and ensuring organizational and legal obligations.*

In Part (b), candidates were asked to state four advantages of working in an office that has centralized its services. Most candidates gave acceptable responses such as: *better supervision of staff by management; increased productivity through specialized, skilled, and efficient staff; encourages teamwork; and furniture can be arranged and rearranged easily.*

Part (c) required candidates to write a memo, the body of which should show their understanding of the functions of the reprographics department and the knowledge and skills required by a worker in this department. Many candidates were able to state the skills required such as: *ability to operate different kinds of machines; time management; communication; and literacy/numeracy.* However, only a few candidates alluded to the *knowledge* segment, such as: *quality/quantity required; how quickly information is required; and whether there is need for copies at a later date.* Some candidates were not able to use the correct format for a memo.

Question 2

This question tested candidates' understanding of the functions carried out by the records management clerk, the resources available for use and activities carried out by the clerk on a day-to-day basis. Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 8.66.

Part (a) required candidates to state one purpose for which a records management clerk may use different reference materials in the office. Except for the use of the post office guide, most candidates were able to state the purpose of the reference materials given.

In Part (b), candidates were required to identify three items that must be included on an agenda for a regular business meeting. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this part of the question, giving correct responses such as: *call to order, apologies, minutes of the last meeting, new business and adjournment.*

Part (c) required candidates to prepare an itinerary for an employer. This part of the question was generally well done. The main area of weakness was that some candidates did not present the itinerary in a logical sequence. Some candidates failed to correctly convert the time to the 24-hour clock. The 24-hour clock should be written, for example, 0800 hours; 1200 hours; 1530 hours – with no colon (:) between the figures or 'a.m.' or 'p.m.' indications.

Question 3

This question tested candidates' understanding of the use of different communication devices and options available to a records management clerk. Marks ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 9.09.

For Part (a), candidates were required to identify some steps that should be taken when transferring funds electronically. The majority of candidates provided correct responses which include:

- visiting the institution where money transfer is legally done
- collecting and completing the relevant form(s)
- presenting cash/debit/credit card to teller
- collecting customer copy of the form from the teller

For Part (b), candidates were required to differentiate between types of telephone calls. This part of the question was not done satisfactorily. Candidates failed to state the main differences for:

- *station-to-station call* — where the caller dials a number directly without the assistance of the operator. This type of call is usually less costly than *person-to-person* which is an operator assisted call. Usually, there is a three minute, plus a one minute surcharge for the *person-to-person call*.
- *call waiting*, on the other hand, alerts the user of an incoming call while on the same line with another caller. With *call forwarding*, incoming calls can be transferred or forwarded to another office, house or mobile if someone is unavailable to take the call on that line.

For Part (c), candidates were required to demonstrate an understanding of the protocol a record management clerk should observe in using a personal cellphone while at work and to demonstrate the use of an appropriate letter format. This part of the question was satisfactorily done by most candidates. Some, however, did not seem to understand the difference between the return and the inside addresses and so placed them incorrectly. Some candidates failed to put the date in an appropriate place given the format of the letter that was used while others did not use a matching complimentary close with the salutation used.

Question 4

This question tested candidates' understanding of the appropriate behaviour a receptionist should display while on the job, some record keeping methods that the receptionist should use and ways of storing company records. Marks ranged from 0 to 13 and the mean was 6.54.

For Part (a), candidates were to identify reasons a company might decide to microfiche records. Some popular responses were: *reduces filing space, inactive information can be saved, and material can be retained for a long time.*

For Part (b), candidates were required to give attributes that the receptionist should display at the reception area. Most candidates performed well in this section, giving correct responses such as: *be polite/respectful/friendly to all visitors; be calm and patient when dealing with hostile and aggressive customers; the use of initiative; well-spoken/pleasant; and well organized.*

For Part (c), candidates were asked to state the most appropriate filing classification/method that should be used in five given situations involving numerical, alphabetical, subject, chronological and geographical filing. Many candidates failed to score full marks on this part of the question, invariably earning three marks at most.

For Part (d), candidates were to make entries in a reception register for three visitors. This part of the question was satisfactorily done.

Section II

The questions in this section were optional. Candidates were required to attempt any two of four questions from this section.

Question 5

This question tested candidates' understanding of

- the rules governing the use of office equipment
- the purpose of some documents used by the Human Resources Department
- how to prepare a Statement of Account
- how to apply special discounts

This was the most popular among the optional questions. It had a mean of 5.65 and marks ranged from 0 to 13.

For Part (a), candidates were to list rules that an employee should observe when using office equipment. This part of the question was satisfactorily done with candidates giving correct responses such as: *report malfunctioning or faulty equipment without delay to the supervisor or maintenance officer; read instructions before operating new equipment; and switch off machines when not in use.*

For Part (b), candidates were required to state the purpose of different documents used by the Human Resources Department. This part of the question was not satisfactorily done.

Candidates failed to identify purposes such as:

- The appraisal form is used as a method of identifying areas for staff development; a method of evaluating progress/performance; or to establish performance standards.
- The job description is to identify duties/functions/responsibilities of the position in the company; describe lines of communication; or indicate the right person for the job.
- The contract of employment is to specify the expectations of the employer; give collective agreements/terms and conditions of contract that govern employment, and specify the requirements of the employee.

Part (c) required candidates to use the information given to prepare a Statement of Account and to calculate special discount which was due to the customer. This part of the question was not satisfactorily done by some candidates as they failed to insert the correct entries under the debit and credit columns and to calculate the correct outstanding balance and payment.

Question 6

This question tested candidates'

- knowledge of the duties performed by the clerk in the Purchasing Office
- knowledge of the advantages of standing orders and credit cards
- ability to interpret the information on a bank statement
- ability to prepare a bank reconciliation statement.

This was the least popular of the optional questions. The marks ranged from 0 to 11 and the mean was 3.09. This question had the lowest mean on the optional section.

For Part (a), candidates were required to list duties performed by the clerk in the Purchases Office. For the most part, candidates gave correct responses such as: *preparing and processing requisitions; filing purchase orders and records; and liaising with other departments.*

For Part (b) (i), candidates were required to define the term standing order. Most candidates failed to define the term correctly. An acceptable definition of a standing order is: *an order given to the bank by the account holder to transfer a fixed sum of money to other bank accounts or to other business accounts at regular intervals.*

For Part (b) (ii), candidates were to state two advantages of using a credit card. This part of the question was satisfactorily done and correct responses such as *eliminates the need to carry around cash; allows for purchases on the internet; and payment is deducted at a later time* were given.

In Part (c) (i), candidates were required to interpret some transactions as they appear in the bank statement and the cash book. The majority of candidates were unable to interpret correctly the standing order, showed a lack of knowledge in recoding unpresented cheques, late lodgments, and transactions in the cash book.

For Part (c) (ii), candidates were to use the bank statement and cash book to prepare the bank reconciliation statement, starting with the bank balance. Most candidates who attempted this question failed to do this part of the question. Those who attempted it, performed poorly.

Question 7

This question tested candidates' understanding of the operations of the Sales and Marketing Department and the duties of the records management clerk in this office. The marks ranged from 0 to 12, and the mean was 5.80.

In Part (a), candidates were required to identify pieces of equipment that are used in the Sales and Marketing Department. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this part of the question, giving correct responses such as: *calculator, cash register, AV equipment, and computer/printer/bar code.*

Part (b) required candidates to state the importance of keeping an updated mailing list in the Marketing Department. This part of the question was fairly well done as candidates were able to give correct responses such as: *easy to retrieve and update customers' names, update customers with current products or information, and maintain efficiency in the department.*

For Part (c) (i), candidates were required to identify some malpractices which are likely to occur in the Sales and Marketing Department. Those candidates who attempted this question gave correct responses such as:

- Inaccurate recording of stocks purchased
- Theft/unrecorded stocks taken from store
- Conflict of interest
- Lack of proper security of store room
- Deterioration
- Reorder levels not checked frequently

For Part (c) (ii), candidates were asked to suggest two stock control methods that could be used to overcome the problems of theft by employees and deterioration. This part of the question presented a challenge to candidates as many of them failed to give correct responses. Expected responses include:

- Theft by employees: perpetual/periodic/regular stock control
- Deterioration: stocktaking should be carried out on a regular basis/interval in order to monitor expired/obsolete stock and stock no longer in demand on the market
- The FIFO method and regular stocktaking could be done, using the running balance.

Question 8

This question tested candidates' understanding of the operations of the Factory Office and procedures for completing the forms used in this office. Marks ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 6.02, the highest in this section.

For Part (a), candidates were to identify some duties that should be performed by the clerk in the Factory Office. For the most part, candidates gave correct responses such as: *progress chasing, liaising with other departments; maintaining time cards for factory workers, and planning delivery schedules.*

Part (b) required candidates to identify information that is found on a consignment note. This part of the question was done satisfactorily as correct responses were generated such as: *name/address of consignee/consignor; description, quantity of or weight of the consignment and terms of delivery.*

For Part (c) (i), candidates were required to calculate weekly gross and net pay for an employee. Most candidates performed satisfactorily on this part of the question.

For Part (c) (ii), candidates were to use the information obtained from Part (i) to prepare the weekly cheque for the employee. This part was well done by most candidates who attempted it.

Paper 032 — Alternative to School-Based Assessment

A short case was presented and candidates were required to read and respond to ten structured questions relating to this case. This case was developed mainly from Module XII, Recruitment and Orientation; and to a lesser extent from Module II, Communication and Module VII, Human Resources. All questions were set at the Application level. This paper was worth 50 marks.

The case revolved around an employee who was working at her first job in the Purchasing Department of a large manufacturing company. She believed that she had acquired sufficient experience in that position and as the company did not offer much prospects for upward mobility she decided to start her search for a new job. The questions were centred on the processes involved in the job hunt, from identifying a prospective job for which to apply to the evaluation after the probationary period of employment.

Marks ranged from 4 to 46 from a maximum of 50 marks. The mean score was 33.40.

Question 1

Part (a) required candidates to outline ways in which an advertisement could assist an individual in deciding on the job he/she wants. Candidates performed fairly well on this question and included correct responses such as:

- Provides detailed information of the job for assessing one's interest/scope for upward mobility
- Gives information on whether or not remuneration/pay is adequate
- Informs of attitudes/attributes/qualities/experience required
- Directs the applicant as to where to send applications/résumés
- Allows applicant to determine if the job is within a convenient location
- Indicates whether or not there are any fringe benefits
- Provides information on qualifications and skills required

Part (b) required candidates to give reasons a company may not want to employ relatives of employees. Those candidates who attempted this part of the question gave appropriate responses such as:

- The possibility that conflict may arise
- To avoid showing favouritism to relatives/nepotism
- To avoid employing persons with similar work-shy attitudes that may retard progress
- To encourage other persons with varying attitudes/knowledge/skills/attributes to invest in the company for increased efficiency

Question 2

Candidates were required to use the information given to prepare a draft of a résumé. They were to include appropriate headings, related details, as well as a career goal. Most candidates performed well on this question, using appropriate headings such as: *personal information, education, qualifications, experience, and hobbies*. However, many candidates failed to include a properly-worded career goal and a complete reference to include the person's name, position and contact information.

Question 3

This question required candidates to draft a cover letter to be attached to a résumé. The responses to this question were only fair as some candidates failed to write the return and inside addresses in the correct places; insert the current date; use appropriate salutation and matching complimentary close; cite attachment notation; and use correct grammar and spelling.

Question 4

Candidates were to suggest ways in which the prospective employee could prepare for the interview to ensure a greater chance of success. Most candidates were able to give two correct responses to include:

- Make sure that her résumé matches company's expectations
- Wear appropriate attire and observe protocol
- Conducted research on the company and its operations
- Take along all original documents/portfolio/specimen required by the company
- Know success factors associated with company

Question 5

Candidates were to suggest articles of clothing a prospective employee should wear to an interview in order to appear business like.

Candidates performed satisfactorily on this question and gave correct responses such as: *shorts; slippers/sandals/shoes with straps; large earrings; tight/short revealing shorts/jeans; sun glasses on top of your heads and leggings.*

Question 6

Candidates were required to state questions the prospective employee could ask to increase his/her chance of getting a job. Most candidates were able to respond correctly and gave answers such as:

- What are the prospects for promotion?
- What exactly does the job entail?
- What arrangements are there for vacation?
- If given the job, how soon will I be able to start?
- Are there opportunities for training?

Question 7

For this question, candidates were required to draft a copy of an appropriate thank you note to be sent to the Human Resources Manager for an invitation to the interview.

The responses to this question were satisfactory. Some candidates included: a thank you comment using an appreciative tone. They mentioned the position interviewed for and ended the note with the signature of the applicant.

Question 8

This question required candidates to outline ways in which a welcome package can benefit a new employee. The question was satisfactorily done with candidates giving responses such as:

- Helps build one's information/knowledge base
- Encourages reading/communication/research skills
- Provides answers not generally given in an interview
- Gives information on organization's structure and social activities

Question 9

Candidates were required to recommend ways in which management could improve the working conditions for workers. This question was done satisfactorily. Candidates gave accepted responses such as:

- Pay keen attention to suitable environment to enable employees to increase efficiency
- Purchase ergonomically-friendly furniture
- Provide adequate office space for flexible movements
- Position computers/monitors/adjustable chairs to promote proper posture, maximum support and comfort
- Provide protective clothing to ensure safety and comfort

Question 10

Candidates were required to compose statements which could be used on an employee's job evaluation. Most candidates were able to compose statements on *desirable work attitudes* but encountered difficulty doing so for *confidentiality*.

For *confidentiality*, expected responses such as the following were not readily generated.

- Able to keep all work-related information private
- Files/information are not left unattended on desks or open to the public
- Records management equipment/information are securely locked or given passwords
- I am able to keep confidential information to myself
- Personal information about employees is not divulged to anyone

Responses given by candidates for *Desirable work attitudes* which were accepted included:

- Willing to assist others
- Punctual and regular in attendance
- Use initiative
- Not a clock watcher
- Pleasant/courteous/polite
- Take corrections/advice without being offended
- Good team player/flexible

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is need for continued exposure to Paper 2 and 032 type questions and for candidates to be guided by the syllabus, recommended texts and support materials in order to ensure better results.
- Candidates should visit the CXC website and read comments presented in the subject reports to assist them in identifying strengths and weaknesses.
- Candidates should practise accounts-type questions such as bank reconciliation statements, statement of accounts as well as filling out forms accurately, since these are some of the areas of poor performance.
- In responding to questions, candidates should note key words/concepts to guide them in presenting information in a logical and organized manner.