

CARIBBEAN EXAMINATIONS COUNCIL

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

JANUARY 2014

**OFFICE ADMINISTRATION
GENERAL PROFICIENCY EXAMINATION**

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GENERAL COMMENTS

The Office Administration examination is offered in January and May/June each year. In January 2014, 1,279 candidates sat the examination compared with 1,059 in the 2013 sitting. Approximately, 76 per cent of the candidates achieved Grades I–III compared with 86 per cent in 2013. The areas of weakness will be addressed in the detailed comments section covering the various papers.

Three papers were offered at the General Proficiency level 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 of the syllabus and examined for the last time as a new Office Administration syllabus will be tested for the first time in June 2014. The papers offered are as follows:

- 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 set covered knowledge of the content area and application of knowledge in the ratio 2:1. The overall mean was 35.31, compared with 34.49 for January 2013. Marks ranged from 11 to 59 out of a maximum available score of 60. Performance was consistent with that of 2013. Seventy-two per cent of the candidates scored at least 50 per cent of the total marks on this paper. Candidates performed better in Profile 2. The standard deviation was 9.17.

Paper 02 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–XI. Candidates were required to answer two questions from Section II and, in total, six questions from Paper 02. This paper assessed knowledge and application of procedures, and processes associated with office routines and activities in the ratio 4:5.

The overall mean for this paper was 42.62 compared with 39.88 in 2013. Marks ranged from 1 to 72 out of a maximum of 90. The standard deviation was 11.91. The mean for Profile 1 was 18.8 out of 40 (47 per cent) and for Profile 2, 23.82 out of 50 (47.6 per cent). The marks for Profile 1 ranged from 0 to 34, while for Profile 2, 0–43. There are some areas that continue to pose difficulty to candidates and this is addressed under the section ‘Detailed Comments’.

Paper 032 targeted private individuals who would not have had the opportunity to complete SBA projects as school candidates. It took the form of a written examination designed to test the candidates' ability to use their personal experiences of routine office activities acquired through observation or from performing the actual office tasks as real employees.

The paper consisted of ten short, structured essay-type questions, based on an office case, with only one of the questions containing subsections – Parts (a) and (b). For this examination, the case focused mainly on Module VII of the syllabus which covers human resources (HR).

It was evident from the performance on this paper that some areas continue to challenge candidates and ultimately these affected their overall performance. The overall mean for this paper was 27.55 compared with 33.30 in 2013. Marks ranged from 0 to 48 out of a maximum of 50. The standard deviation was 7.92.

DETAILED COMMENTS

Paper 02 – Short Answer

Section I: Compulsory Questions

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

Question 1

This question tested candidates' understanding of:

- The term *organizational structure*
- How the size of a small business may affect the way it deploys its staff
- The purposes of specific office equipment
- Ways in which an employee may improve punctuality and regularity
- Ways in which the skills of operating a variety of office machines and the ability to solve problems can improve efficiency in the office

For Part (a) (i), candidates were asked to define the term *organizational structure*. Generally, candidates were able to define the term, giving at least a partial response such as 'lines of authority' and 'information flows between different levels of management'.

In Part (a) (ii), candidates were asked to describe how the size of a small business may affect the way it deploys its staff. In responding, many candidates referred to the layout of the office, instead of the effects on the way it deploys its staff, such as: *The small business will be less able to employ people to do specialist tasks, and that some workers will have to be responsible for several aspects of the operations, and will have to carry out multi-functional tasks.*

Part (b) required candidates to state the purpose of the shredder, overhead projector and the risograph. For the most part, candidates were able to state the purposes of these machines except the risograph which they alluded to as a form of visual communication or paper used to do mathematics.

In Part (c), candidates were given a scenario of an employee, who having been appraised at the end of the year, was given a low score for punctuality and regularity. Candidates were to suggest four ways in which the employee could improve in these areas.

For the most part, candidates were able to suggest realistic ways on how to practise good time management, indicating responses such as: *Retiring to bed early to rise early; Prioritizing personal work and working smartly, allowing enough travel time and ensuring a reliable transport system.*

Part (d) required candidates to outline ways in which the skills to operate a variety of office machines and the ability to solve problems can improve efficiency in the office. Most candidates were able to outline at least one way in which these skills were important such as: *Work is carried out with a degree of purpose and confidence, thereby increasing morale, output and efficiency; flexibility and multi-faceted ability allow for effective use of time, as well as interpersonal relationships are enhanced for team building, and decisions can be made more easily and independently.*

Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 7.38, with standard deviation of 2.62.

Question 2

This question tested candidates' understanding of:

- The purpose of specific machines when dealing with outgoing mail in a large office
- Guidelines to follow when preparing to rent and operate a new franking machine
- The differences between an electronic mail and a facsimile
- How to write a report of an accident

Part (a) (i) required candidates to state the purposes of the sealing and addressing machines when dealing with outgoing mail in a large office. Most candidates were able to state the correct purposes of the machines, giving responses such as: *The sealing machine speeds up the sealing of envelopes, thus eliminating the manual wetting and folding of flaps, and the addressing machine is used to print addresses, bar codes and customized messages on labels and envelopes.*

In Part (a) (ii), candidates were required to list three guidelines the user should follow when preparing to rent and operate a new franking machine. This part of the question posed a great deal of difficulty for most candidates, as seen in the type of responses given. The following are some of the guidelines candidates could have cited:

- *Obtain authority from the postmaster General before starting to use the machine*
- *Make payments for postage in advance at a specified post office*
- *Break seals in the presence of an authorized officer of the post office*
- *Use franking machine only at the office or premises specified in the licence*
- *Frank postal packages according to postage machine regulations issued to the user upon the grant of the licence*
- *Keep machine in good condition; maintain regularly to ensure clear impressions and accuracy in recording*

In Part (b), candidates were required to state the difference between an electronic mail and a facsimile. This was generally well done as candidates clearly highlighted the differences of the electronic mail *as a system that enables users to transmit letters and other messages from one computer to another via the internet; while the facsimile transmits and reproduces documents over regular telephone lines.*

For Part (c), candidates were required to write a report of an accident they witnessed based on a scenario given. Whereas many candidates were able to write the report sequentially to include the relevant points, they lost marks that were awarded for:

- Appropriate title
- Use of relevant headings, such as Terms of Reference/Introduction, Body of Report, Conclusion/Actions taken
- Name of reporter and date
- Correct grammar and spelling

Marks ranged from 0 to 13 and the mean was 7.03; standard deviation was 2.12.

Question 3

This question tested candidates' understanding of:

- Duties a receptionist may be asked to perform
- Reasons a desk diary is a good reminder system
- Instances when a breach of confidentiality may arise at the workplace
- Appropriate filing systems and how to arrange clients' names as they would appear in those systems
- How to cross reference clients' names

For Part (a), candidates were required to list three duties a receptionist may be asked to perform. For the most part, the majority of candidates provided correct responses such as: *Receiving and screening visitors; keeping the reception register; operating the switchboard and re-directing visitors to other personnel.*

In Part (b), candidates were asked to state reasons a desk diary is a good reminder system. Performance was satisfactory as candidates stated reasons such as: *It contains information about appointments/activities to be done; it may be used as a reference; and it can be consulted for dates and times of appointments and actions to be taken.*

For Part (c), candidates were to give instances when a breach of confidentiality may arise at the workplace. For the most part, candidates gave correct responses such as: *Information of a confidential nature is given to someone in confidence, who later discloses the matter; files containing private and personal information are not stored in a secure place; information relating to one's salary or medical records are exposed; and employees disclose company's policies, procedures or information of a competitive nature.*

In Part (d) (i), candidates were required to create a filing system for a company which trades with international clients and arrange clients' names as they would appear in the filing system. While the majority of candidates was able to create a geographic filing

system and place clients' names according to their countries in alphabetic order, weaker candidates failed to identify the correct filing system and arrange countries' names in alphabetic order.

For Part (d) (ii), candidates were to show the cross-referencing order for the names of two of the newest clients. Many candidates failed to cross reference correctly. For example, the names Keisha Browne-Smith and Saleem Nherd, Nhurd should be cross referenced as follows:

Keisha Browne -
See Keisha Smith;

Saleem Nherd -
See Saleem Nhurd

Marks ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 6.85, with a standard deviation of 3.06.

Question 4

This question tested candidates' ability to:

- Define terms associated with meetings
- List types of monetary instruments, other than cash, used for overseas travel
- State types of services that are provided by travel agencies
- Prepare draft minutes for a chairperson

For Part (a), candidates were asked to define the terms *adjourn*, *chairperson* and *ex-officio*. Most candidates were able to define the terms *adjourn* and *chairperson* correctly, but failed to give the correct definition for *ex-officio* which is: *a person who is automatically a member of a committee or board by virtue of the office he holds and there is no need to elect the person.*

For Part (b) (i), candidates were required to list two types of monetary instruments, other than cash, that can be used for overseas travel. Most candidates performed well, giving correct responses such as: *Traveller's cheque; credit/Master/Visa card; letter of credit, and bank draft.*

For Part (b) (ii), candidates were to state two types of services that are provided by travel agencies. Most candidates performed well, invariably earning the two marks at most, giving responses such as: *Booking airline/ship seats and travel tickets; preparing flight*

itineraries for travellers; preparing travel documents, and recommending and making hotel reservations.

For Part (c), candidates were to use an appropriate format to prepare a draft of the minutes for the chairman from notes that were given to the secretary. Generally, this was unsatisfactorily done as candidates failed to:

- Head the document as ‘Draft Minutes for the Chairman’
- State the company’s name, place, date and time of meeting
- Use appropriate headings for each section such as: Minutes of Meeting; Present; Absent; Minutes of Previous Meeting; Matters Arising; New Business, Any Other Business; Adjournment, and Date of Next Meeting
- Include chairman’s signature and date
- Use an appropriate/acceptable format for writing minutes

Marks ranged from 0 to 14 and the mean was 6.17; standard deviation was 3.07.

Section II: Optional Questions

Candidates were required to attempt any two questions from this section.

Question 5

This question tested candidates’ understanding of:

- Methods of payments that can be made and received through the bank
- The difference between debit and credit notes
- How to complete a payroll form

For Part (a), candidates were to list four methods by which payments can be made and received through the bank. This was generally well done with candidates giving correct responses such as: *Cash; cheques; bank drafts; credit transfer; standing order; and cash dispenser/ATM.*

For Part (b), candidates were required to state the difference between a debit note and a credit note. This was fairly well done. Candidates who scored satisfactorily gave correct responses such as:

- *The debit note is a document made out by the seller whenever the customer is undercharged on an invoice, or a charge is made on a customer which increases his debt*
- *The credit note is issued by a seller to a customer to inform that the price quoted on an invoice has been reduced and his account has been credited. This can be due to an overcharge or if the goods were defective, insufficient, or lost/misplaced during transit.*

Part (c) required candidates to complete the payroll form given as an insert, by calculating and inserting all required information. Most candidates who attempted it did well displaying competence in using the payroll form to insert the correct period, calculate overtime rate, gross pay, PAYE, and net pay. Weaker candidates failed to calculate correctly.

This was the most popular of the optional questions. It was attempted by approximately 67 per cent of the candidates. Marks for this question ranged from 0 to 15 and the mean was 8.73, with a standard deviation of 3.51.

Question 6

This question tested candidates' ability to:

- Define terms used in the sales department
- List reference sources that a purchasing department may consult when acquiring goods and services
- Use the purchase requisition to complete an order
- Explain the effects a late requisition could have on a company's operations

For Part (a), candidates were required to define three terms used in the sales department. For the most part, candidates gave correct responses for the terms: *cash on delivery*, *discounts* and *errors and omissions excepted (E & OE)*. Weaker candidates failed to give the correct definition for E & OE, which means that *the seller is entitled to make any change in the price quoted on the invoice if there is any error or omission*.

For Part (b) (i), candidates were required to list three reference sources that a purchasing department may consult when acquiring goods and services. Most candidates failed to list the correct reference sources that the purchasing department may consult for goods and services. These include *catalogue*, *enquiry*, *e-commerce/internet*, *quotation* and *price list*.

For Part (c) (i), candidates were to use the purchase requisition form, given as an insert, to complete an order, using the current date. Most candidates who attempted this part did well as they inserted the correct information on the purchase requisition to complete the order, thus scoring full marks. Weaker candidates failed to place the information in the correct order on the form.

In Part (c) (ii), candidates were asked to explain two effects a late requisition could have on a company's operations. Most candidates were able to explain only one effect, giving correct responses such as:

- *Required material will not arrive on time, thus causing delays in production*
- *Pressure will be put on department to meet customers' needs for goods/services on a timely basis*
- *Cost of goods could be increased with late orders*
- *Delays in getting goods to customers*

Approximately 61 per cent of candidates attempted this question. The marks gained ranged from 0 to 13, and the mean was 7.07; standard deviation was 2.26.

Question 7

This question tested candidates' understanding of:

- The functions of the marketing office
- The purpose of the equipment used in the sales and marketing office
- How to calculate cash discount, total discount and total amount due for goods
- The ways a company can benefit from offering discounts

In Part (a) (i), candidates were required to list three functions of the marketing office. Candidates performed satisfactorily on this part of the question, giving correct responses for the functions of the marketing office such as:

- *Promoting the firm's products*
- *Preparing a marketing budget/pricing*
- *Publishing promotional activities, fliers, price lists, catalogues*
- *Planning strategies to help the firm achieve its financial objectives through its products*

Part (a) (ii) required candidates to state the purpose of three pieces of equipment — computer, calculator and scanner — that are used in the sales and marketing office. This part of the question was done well done by most candidates who attempted it. Weaker candidates failed to give correct purposes of the scanner which include *to scan original documents from customers; to advertise material created to be transferred to a computer; and to make soft copies of documents to be transferred electronically.*

For Part (b) (i), candidates were given information to calculate the cash discount for the period, the total discounts offered, and the overall total amount due for the goods. They were to show all working. Most candidates who attempted this part scored full marks and showed how they calculated the correct discounts and amount due for the goods. Weaker candidates failed in their bid to calculate correctly.

For Part (b) (ii), candidates were asked to consider why discounts are given despite the fact that companies are making a loss. They were to explain three ways a company can benefit from offering discounts.

This part of the question presented a challenge to some of the candidates who attempted it as they failed to come up with three ways a company can benefit from offering discounts. Some of the correct responses given were:

- *Encourages large purchases of goods*
- *Encourage prompt payments/customer loyalty*
- *Reduces quantity of old stocks*
- *Increases the company goodwill*
- *Attracts new customers*
- *Reduces the likelihood of customers owing money*

This question was attempted by approximately 51 per cent of the candidates. The marks gained ranged from 1 to 15, and the mean was 8.67, with a standard deviation of 3.53.

Question 8

This question tested candidates' understanding of:

- The functions of the factory office
- The duties of a clerk in the factory office
- The consequences persons may encounter should the bill of lading not accompany goods sent
- Guidelines to ensure that goods arrive in good condition to consignees

For Part (a) (i), candidates were to list three functions of the factory office.

For the most part, candidates gave correct responses such as:

- *Making sure the quality of products meets market standards*
- *Keeping stock control at optimum levels*
- *Making available materials, labour and machines to produce goods and services*
- *Liaising with other departments*
- *Maintaining sufficient stock to keep production of goods going*
- *Health and safety standards: employees and environment*

Weaker candidates confused the functions of the despatch and transport offices with that of the factory office.

Part (a) (ii) required candidates to state three duties of a clerk in the factory office. This part of the question was done satisfactorily by some candidates who gave correct responses such as:

- *Liaise with other departments*
- *Dispatch goods to customers on time*
- *Prepare and complete records/documents used in production*
- *Address customers' complaints*
- *Monitor progress of goods ordered by customer*
- *Maintain work schedule for factory workers*

Weaker candidates stated duties done by a clerk in the general/administrative office.

For Part (b) (i), candidates were given a scenario stating that in the Caribbean it is the culture for parents to migrate to foreign countries and later send back foodstuff and other goods to relatives by sea. They were also told that a bill of lading should accompany goods supplied. Candidates were to advise persons of three consequences that may be encountered should the bill of lading not accompany goods sent.

For those candidates who attempted this part of the question, many were able to generate correct responses such as:

- *The goods cannot be claimed from the wharf*
- *There is the possibility that the goods would not get on a vessel*
- *There would be no document to prove ownership of goods*

- *The goods could get lost in transit*
- *Packages would be viewed in a suspicious way*
- *Charges could not be legally assigned*

For Part (b) (ii), candidates were to outline three guidelines which would ensure that the goods arrive in good condition to the consignee.

This part of the question was done satisfactorily by most candidates who attempted it as they gave among their responses the following:

- *Ensure that the goods are packed securely*
- *Ship package with a reputable shipping line*
- *Describe every item in the package*
- *Pay for the shipment*
- *Ensure that the consignee's address is written on the package*

This was the least popular of the optional questions, as it was only attempted by approximately 16 per cent of the candidates.

Marks ranged from 0 to 13 and the mean was 5.76, with a standard deviation of 2.95.

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

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

Candidates were required to apply analytical and evaluative skills to respond appropriately to questions asked. In addition to the case, candidates were given several short scenarios from which they were to respond appropriately using market research techniques.

The case, which was developed from Module VII, explored the roles and functions of the human resource office. It was entitled 'The Merger'. Two companies planned to merge their businesses in order to survive the recession being experienced in the Caribbean and worldwide. Their new office would be located in Jamaica under the consolidated name of Ramjeed & Davis Co. Ltd. A number of meetings took place where management, among other things, decided to consolidate all the departments beginning with the HR department. Some staff would be kept; others would be made redundant, while new staff

would be employed with appropriate skills. The new company pledged to offer increased benefits and improved HR procedures and functions aimed at increasing productivity.

Marks ranged from 0 to 48. The mean score was 27.55, with a standard deviation of 7.92.

Question 1

Candidates were asked to state four work tasks that the HR department would be required to perform before hiring new staff as a result of the merger.

Candidates performed fairly well on this question and stated correct responses such as:

- *Recruit and select qualified, skilled and experienced workers*
- *Budget for training and development of staff*
- *Re-deploy staff*
- *Prepare redundancy packages*
- *Ensure all employees have job descriptions/specifications/appraisals/operational manual*
- *Ensure that the welfare of staff is taken into consideration/hold meetings*

Question 2

Candidates were required to draft a new application form to be used for updating records in the HR department.

Most candidates performed unsatisfactorily on this question as they failed to include instructions on the form and to include essential information such as date of birth, address, marital status, education/qualification, interests, and/or references.

Question 3

This question asked candidates to explain four actions management should take to satisfy the conditions of employment at the workplace.

Many candidates were able to generate correct responses such as:

- *Compile new salary packages/benefits*
- *Keep regular meetings/communicate*
- *Provide the necessary physical and human resources to enhance productivity*
- *Provide an ergonomically friendly environment*

- *Create new job titles for the merger company*
- *Write new contracts as this is a new company and terms of employment may be different, for example, qualification and experience*

Question 4

Candidates were required to recommend four recruitment procedures that may be used to recruit the most competent persons for the new company.

Candidates gave correct responses such as:

- *Examine the skills/knowledge/attributes/experience of applicants*
- *Advertise/shortlist the applicants and interview them*
- *Determine the job positions needed*
- *Conduct rigorous job interviews*
- *Conduct thorough job search/utilize a recruitment agency*
- *Consider whether to employ new staff or keep internal staff*

Question 5

Candidates were required to draft a job description for an HR Clerk IV position. They were to include three of the most important duties and responsibilities for that position.

This question was done unsatisfactorily by most candidates as they failed to include the correct information indicative of a job description. These include salary scale, department, and the position to which an employee reports, as preliminary information which are usually placed on the document. Weaker candidates were not able to write a proper job summary nor list at least three duties and responsibilities of the HR Clerk IV.

Question 6

Candidates were asked to state one action that management could take to ensure the health and safety of its employee in each of the following situations:

- (i) Disposing of waste materials
- (ii) Providing clean and sufficient toilet facilities
- (iii) Providing access to clean water

Most candidates were able to score full marks for this question as they provided appropriate responses for each part of the question.

Question 7

For Part (a), candidates were to suggest to management, four ways they could discipline their employees, other than by firing them.

The responses to this question were good, and they included:

- Listen to employees' grievances
- Have meetings/workshops with employees to find solutions/recommendations to improve the situation
- If problems with employees continue, put it in writing as a warning
- If nothing changes, implement sanctions such as suspension, deduction from salary
- Write follow-up letter and place on files
- Demote the employee if indiscipline continues and suspension does not work

For Part (b), candidates were to use any of the suggestions made in Part (a) and give one reason why it is likely to succeed. Candidates performed fairly well on this part of the question, indicating correct responses in the categories of listening to employees; having meetings; and putting warning in writing. The correct actions and information were given by the candidates.

Question 8

Candidates were to indicate one way in which each of the following conditions may prevent staff turnover.

- (i) Offering competitive salaries
- (ii) Providing good working conditions
- (iii) Offering training for staff
- (iv) Providing competitive fringe benefits

The question was done well by most candidates who attempted it; weaker candidates misunderstood the word *competitive*, and suggested that this could cause jealousy among employees.

Question 9

For this question, candidates were given a scenario where Sam and Sue applied for a vacant position as chief accountant. However, Sue being younger and having a physical disability, was being discouraged by her colleagues who presented reasons that someone of her age, gender, physical ability and other attributes would not get the job.

Candidates were to advise Sue of three ways in which the Employment Act can protect her. Those candidates who attempted this question gave among their responses the following:

- *Offers equal opportunity for both male and female at the workplace*
- *Offers protection against harassment or victimization*
- *Protection from not being promoted*
- *Age and physical disability should not prevent anyone from due consideration of particular positions.*

Question 10

Candidates were asked to state four consequences for staff if annual performance appraisals are not completed and done on time.

Candidates performed satisfactorily on this question, as they scored marks for stating:

- *Comments/feedback made by supervisor could not be challenged*
- *Weaknesses/strengths of employees would not be identified*
- *Training to improve work deficiencies would not be implemented*
- *A good job would not be recognized*
- *Contracts would not be renewed*
- *No record/evidence for disciplinary measures*

Recommendations

- Candidates need to expose themselves to more Paper 032 type questions and seek to develop critical and analytical skills in order to answer the application questions which comprise this paper.
- Since most candidates who sit this examination are private candidates, upon registration for the examination, they should be informed that they need to be guided by the syllabus, recommended texts and support materials.

- Candidates should visit the CXC website and read comments presented in the subject reports in order to assist them in identifying their strengths and weaknesses.
- Candidates need to practise to fill out forms accurately, such as job descriptions, applications, among others, since this is one of the areas of poor performance.
- In responding to questions, candidates should also note key words, such as *describe, state, suggest, differentiate, prepare draft, advise*), to guide them in presenting information in a logical and organized manner.
- Private candidates should also consider seeking assistance from experienced teachers in the school system.