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OFFICE ADMINISTRATION STANDARD LEVEL

Paper 5231
Text Processing

Overall comments

The overall performance of the candidates was varied; some of the work submitted was excellent, with accurate and well-presented work. However, some candidates submitted scripts which were inaccurate and which showed little evidence of proofreading.

Some candidates did not succeed because they failed the Speed Test (**Task 1**). Candidates are required to key in all the text (to achieve the minimum speed of 35 wpm) within the error tolerance (six errors maximum are allowed) and within the time allowed (five minutes).

Many candidates seemed to rely on spellcheckers and grammarcheckers as their only means of proofreading. There were errors such as “opining” (“opening”) and “will” (“well”).

Some candidates were successful in the Speed Test but then incurred too many errors in **Tasks 2 – 5**.

Errors occurring in **Tasks 2, 3 and 4**:

- Errors of agreement were not identified and corrected (such as “60 guest” not corrected to “60 guests” – 5231/A, **Task 2**).
- Apostrophe errors were not identified and corrected (such as “childrens’ parties” not corrected to “children’s parties” – 5231/A, **Task 3**).
- Abbreviations not expanded included “approx” not keyed in as “approximately” and “poss” not keyed in as “possible” – 5231/A, **Task 2**).
- Typographical errors that had not been identified and corrected (such as “sports’ person” not corrected to “sportsperson” (5231/A, **Task 3**)).

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

Many of the candidates still do not seem to understand that they are allowed to proofread and correct errors *within the 5 minutes allowed*. Candidates should be advised that they are required to type the text once only and to spend any time remaining proofreading and correcting their work before printing.

Although most of the candidates completed the task within the error tolerance, there were some candidates who did not complete all the text within the five minutes allowed. Some candidates completed all the text but incurred more than the maximum six errors allowed.

Task 2

Today’s date is required, as is normal business practice. Omission of the date incurs three penalty errors.

The subject heading should be keyed in as displayed in the draft, for example Initial Capitals and Underlining or ALL CAPITALS. Candidates are assessed on their ability to use a variety of styles as presented in the draft (such as may be required by a company’s house style).

Errors of agreement may be subject/verb or quantity/noun. These will include errors such as “the company are” (“the company is”) and “50 section” (“50 sections”).

Task 3

Paragraphing shown in the draft should be followed exactly. Instructions to create a new paragraph and to “run on” should be carried out as shown by the amendment signs. The inset paragraph was not indented from the left margin the exact measurement instructed (such as 50 mm from the left margin – 5231/A).

Errors in apostrophes may be those which have been misplaced – e.g. “children’s’ shoes” (“children’s shoes”) or superfluous apostrophes – e.g. “some organisation’s” (“some organisations”).

Page numbers should be inserted on continuation sheets – any style and font size is acceptable.

Task 4

Letters must be produced on letter-headed paper – some candidates used plain A4 paper. The letter-heading may be prepared as a template for the use of word processor operators, or may be pre-printed. Candidates must *not* key in the letter-heading themselves. They are being assessed on their ability to produce letters in a realistic manner, as would be required in business.

Today’s date is required – the full style is preferred, e.g. “1 January 2005”.

The Special Mark (such as “PERSONAL” – 5231/A) should be keyed in exactly as shown in the draft, including capitalisation.

Most of the candidates typed an envelope, using a typewriter, even though they had produced the remainder of the work on a word processor. It is recommended that candidates use their copy/cut/paste facilities to produce the envelope (or label) as this prevents further errors from occurring. Those candidates whose printers cannot produce envelopes may use an address label and any format and size of label is acceptable. Some candidates incurred penalties because they did not type the Special Mark on the envelope and omitted a clear line space between the Special Mark and the name and address. Others typed the details inaccurately. The majority of the errors had not occurred on the letter.

The words “Our ref” were omitted.

Task 5

This task was very accurately typed and excellently displayed by the majority of candidates, who were very inventive and used various methods of emphasis to great effect. There were very few keying in errors.

Paper 5232

Communication and Task Management

General comments

The submission of work was much better than that produced by candidates in previous years. Most candidates demonstrated sound underpinning knowledge and/or relevant work experience but there were still a few candidates who produced answers which indicated insufficient knowledge and no evidence of work experience.

It must still be stressed that some Centres continue to focus on selected aspects of the syllabus resulting in gaps in candidate knowledge and thus an inability to answer questions well.

There are no comments for questions, or parts of a question, which were generally found to have been answered satisfactorily. Most of Papers B and C have not been used by Centres and therefore there will be no comments on those papers in this report.

It was pleasing to see the improvement in both presentation and legibility of scripts. At all times candidates should be encouraged to keep in mind that the assessment is concerned with good business practices and this should be reflected in the presentation of their assessment submissions.

Centre administrators should ensure that candidates who sit both papers i.e. Communication and Task Management and Office Procedures in the same series have their documentation completed with the correct Paper Numbers – often these have been transposed e.g. 5242 instead of 5243 which could result in administration problems.

The comments in the previous reports concerning examination techniques have also been accepted by most Centres although it is still a concern that some candidates are omitting to answer parts of questions or are not providing the requested number of points in their answers. This could be because of limited knowledge but it could also be as a result of not reading the question, poor proofreading skills or not ticking off a question as it has been answered.

It is important that candidates be given the opportunity to use past assessment papers and to sit mock examinations under timed conditions. This not only assists candidates in their examination preparation but provides them with feedback and to know their individual weaknesses in parts of the syllabus.

There has been evidence in a number of Centres that rote learning is used for selected parts of the syllabus and, whilst this is sometimes useful, candidates often find it difficult to apply that knowledge to the questions being asked.

It also needs to be reiterated that some candidates who were entered for Standard and Advanced Level would have benefited from having completed Foundation Level initially. It is an introduction to the question types and wording used throughout the three levels as well as developing underpinning knowledge for topics which appear for all levels.

Once again most Centres had trained candidates very well and the scripts produced were of a very good standard.

However, there were some candidates who were not at the level required to succeed in this examination and would have benefited from being entered for the Foundation Level. These candidates did not have the underpinning knowledge and/or work experience to understand the questions or to produce the level of answer needed to gain satisfactory marks.

Comments on specific tasks

5232A

Task 1

This question asked candidates to list seven advantages and five disadvantages of using the telephone. Most candidates gained good marks on this question but lost some marks because they could not give the required number.

Task 2

Candidates were asked to give six rules for written communication. This was one of the instances when knowledge gained through rote learning was used. Weaker candidates found it hard to apply that knowledge to their answers or could not give the number requested.

5232B

Task 3

This question related to making a telephone call and what should happen when the person required was not available. The candidates often confused what was required and gave answers which related to a person ringing you rather than the other way round.

Some candidates were unsure how to end a call.

Paper 5233
Office Procedures

Overall comments

The general standard of work in 2004 has improved greatly with many candidates obtaining distinctions.

The same comments apply as with the Communication and Task Management Examinations in that there is evidence to indicate that only selected areas of the syllabus had been covered by some Centres. Candidates must have underpinning knowledge and/or work experience to ensure full coverage of the syllabus.

Owing to the greater numbers of candidates achieving success when completing Paper A it has not been necessary to use Papers B and C in some of the levels and therefore there will be no comments on those papers in this report. No comments have been made for questions, or parts of a question, which were generally found to have been answered satisfactorily.

The report in 2003 stated that although evidence of excellent work had been seen, some candidates would benefit from guidance on how to read examination questions and how to ensure that every part of the question has been attempted. This still applies to candidates who took the examinations this year. Several candidates omitted whole or parts of questions or did not give the requested number of points.

Once again it is endorsed that candidates must also be given the opportunity to use past assessment papers and to complete mock examinations under timed conditions. This not only assists candidates in their examination preparation but provides them with feedback and to know their individual weaknesses in parts of the syllabus.

It has to be said that some Centres who entered candidates for Standard and even Advanced Levels would probably have benefited from having completed Foundation Level initially. It is an introduction to the question types and wording used throughout the levels and is helpful in identifying weak areas of the syllabus which are common to all three levels.

Again candidates at this level produced mainly good papers and they are to be congratulated. However, it was evident that some candidates had both insufficient practical and underpinning knowledge to answer all questions well at this level and there were gaps in some scripts.

As in previous years some questions were not read properly which led to candidates misinterpreting what was required. Parts of questions were omitted which may have occurred because certain parts of the syllabus have not been covered by Centres. Mock examinations would have helped to make candidates aware of their strengths and weaknesses.

Comments on specific tasks

5233A

Task 3

The question asked for possible health and safety hazards when working with VDUs. Many answers related to the results of the hazards such as repetitive strain injury, eye strain and shoulder problems rather than stating what the hazards were.

Task 4

Candidates were asked to give ways in which *equipment* can be protected from theft. Although some good answers were received they often included for example the use of security personnel and passwords.

Papers 5166 and 5168
Interpersonal Business Skills and
Customer Care

General comments

Centres need to be alert to the administration elements of this scheme. The use of the assignment cover sheets is strongly recommended and has benefits for the candidate, Tutor and Examiner. Centres should only submit candidates' work if they feel it meets all of the requirements of the scheme and is complete. SAR sheets must be fully completed and signed by the Tutor before submitting work to be examined. Care must be taken in completing the list of names of candidates being put forward together with their assignments.

'Assignment Guidelines' and 'Criteria for Assessment' sections of the syllabus are very important and must be acknowledged and understood by Tutors.

Centres should try to be consistent with the layout and presentation of candidates' work. The assignments submitted should always be set out in a logical way, embracing conventional styles such as title, page numbering, contents page, headed sections, appendices, bibliography, etc.

The modules require that the candidate makes a self-evaluation of his/her performance in addressing a group, undertaking some research or simply commenting on the assignment. Tutor guidance is important with this issue (see the final item in the assignment cover sheets).

It is suggested that Tutors read all the comments below for each of the modules, as there are many points which could be applied to the majority of the on-demand assignments.

Paper 5166

It is pleasing to report that some reports exceeded the requirements of the scheme by having a richness of quality, and in which the candidates had extended their thinking about interpersonal business skills; these assignments were graded as 'distinction'.

Unfortunately, there were administration weaknesses including poor use of assignment cover sheets, and mismatching of page numbers to those numbers appearing on the cover sheets. Some candidates were confused about the difference between interviewing individuals and making a presentation to a small group as part of the module requirements. However, there were some first class submissions where candidates had received good advice from Tutors and a good understanding of 'criteria for assessment' was evident.

It is understood that candidates might work together and share information and resources. However, assignments must be the work of each individual. One Centre submitted work by candidates who had obviously worked together and whose assignments were identical, which is unacceptable as it is not the work of an individual. Text was written in the third person to alleviate the need to individualise the content so that it appertained to one candidate; work submitted must be that of the individual candidate. Identical assignments cause concern. Similarly, if a Centre submits a number of entries, each with the same candidate self evaluation there is cause for concern. This too is not acceptable as each individual will have contributed different items and have had a different experience of the module. Tutors can provide advice but self evaluation is very much an individual effort. Weaknesses again included short self-evaluations and no reference sources used.

Paper 5168

Self-evaluation and reference sources used were weak with some candidates. These are requirements of the module and need to be emphasised by Tutors. All candidates from one Centre submitted the same work but with pages in different orders; this is not acceptable. Some further weaknesses were identified with the introductions, conclusions and reference sources used in assignments. Another Centre submitted work which was of a very high standard and most candidates were graded 'distinction'; they had received quality guidance and the Centre completely understood what was needed. Some candidate questionnaires were not focused enough on customer care issues, but included other matters which were not related to the module. Complaints and complaining were objectives not always grasped by candidates; if this is not relevant or not appropriate to the assignment, then this fact should be stated. Many assignments were well presented and laid out in a business like way, but one Centre decided to use strongly watermarked paper which proved to be a hindrance in the examining process.

The work of candidates has improved in Centres where Tutors and candidates have access to the syllabus. In these instances Tutors are able to work with candidates to ensure that all the outcomes are adequately covered before assignments are submitted for assessment.

<p>Paper 5237 Organising Meetings and Events</p>
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Overall comments

The overall performance of the candidates ranged from very good to poor. Some candidates were obviously well prepared and correctly organised a meeting, as required. They then produced reports detailing how they had organised their meetings and the documentation and methods of communication they had used.

Some candidates did not submit completed Student Assessment Records and/or completed Assignment Cover Sheets. These should be completed and signed by all candidates and their Tutors.

Comments on the work of candidates

Most of the reports produced were legible and very detailed. However, some candidates only included information on how a meeting should be organised and detailed the various aspects that make a meeting successful. However, there was often very little in the way of specific information on what the candidates actually organised, how they did it, when and where, with whom they communicated and how they did so, etc.

Some candidates did not mention the communication methods they used. Copies of letters, emails, agenda, notice of meeting, minutes, chairperson's agenda and transcripts of telephone conversations were sometimes attached, although quite a large number of candidates did not produce a chairperson's agenda. There was often no detailed information of what communication methods were used and the factors that influenced their choice. (For example, a need to inform someone urgently of a meeting would most likely be dealt with by telephone. However, if the person was not available, a message could be left on the person's telephone answering machine and then an e-mail or a text message sent to ensure the person receives the information as quickly and efficiently as possible.)

Candidates are required to assess the planning, organising and monitoring methods they actually used. They should then state whether or not these methods were successful and what they would do differently when they organise their next meeting.

Many candidates included lengthy descriptions of the secretarial and chairpersons' roles and procedures and lists of meeting terminology. Although these are not required, candidates were not penalised for including these in their assignments.

Some assignments were muddled and confused. Candidates appeared to have included exercises carried out during lessons. It was often very difficult to decipher which information was part of the class exercises and which was part of the work of the final assignment. (It would be most helpful if the final assignment only could be submitted for assessment.)

A number of candidates produced some documentation but did not include a work schedule or action plan.

General comments

A Student Assessment Record (SAR) should be completed when the candidate has achieved all objectives reliably, consistently and without help. The SAR should be signed and dated by both candidate and Tutor. Each candidate must submit a completed SAR with his/her assignment. Assignment Cover Sheets should also be completed and submitted by every candidate. These confirm that the Assignment is the candidate's own work and should indicate that work taken from another source is appropriately referenced and acknowledged. Assignment Cover Sheets have also been designed to enable candidates to check that their work is complete and has covered all the required competence criteria.

Candidates and Tutors are advised to read the Assignment Guidelines in the syllabus very carefully. The step-by-step approach to the final Assignment is highly recommended, as this will help candidates in the planning and undertaking of their assignments.

It is also recommended that candidates discuss with their Tutors the meeting they are able to organise. Candidates should be advised to organise a small, informal meeting, rather than to be too ambitious by organising a large, formal meeting. Once they have decided the meeting they intend to organise, they should then work out how this could be done. They should write a plan of how they intend to carry out the various tasks that will be required. (Those candidates who cannot organise an actual meeting may organise a simulated meeting. All the assessment requirements listed in the syllabus, however, should still be met.)

Candidates may choose to work on their own or may wish to work with a fellow student or work colleague. They should plan their duties and negotiate the allocation of these duties. However, each candidate must produce evidence of his/her own planning and work schedule. Copies of documentation such as agendas, minutes, notes, short reports, notices of meetings, chairperson's agendas, transcripts of telephone calls, etc. should be included in the report.

Candidates should consider:

- what type of meeting they will be organising
- the documentation which would be appropriate for that meeting
- the time, date and venue for the meeting
- how they propose to organise the meeting
- what facilities they have to help them in this task
- how to ensure everything required is organised – methodical working is essential
- production of clear documentation
- what communication methods would be appropriate and the factors that influenced their choice
- timescales involved.

The production of the report should be considered from the beginning, not left to the last minute. Candidates who made notes and who thought out the organisation of the meeting and the report from the outset were often the most successful in their assignments.

Candidates may wish to note the following points for successful report writing:

- a brief introduction at the start of the report should describe exactly what the candidate has organised
- the actual planning and organisation of the meeting
- full details on the organising and monitoring methods that were used
- a brief statement as to whether or not the organising and monitoring methods were successful
- a short paragraph of what the candidate would do differently next time, if appropriate
- a brief paragraph giving the communication methods used by the candidate, together with an explanation of the factors that influenced the communications they used
- copies of all documentation – including a chairperson's agenda, if appropriate, and transcripts of telephone and face-to-face conversations
- a conclusion on the success of the meeting.

Tutors may wish to note that lists of secretarial and chairperson's roles and procedures, descriptions of basic meeting terminology and explanations on the differences between meeting notes, minutes and precis are not required as part of the assignment.

Finally, Centres should submit the candidate's assignment to CIE together with the Student Assessment Record (SAR) and Assignment Cover Sheets, making sure that these have been completed, signed and dated.

Paper 5191

Information and Communications Technology

The general standard of entries for this module was high, although there were a number of errors which included:

- Errors in page layout with the failure to set margins or column widths as specified.
- Errors in searching, either by trying to search using the results of a previous search rather than all the data, through errors in the search criteria, or in the selection of the data for the database extract.
- Some candidates could not correctly align text, especially when asked to fully justify the body text of a document.
- Errors in sorting the data as specified in the question paper.
- The failure to include a calculated control in the data manipulation report, or where a calculated control was included it was not the one specified on the question paper.
- The failure to understand the generic terms serif and sans-serif. Many candidates tried to locate these as font styles rather than understanding that fonts such as Times New Roman contain short strokes or serifs on each letter, and that sans-serif fonts are without these.
- Errors in page layout with the failure to set margins or column widths as specified.
- The failure to indent the bulleted list by the amount specified on the question paper.
- The failure to resize the imported graphic or to text wrap around this graphic.
- Widows and/or orphans were not removed by inserting page breaks.