CONTENTS

BUSINESS STANDARD LEVEL

Paper 5161

Business Organisation and Environment

General comments

Compared with previous examinations, the standard and content of responses have improved although there remains much room for improvement. It is recognised that most of the candidates undertake the examination in a second language; incorrect spelling and grammatical errors are ignored in favour of the quality of their responses. The demonstration of business knowledge and, where required, the evidence of reasoning are more important than the quality of language. However, it must be understood that very poorly expressed answers, especially those which expect the Examiner to guess the meaning, will not be marked very highly.

Arising from this examination, there are perhaps four issues which need ventilation:

- Candidates must ensure that they understand what the Examiner wants them to do. This means they must read the Examiner's instructions very carefully. All too often candidates fail to earn good marks simply because they either misread or fail to comprehend a task. It needs to be reiterated that candidates are allowed fifteen minutes reading time in order to become acquainted with the case study and the general nature of the tasks. It is appreciated that an examination will subject candidates to pressure but they need to be encouraged to pace themselves and not panic because of the time constraint. There is still a significant minority of candidates who, despite a task asking for three features, will offer more than is required. Not only is that a poor use of examination time but the candidate runs the risk of the Examiner accepting only the first three, regardless of the quality of the other points.
- Candidates must learn to differentiate between the demands for a 5-mark and a 10-mark task. At no point in the examination paper are they required to write lengthy essay style answers but candidates must write enough to convince the Examiner that they understand the tasks. Crisp and succinct answers that rehearse the knowledge required are preferred by the Examiner to those which ramble at length and produce little by way of a substantial answer. A 10-mark task requires more detail and argument than a 5-mark task.
- Mostly, the tasks ask candidates to *describe* or *explain* and a typical problem, alluded to above, is that candidates do not offer satisfactory descriptions or explanations. A number of answers were limited, not because of any specific weakness in knowledge, but rather because the explanations lacked substance. A description or explanation does not require a bullet-point answer (although the essential points are rewarded) but, in terms of a 5-mark task, two or three well expressed and detailed sentences.
- The whole point of having a case study is to expect candidates' responses to be made in appropriate context. Some tasks test general business knowledge but, mostly, they are related to issues in the case study and should be answered accordingly. Marks may be lost if context is overlooked.

The foregoing points are, perhaps, obvious but they still occur and clearly some candidates are not earning the level of marks they would otherwise deserve. Examination technique is always a matter of concern and Tutors are advised to give it full attention when preparing candidates for the examinations.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

(a) Candidates were asked to explain two features of a franchise. This appeared to be a familiar business area to candidates who rehearsed similar standards features. Very few candidates ventured to say that a franchise was not a form of company but a legal contract or undertaking between two parties – the franchiser and the franchisee.

(b) The answers to this task were generally good as candidates could readily identify two advantages to Perfect Parties of becoming a private company. The main advantages rehearsed by candidates were limited liability, separate legal personality, and the ability to raise more capital. With reference to the latter point, some of the weaker responses suggested that additional capital could be raised by openly selling shares; clearly confusing the private company with a public limited company.

(c)(i) Candidates were asked to explain the meaning of authorised capital. The task dealt with a basic element of business knowledge and good working definitions were expected. However, the responses were mostly disappointing and many references were made to start-up capital which is not quite the same thing. Essentially, candidates were required to explain that authorised capital is the maximum amount of capital that a company is authorised to raise, and very few responses even mentioned that it was referred to in the Memorandum of Association. This task exposed a weakness in candidates' elementary business knowledge.

(ii) This was a companion task to **(i)** and which revealed further limitations in basic business knowledge. Candidates were asked to explain the benefit to the company of having unissued capital. What was required here was an understanding of capital rather than a definition, although that might have been useful in demonstrating understanding. Candidates should have explained that unissued capital gave the company the ability to raise new funds from existing or even new shareholders at any time without having to seek loans. No response contained reference to rewarding current shareholders with bonus shares.

Task 2

(a)(i) The task asked candidates to explain the meaning of the chain of command being too short. The responses needed to be made specifically in the context of case study. It meant offering a definition of chain of command (namely, the route through which authority and orders are passed down in a company) and then explaining how a short chain enabled the Director of Perfect Parties to maintain close control and direction over the company's affairs.

(ii) Explaining two advantages of decentralisation appeared to offer little difficulty to the majority of candidates. Context was not particularly looked for in this task and so candidates were able to rehearse their general knowledge of the subject. In the main, the salient issues were recognised and explained.

(b) This task addressed the matrix form of organisation and candidates were asked to offer two features. For the most part it was not well answered which indicated that matrix was not clearly understood. There were, however, some serious attempts which recognised the better coordination of projects and the exploitation of employees' skills and expertise. A large number of responses referred to each employee being answerable to two managers or supervisors, which was correct, but few explored the positive aspects of matrix.

(c) This was a most disappointing task. Very few candidates had any idea how to respond to it. They were asked to explain three powers and duties of a company director which meant focusing on the legal responsibilities. So many answers contained reference to managerial duties so omitting to acknowledge that some Directors had no employment role within a company. This task has been asked before with little success and Tutors need to consider the subject when dealing with the legal basis of a company organisation. The points to be offered included the duty of trust; acting as an agent of the company; power to declare a dividend; power to sue in the company's name; power to sell company assets. This represents an important area of corporate organisation.

Task 3

(a) This task called for an explanation of the difference between permanent and casual employment, and it was tackled quite well. It was yet another task that ought to have earned candidates full marks and that few did so tended to reflect weak explanation. The salient points were rehearsed indicating a basic knowledge. However, a number of candidates made the usual mistake of confusing casual with part-time work, and permanent with full-time work. It is possible to work part-time and be on a permanent contract. Part-time work implies a continuing need of a company to fill a role that does not require full-time attention. Equally, a casual employee may work either part- or full-time for the period of employment. There is a subtle difference to be acknowledged here.

(b) Explaining a code of conduct presented little difficulty for candidates and most were able to define it as a company guideline for employees which might refer to such issues as dress, behaviour, health and safety.

(c) The description of three expectations that the employer might reasonably have of the employees has become an established standard task which means it ought to encourage competent answers. Candidates had no real difficulties in identifying two or three appropriate expectations but, as they were not well expressed, few were awarded more than 6 marks out of the 10 allocated. This task was just one of two in the paper that was worth 10 marks. Candidates must learn that a 10-mark exercise demands a little explanation and detail than a 5-mark one.

Task 4

(a)(i) Candidates were asked to describe how the company, Perfect Parties, might be affected by Taxation policies. A significant number of responses dealt with the matter simplistically, that is to say, pointing out that an increase in company taxation meant a decrease in profits and vice versa. Very few grasped the issue that high taxation might deter investment and initiative whilst a more amenable tax regime might well encourage risk-taking and hard work. Government might assist a company by offering, for example, tax holidays or reductions because of investment programmes. Candidates were not expected to write essays on fiscal issues but just to demonstrate that, for 5 marks, they understood the likely impact of tax on a company.

(ii) The companion external influence was Competition and this was better understood than taxation, although the arguments tended to be rather lacking in substance. Candidates should have argued, again only for 5 marks, that competition can encourage creativity, improvement in product quality, and an improvement in customer care. Mostly, candidates regarded competition negatively suggesting that another entrant into the market would bring about the closure of Perfect Parties.

(b) This task asked why the location of Perfect Parties no longer mattered. The clues were in the case study and missed by many candidates. When the company started out, it concentrated on children’s parties and it was essential to be located within easy reach of the clients. That aspect of the business was later disposed of through franchises. The company began to focus on the organisation of special international events; in other words, the company operated where the work was to be found. It was necessary to have a registered office but staff were sent wherever necessary to negotiate business. One point which could have been employed, and was not even mentioned in any answer, was that electronic contact partly reduces the importance of location. Perhaps the majority of answers referred to the international position of the company but there was little evidence of reasoning.

(c) Candidates were asked to explain the meaning of fair trading. This was not, in the main, a very successful task although most made some reference to doing business within the law. Like most of the tasks in the paper, an in-depth response was not required but candidates were expected to identify points such as compliance with trading regulations, not to employ unfair market influence, not to make false claims.

Task 5

(a) Candidates were asked to describe two factors that affected the nature of the company's market. The choices were relatively few, and even obvious, but the task was not tackled particularly well overall. Having said that, there were some firm answers which identified competition, the health of the economy and/or chosen market, and pricing. Other factors included the product or service itself, quality, and government policies and controls.

(b) 'Client base' was the focus of this task and candidates were asked to explain what it meant. It was not a demanding task and, for 2 marks, candidates only had to indicate that it was the number and type of clients the company had on its books. A better response would have included the point that the wider the client base, the more success the company was likely to have. Perfect Parties had an increasing client base owing to the success of its international event organisation.

(c) The final task focused on how the company might ensure client satisfaction and this was an area that candidates seemed to know well. It was only the second 10-mark task in the paper and so required a little more depth in its treatment. Mostly, the responses were sound and covered the essential issues and good marks were earned. The main points included advising clients, maintaining (even improving) standards, guaranteed delivery of events, proper planning and preparation, meeting the specific needs of clients, and appreciating the characteristics of their clients.

Paper 5162
Effective Business Communication

General comments

The standard of performance in relation to this paper appears to be generally good, with a small amount of Centres demonstrating exceptional performance. However, the depth of discussion in many instances was quite disappointing, with answers tending to be quite brief with little elaboration on key points.

As in previous years, the same issues tended to manifest themselves and were responsible for the failure, and low pass mark, experienced by some candidates. These include:

Misinterpretation of task requirements – This was very evident in **Question 3 (c)** where many candidates failed to realise that the focus on preparing for a meeting, would include development of agenda's, identifying accommodation for the meeting etc. Instead many answers focused around the development of job descriptions, which was not the requirement.

Time management – Many candidates seemed to perform quite poorly in **Question 5** because they had run out of time. As this is a two part question, it is quite unfortunate. Answers to **Question 5 (b)** were very brief, often in bullet point format, with little or no substance. Additionally, writing tended to deteriorate quite considerably at this stage, and at times writing was barely legible. The structure of this paper has been the same for several sessions, and therefore it is apparent that there are five questions, which means that the two hours of the examination should be split into five equal sections, with each question totalling 20 marks.

A further problem relating to time management, was the excessive amount of text some candidates would write for a 2 mark question, it was often the same amount as for a 10 mark question. It is important that candidates realise the various demands of questions based upon volume, in order that they can identify the type and length of response required.

On a more positive note, the *format and presentation of material* seemed to be quite good on the whole, with the exception of preparation of letters and memos. Clearly candidates struggled with these tasks, in particular the level of detailed expected, the content of the documents and the salutation. It was quite amazing how many candidates actually mixed up the use of 'yours sincerely' and 'yours faithfully'.

On a final note in this section, can Centres please ensure that papers are clipped together in the appropriate order. Examiners spend a considerable amount of time re-ordering the script in order to be able to mark coherently.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

(a) The task required candidates to give four reasons why it is so important that the external communications to potential recruits are effective. Generally this question was answered well and included a combination of factors, such as projecting a good image, considering target audiences, considering type and level of feedback required, timings and costs involved. There were also a broader range of answers provided which were equally valid, but normally linked with issues relating to image and relationships. Candidates who provided these answers were rewarded marks accordingly. However, there was a lot of variability in the length and depth of answers, anything from four brief bullet points to a page and a half of text.

(b)(i) This focused on identification of the best method of communication to reach potential graduate applications to inform them of the closing date for applications. There were a lot of sensible answers to this question including local and regional press, local radio, flyers and posters. All of which were good ways of reaching a mass audience. However, many candidates also suggested TV. This is a very unlikely source, and would be a very expensive route to advertising such information, and is therefore deemed in appropriate.

(ii) This followed on the theme from the above, and looked at inviting actual applicants. In the main candidates answered this quite well, and made suggestions such as letter, telephone call or email. There were some obscure answers, but this was quite strong overall.

(iii) The final part to this question was about finding information about universities to visit on behalf of recruitment. The accepted answers within the mark scheme included telephone call, email and letter and made reference to websites. The answers all followed that thread, with a heavy influence on web searched.

However, there was one evident weakness with answers to **(b)** and that was the justification for use of methods of communication. Candidates either failed to provide the justification, or did so in very brief terms. This was disappointing.

Question 2

(a) Candidates were tasked with writing a memo to BP's Human Resource Director, explaining why it is necessary to advertise in the national press for graduate positions.

Sadly the answers to this question were very poor, although layout was generally acceptable. However, the content was very disappointing. The marks were split equally on format and content. The key area of weakness was the final stage in the memo, which should have focused on getting the approval of the HR manager to arrange for the budget to allow this advertising to take place. A high number of candidates failed to incorporate this into their memo.

Key things candidates should be aware of also in terms of formatting, is that memos do not conclude with 'yours sincerely' or 'yours faithfully'. A memo is an internal document and does not require that type of salutation.

Key components of this question should include:

- to/from
- date/reference number or department
- subject (advert for recruitment of graduates).

The body of the memo should include:

- reasons for advertising i.e. advertising nationally
- indication that the advert needs to be national because of the number of graduates required
- indication of timing i.e. urgent
- next-step, i.e. HR manager to arrange for budget for advert to happen.

The split of marks on this is format 4 marks and body 4 marks.

(b) In this part of the question, candidates were required to write a letter to the applicants asking them for interview. This part of the question was very poorly answered, and it became apparent very early on, that few candidates really knew how to write a letter, consider format, content and use the appropriate salutation. The majority of the letters gave the wrong salutation. Letters should have started with 'Dear Mr or Mrs' etc, most said Dear Sir or Madam. This was inappropriate. Added to which, clearly the use of 'yours faithfully' and 'yours sincerely' was also confused, and used inappropriately. Therefore marks tended to be lower in this question.

In terms of the body of the content, this was also very weak, some candidates just put in limited information about the time of the interview, others forgot venue, and again the majority of people actually forgot to ask for confirmation, or give a point of contact for the purpose of the interview.

Overall, candidate performance was very disappointing. It is clear that there is a lot of effort required on the part of candidates and their Tutors, to ensure a good and solid understanding of preparing communication documents. These two types of documents are a key part of organisational communication, and therefore, must be right.

In essence answers should have been along the following lines:

Business letter to confirm the following format:

- logo or letter heading of the company
- date
- reference number
- recipient's name and address
- appropriate salutation – Dear Mr/Mrs
- letter heading – RE: Application of.

The content of the letter – calling for interview, giving date, time location, person interviewing applicant, confirmation details and any other information required for the interview i.e. CV, certificate etc.

The letter should then have an appropriate closure i.e. 'yours sincerely'.

The split on this particular task was 6 marks for format and 6 marks for content.

Question 3

(a) Candidates were required to consider a range of factors relating to planning a presentation, specifically in terms of verbal and non-verbal communication. This should have been a straightforward question, but interestingly, candidates seemed at times to answer in general terms, and were thinking about presentation of slides, room and layout. This was not the focus of the question.

Answers should have included things like deciding on the aim of the message and the need to sell the organisation, delivering appropriate facts and figures, stressing key points. In addition to this, consideration of verbal style, should it be sincere, warm, assertive or diplomatic.

In terms of non-verbal communication, here candidates should have considered issues such as body language in the main considering use of gestures, posture, eye movement, and facial expression. Ultimately, consideration of how to present data was required.

This question drew mixed responses from candidates and marks awarded were on average in the middle range of the spectrum.

(b) This asked candidates to consider how potential applicants could work in groups. This looked in particular at three factors:

- size of the group
- group culture
- relationships within the group.

Candidates performed well overall, providing well balanced answers to this question, in terms of the issues relating to the size of the group, and in particular relationship components of the group.

However, reference to group culture was somewhat more confused. Here candidates tended to focus on organisational culture, as opposed to individual cultural differences, so answers were a little less pleasing in this respect. The focus of this part of the question should be looking at how people operate, when they are as individuals, culturally diverse.

(c) Unfortunately, candidates appeared to either miss this question out altogether, or focus upon the paper work required for the meeting, i.e. recruitment documentation, as opposed to realising that the focus of the question was actually about preparing for a meeting i.e. preparing an agenda, booking a room, setting a time, arranging for minutes to be taken and distributed, identifying a chair for the meeting and other meeting related issues. Therefore, marks overall were very disappointing. This was a 6 mark question, so if it was missed out, it made a significant difference to marks available for that question.

Question 4

(a) The majority of candidates scored 100% for this part. The question asked for four purposes of a recruitment interview.

Answers focused upon obtaining information about the application, checking the suitability of the applicant, checking the information given on the CV and checking the ability of the person against the job. The response to this was very good and very encouraging overall.

(b) Again, as with **(a)**, the responses to this question were very good, whereby candidates were expected to explain what they should do when preparing for interviews. Candidates often scored quite high marks in this question for considering a range of factors including, considering the aims and purpose of the interview, which should be present, necessary documents, location, being aware of verbal and non-verbal behaviour, making the recruitment decision and appropriate feedback.

(c) The focus of this question was upon the use of open and closed questions that could be used at interviews.

This was the most disappointing set of answers ever seen in relation to this subject area. The vast majority of candidates did not provide the right answers. They provided confused answers and examples, and seemed unable to grasp the differences, which suggests that developing a greater understanding of this area is imperative.

Clearly the answers should state that ‘closed questions’ are questions based on facts, such as age, income, checking skills, checking details on an application form, and are in essence one or two word answers. For example “how old are you? – 32”.

Open questions, however, are used to find out much more about the potential applicant, in terms of understanding their attitudes and past work experience. Therefore, questions such as ‘why did you apply for this position?’ would be much more appropriate. This part of the question had 8 marks available, and failure to gain those marks will have had a significant affect on some candidates.

Question 5

(a) This question required delegates to apply their knowledge of graphical presentation in practice, by using data within the case study to develop a graph.

The answers to this question were by and large pleasing, and some of them were very detailed, and awarded full marks accordingly. However, it was also clear that some candidates ran out of time, and therefore failed to pay attention to the finer detail, such as ensuring that there was a heading for the graph and a key for shading, or indeed any shading at all. This therefore resulted in some candidates being awarded less marks overall.

Candidates were expected ultimately to:

- provide a correct and accurate graph
- plot the values correctly
- shade the areas and illustrate shading differences by introducing a key
- ensure that the chart is correctly labelled on the axis and also correctly headed.

(b) Candidates were required to explain three different types of visual aids that they could use to present data instead of using a bar chart. However, some candidates did explain the use of a bar chart, regardless of what the question said.

Answers tended to be extremely brief in the main, and not particularly well developed, which it would appear is more a case of time management than lack of understanding.

Typical visual aids would have included pie charts, line graphs, tables and histograms, to name but a few.

Key points to be addressed in relation to these particular examples would be as follows:

- Pie charts – these are useful for presentation of less complex data, and allow a limited use of in-depth information. Pie charts are generally not that helpful in portraying trends, at they are often too complex to illustrate in this way.
- Line graphs – are useful for showing trends but tends to be difficult to read or follow, particularly if there is a lot of data to be presented. Too many lines and points on a graph makes it quite confusing to those trying to read it.
- Tables – numeric tables are a valuable way to present complex facts, but again not very good at showing trends, this tends to be too difficult to present.

Paper 5163

Business Finance

General comments

It is pleasing to report that once again the vast majority of candidates who sat the October 2004 paper appeared to have been well prepared for the examination. There appeared to be fewer gaps in the candidates' knowledge of the syllabus content and Centres should be congratulated for their efforts in delivering across the breadth of the syllabus.

It was also pleasing to see that a majority of the candidates had used their time effectively and this contributed to several candidates achieving at least a pass grade, even if they had not produced 'perfect' answers to all of the tasks.

There are however, some issues that need to be addressed to ensure that future candidates achieve the maximum possible marks for their efforts.

The need for precision when defining terms needs to be stressed. The nature of the syllabus dictates that terms used in the business world have specific meanings and candidates need to provide clear and concise definitions to achieve the maximum marks for these components.

When a task requires that candidates undertake a calculation, it is essential that candidates provide a formula to show how they are attempting to solve the problem. Centres are reminded that marks are available for knowledge of the process required to arrive at a solution as well as providing the correct answer.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

Overall the answers provided by the majority of the candidates for this task (**(a)**-**(g)**) were satisfactory and this provided a sound basis for many candidates to progress to a reasonable result.

There was however, some confusion over the distinction between a grant and an annual subsidy in **(c)**, and the answers provided for methods used to 'go public' in **(e)(ii)** could have been more focused.

Task 2

This task was well answered by the majority of candidates with many achieving full marks. In order to achieve full marks candidates needed to explain how each of the factors would have an impact on the financial activities of the firm, and a failure to address this issue meant that candidates lost marks.

Task 3

The answers to this task were rather disappointing as many candidates could not produce an amended balance sheet that actually balanced. This kind of task has frequently been included on the examination paper and Centres are urged to ensure that future candidates are capable of understanding and producing the important financial statements.

Task 4

This task was answered well by the majority of the candidates. Most candidates could distinguish between the internal and the external users of the accounts and they provided reasoned explanations of how these users would use these accounts.

Task 5

This task produced few good responses. Many candidates found it difficult to distinguish between profit and contribution. Only a minority of candidates appeared to understand the process required to calculate the contribution of the activities of the firm. Once again it is necessary to remind Centres that the candidates should always provide a formula to demonstrate how they intend to solve the problem. A failure to do so often leads to candidates losing marks when their calculations prove to be incorrect.

Task 6

Overall the answers to this task were rather disappointing. Many candidates had difficulty in distinguishing between financial and management accounting and they seldom provided valid examples to illustrate their explanations. It was surprising to see that many candidates had difficulty in identifying two accounting principles and had problems in providing an explanation of how the principles operated.

Task 7

This task was answered well by the majority of the candidates and it was clear that this was a topic that had been well covered by most Centres. In many cases candidates were awarded full marks as they produced answers that demonstrated both the correct methods and the correct solutions for the task.

Paper 5164

Marketing

General comments

It was pleasing to see some very good overall performance this session, and a general understanding of marketing at this level was demonstrated. Specific syllabus content areas are covered in the section on tasks below.

Candidates appear to have noted previous comments about time management and reading the questions carefully.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

This task was set to assess candidates' general understanding of marketing and was generally done very well. The main omission was a failure to use examples from the Case Study in part **(b)** of the task.

(a) Most candidates did well in this part of the task and gave an acceptable definition of marketing.

(b) As already mentioned, many candidates failed to give examples from the Case Study. The other difficult area was 'market share'.

Task 2

This task was generally answered well, although the five marks available for each section of part **(b)** should have given an indication of the depth of explanation which was required and this was not often achieved.

(a) This part of the task was straightforward, with the answer given in the Case Study. Most candidates correctly identified this as 'observation', and explained what George had been doing and why.

(b)(i) This part required an explanation of the term 'customer survey' and identification of data collection methods. Few candidates mentioned qualitative and quantitative methods, although most were able to identify the use of questionnaires in carrying out surveys.

(ii) Although some candidates correctly explained the way in which focus groups can be used to obtain qualitative data, many answered incorrectly, saying that this was about George focusing his marketing on one group of customers.

(iii) This part required an explanation of the term 'customer interview' and identification of data collection methods. Few candidates identified the fact that this can provide a way of discovering broader qualitative data through the use of unstructured questioning.

Task 3

This task was set to assess candidates' understanding of segmentation.

(a) Most candidates were able to explain two different segmentation methods – for example, behavioural or demographic. However, some candidates tried to use business to business methods which were inappropriate. Also, answers should have linked to the coffee shop, and few achieved this.

(b) Again, most candidates were able to identify general advantages of using segmentation, but few linked these advantages to the Case Study scenario. Candidates are unable to gain high marks if links are not made to the context in which it is set.

Task 4

This task was generally done very well and it was pleasing to see so many candidates correctly identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Coffee Shop.

(a) This was done well by most candidates. However, some candidates forgot that opportunities and threats come from factors that are external to the organisation.

(b) Most candidates were able to give two reasons why it is important to monitor competitor activity.

(c) Again the majority of candidates were able to explain why it is important to monitor progress to a plan and the role which SMART objectives play. A few candidates simply explained what the S, M, A, R, and T of SMART meant, and this was not required by the task.

Task 5

This final task was set to assess candidates' understanding of four specific elements of the marketing mix which were relevant to the Coffee Shop scenario.

(a) Most candidates were able to identify the need for quality food and prompt service under the heading of 'Product'. However, more marks were available for those who suggested new services that could be offered such as baby changing facilities to attract young mothers during the day.

(b) This part of the task was generally done very well, with only a few candidates suggesting 'price' related offers rather than 'promotional' activities.

(c) Many candidates correctly explained the importance of having good staff. A few incorrectly suggested that this element referred to the customers attracted.

(d) Most candidates correctly made suggestions related to the ambience of the premises. A few incorrectly described 'place' rather than 'physical evidence'.

Paper 5165
Human Resource Management

General comments

This paper has been designed to provide a differentiated approach. Each question starts with the basic requirement of knowledge and builds through understanding to evaluation and analysis, the higher order skills.

It was hoped that part **(a)** of each question would provide marks for almost every candidate and boost the confidence of the less able. Unfortunately, many candidates did not read the instructions of the questions and therefore answered each part in the same way. This ultimately wasted time and lead to problems later in the paper. The skills required in an examination are as important as the knowledge and understanding of the subject itself and should not be neglected.

The paper generally produced a better range of responses than previously, but the low entry is still a concern.

Comments on specific questions

Question 1

This question tested the candidates understanding of the meaning, purpose and organisation of HRM and their ability to distinguish between meaning, purpose and organisation.

(a) Few candidates managed to provide four purposes from the possible eight and many simple quoted the meaning of HRM. This is an area that needs some work with candidates.

(b) This part of the question produced better answers but few candidates were able to use examples form the case study to illustrate their point. Too many answers simply retold the problems of the case study or answered from a theoretical point of view.

(c) This part of the question was by design the most difficult part but surprisingly well answered. The majority were able to describe rather than explain how OCD changed its approach to HRM with some good examples. The fine detail and more technical aspects, such as the move from a centralised to a decentralised approach, proved too difficult for the majority.

Question 2

This question tested assessment objective 2.0, investigating the employment market and the frameworks within which organisations manage people. Once again there was an emphasis on the entire assessment objective to ensure knowledge across the range rather than particular parts. This in the past has been the least well taught part of the HRM option.

(a) Many candidates are clearly confused about the employment market. The word 'features' caused a number of problems and lead to many strange answers. Few candidates were able to quote gender, age, part-time, full-time etc., the required answers.

(b) The role of the trade union has clearly been very well taught. All of the candidates were able to write at length about trade unions. The next step to take the functions of a trade union and apply them to the situation proved too difficult for many. The ability to take taught knowledge and apply it to different situations needs to be considered for the future.

(c) Once again the candidates had a good knowledge of the different employment laws but had problems when asked to apply these to the situation in question. The teaching of employment law using the case study approach might prove beneficial.

Question 3

Assessment objective 3.0 has always been the most popular of the entire HRM option and one that has been covered in great detail. Often in such detail that the candidates knowledge goes beyond what is required. This year the candidate's detailed knowledge was evident.

(a) The majority of candidates gained full marks on this section but some are confused and find it difficult to distinguish between employment contracts and working patterns.

(b) Many candidates took this question out of context and simply quoted dismissal, redundancy, retirement etc. The question clearly required an explanation of how the employee should have been dismissed, the process with verbal and written warnings.

(c) This is a favourite topic and produced answers of great length. The majority of candidates understood the difference between recruitment and selection but many neglected to answer the question in the context of OCD.

Question 4

It is of some concern that aspects of this assessment objective are extremely well covered whilst other aspects are poorly covered. Ways of organising work and appraisal are always favourite questions, but candidates always struggle with other methods of measuring performance and conflict resolution.

(a) The majority of candidates gained full marks on this part, but some are confused and find it difficult to distinguish between working patterns and employment contracts.

(b) Candidates understood how a shift system works but many of the description/suggestions were not appropriate for OCD. Once again the context was important and ignored by too many.

(c) This part of the question was poorly answered. Candidates confused improvement initiatives with conflict resolution or simply looked at different communication methods. This is an area of weakness for many of the candidates and requires some thought for the future.

Question 5

This question, testing assessment objective 5.0, produced either high marks or very low marks. The difference was due to the interpretation of the words 'methods of payment'. Those who received very few marks discussed payment by cheque, cash, BACS etc. This is clearly outside the scope of this syllabus. Candidates have either brought this knowledge in from other areas or are being taught material that is not required, and at best confusing.

(a) The majority produced a comprehensive list but a few candidates remain confused between payment and 'fringe benefits'.

(b) For those candidates who correctly understood the requirement of part **(a)** this part was well answered. Few ventured beyond fixed rates or piece rate and many could not justify their answer.

(c) The quality of answer to this question was disappointing. Few mentioned induction training or on-the-job training and preferred to discuss what had not been done. Linkages to other parts of the syllabus such as Health and Safety were non-existent.

Papers 5166, 5167 and 5168
Interpersonal Business Skills, Business Start-up 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, Assessor 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.

'Assignments Guidelines' and 'Criteria for Assessment' sections of the module booklets are very important and must be acknowledged and understood by Tutors and Centre Assessors.

Centres should try to be consistent with the lay out 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 5167

No assignments submitted.

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.

Paper 5191

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

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.

Paper 5237

Organising Meetings and Events

<u>Overall comments</u>

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

<u>Comments on the work of candidates</u>

Most of the reports produced were legible and very detailed. Some candidates only included information on how a meeting should be organised and detailed the various aspects that make a meeting successful. These candidates often provided 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 given 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. Candidates who cannot organise an actual meeting may organise a simulated meeting. However, all the assessment requirements listed in the syllabus 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.