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Cambridge Career Awards in Office Administration – Foundation

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TEXT PROCESSING

Paper 5221

General comments

The candidates' overall performance was very varied. Some of the work submitted was of a high standard, with accurate work that was well presented. However, some candidates submitted scripts which were inaccurate and which showed little, if any, evidence of proofreading.

Some candidates did not succeed in the practical assessment because they failed the Speed Test (**Task 1**). They must be able to key in all the text (to achieve the minimum speed of 25 wpm) within the error tolerance (6 errors maximum) and within the time allowed (5 minutes). Some candidates were successful in the Speed Test but incurred too many errors in **Tasks 2 – 5**.

Errors occurring in Tasks 2, 3 and 4

- Errors of agreement were not corrected (such as "Some of our representatives has" not corrected to "Some of our representatives have" – 5221/A, **Task 2**).
- Apostrophe errors not corrected (such as "bank's" not corrected to "banks" – 5221/A, **Task 4**).
- Words omitted or keyed in inaccurately.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

Although the majority of candidates completed the task within the error tolerance, there were some who did not complete the text within the 5 minutes allowed. There were a small number who did complete all the text but who incurred more than the maximum 6 errors allowed.

Task 2

- Abbreviations not expanded (such as "poss" to "possible" – 5221/A).
- Today's date omitted.

Task 3

- A variety of typing errors, which ranged from omitted words to errors which the spellchecker would not have identified as incorrect, such as "you" instead of "your".
- The word underlined in the draft was often not underlined by the candidates (such as "turtles" – 5221/A).

Task 4

- The words "Our ref" omitted.
- Today's date omitted.
- Abbreviations not expanded (such as "Dr" ("Dear"), "snclly" ("sincerely") – 5221/A).
- The enclosure not indicated.

Task 5

- Many candidates produced excellent tasks that were accurate and well presented.

Further general comments

Many candidates seemed to rely on spellcheckers and grammar checkers as their only means of proofreading. Frequently, errors such as “advice” (“advise”) and “form” (“from”), which the spellchecker would not detect as incorrect, were identified during the marking.

Task 1

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

The candidates who passed **Task 1** (Speed Test) are those who typed all the text within the 5 minutes allowed, thus achieving the required speed of 25 wpm, within the error tolerance - 6 errors maximum.

Task 2

Today’s date is required, as is normal business practice. Omission of the date incurs 3 penalty errors as referred to in the Syllabus.

The subject heading should be keyed in as displayed in the draft, for example Initial Capitals and Underlining or ALL CAPITALS. This assesses candidates’ ability to use a variety of styles as presented in the draft (such as may be required by a company’s house style) – the Syllabus refers to this.

Errors of agreement may be subject/verb or quantity/noun. These will include errors such as “I were” (“I was”) and “15 vehicle” (“15 vehicles”).

Task 3

A page number on a single-page document is not required.

Task 4

Letters must be produced on letterheaded paper – some candidates used plain A4 paper. The letterheading may be prepared as a template for the use of word processor operators, or may be pre-printed. Candidates must *not* key in the letterheading 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 on the letter – full style is preferred, e.g. “31 December 2003”.

Task 5

This task was very accurately typed and excellently displayed by the majority of candidates. The methods of emphasis used were imaginative and very effective.

COMMUNICATION AND TASK MANAGEMENT

Paper 5222

General comments

The submission of work was similar to that produced by candidates in 2002 with many candidates having sound underpinning knowledge and/or relevant work experience but scripts produced by a few candidates indicated insufficient knowledge and no evidence of work experience.

It must again be stressed that some Centres are still focusing on selected aspects of the Syllabus resulting in huge 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. *Papers B and C* in some of the levels have not been used by Centres and therefore there will be no comments on those Papers in this Report.

Centres have taken note of the comments made in the previous Report concerning Foundation Level candidates and 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. Presentation for both Standard and Advanced Levels is generally satisfactory.

The comments in the Report for 2002 concerning examination techniques has 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.

Candidates must 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.

Rote learning appears to be used by some Centres 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.

Comments on specific levels

The candidates who completed this level were, in the main, successful but it has to be said that some candidates entered for Standard and Advanced Level this year 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.

Comments on specific papers

Paper 5222A

Question 2

For this task candidates had to produce two charts. Some candidates did not read the question properly and produced one chart in which they attempted to show all that was required. This resulted in loss of marks since each chart received marks for choice of chart, presentation etc.

Weaker candidates who were unable to produce a chart drew a table.

Question 3

Good marks were achieved for saying why a working day may become unproductive but candidates were unsure how to handle interruptions and gave irrelevant answers such as 'put telephone on answer service'.

Paper 5222B

Question 1

In the second part of this question some candidates based their memorandum on the work of the purchasing department rather than answering the question. Answers should have included statements such as the machine is easy to operate, would improve customer service and original documents can be retained.

Good marks were gained for layout of memorandum.

Question 2

This question asked for *five* ways to monitor work. Candidates found it difficult to find more than two ways and weaker candidates included statements which simply said 'monitoring paperwork'.

Paper 5222C

Question 4

Some candidates did not understand the requirements of the question and reasons given for communication failure included incomplete messages rather than relating to wrong body language, poor listening skills etc.

OFFICE PROCEDURES

Paper 5223

General comments

The general standard of work in 2003 has continued to improve with many candidates obtaining distinctions.

However, as with the Communication and Task Management Examinations there is evidence to indicate that only selected areas of the Syllabus had been covered. Candidates must have underpinning knowledge and/or work experience to ensure full coverage of the Syllabus.

Papers B and C in some of the levels have not been used by Centres 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.

As reported in 2002, although excellent work has 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. Several candidates omitted whole or parts of questions, or, did not give the requested number of points.

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.

Comments on specific questions

The candidates who completed this level were generally successful and will hopefully progress to Standard and Advanced Levels. On the other hand, it has to be reiterated that candidates entered 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.

Comments on specific papers

Paper 5223A

Question 1

Part 2 - Most candidates were able to give only one procedure for calculating postage rather than the three requested. The common answer was to weigh the letter or parcel. Others misinterpreted the question and indicated that the full name and address must be included on the envelope.

Part 3 - Many candidates could not list five items of *equipment* used to process outgoing mail. Poorer candidates did not read the question and said how the equipment would be used rather than naming the equipment.

Question 2

Once again candidates did not read this question properly. Responses included rules for leaving a building when a fire occurs rather than giving items of fire fighting equipment.

Question 3

Candidates were asked to explain *five* ways in which computerised data can be lost. Most candidates answered well but some were able to give only one or two ways in which this could occur. Few mentioned that this could happen because of thunderstorms, floods, earthquakes, power cuts and fire.

Question 4

Again some candidates did not read the question. The question asked for *examples* of unsafe work practices and candidates gave long explanations of how to correct unsafe work practices.

Question 5

Many candidates did not understand the term FIFO or what it is used for. An example of the extension was Fire Investigator Federal Organisation.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Paper 5181

There was an overall pass rate of 75% for this module. The most common error found this year was:

- The loss of data integrity during sorts. Many candidates failed to highlight all the data prior to sorting by a specified field which meant that the data became irrelevant to the task in hand.

Other common errors included:

- 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.
- The failure to produce formulae printouts from the spreadsheet. The most common package used was Excel and many candidates did not know how to use Tools, Options and tick the Formulas box prior to printing.