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Cambridge Career Awards in Office Administration - Advanced
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TEXT PROCESSING

Paper 5241

General comments

The overall performance of the candidates varied considerably. Some of the work submitted was of a very 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 50 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 identified and corrected (such as “six week” not corrected to “six weeks” – 5241/B, **Task 3**).
- Apostrophe errors were not identified and corrected (such as “directors meeting” not corrected to “directors’ meeting” – 5241/B, **Task 2**).
- Abbreviations were not expanded (such as “cat” to “catalogue” and “gntee” to “guarantee” – 5241/B, **Task 3**).
- Initial capitals in proper nouns were not typed as drafted (such as “Home Study Course” – 5241/A, **Task 3**).
- Typing errors such as “you” instead of “your”, “pleas” instead of “please” and “from” instead of “form” (or vice versa).

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

Although some candidates completed the task within the error tolerance, there were instances of candidates not completing all the text and some who completed but incurred more than the maximum errors allowed (6 errors).

Task 2

- Subject heading not typed in the style shown in the draft (such as “RESPONSE TO RECENT CAMPAIGN” instead of “Response to Recent Campaign” – 5241/B).
- Enclosure not indicated.
- Today’s date omitted.

Task 3

- The left and right margins were not the exact measurement stated in the instruction (such as 40 mm from the left edge of paper and 40 mm from the right edge of paper – 5241/A).
- The inset paragraph was not indented from the left margin the exact measurement instructed (such as 40 mm from the left margin – 5241/B).

Task 4

- The letter was not produced on letterheaded paper.
- The words “Our ref” omitted.
- Today’s date omitted.
- Two extra copies were not produced.
- Candidates who did produce the two extra copies did not ensure the name of the person receiving a copy appeared on *both* extra copies.
- Some candidates who produced the extra copies correctly did not show the routing.

Task 5

- Many candidates produced excellent tables which were very accurate and well displayed.

Further general comments

Many candidates seemed to rely on spellcheckers and grammar checkers as their only means of proofreading. There were errors such as “you”/“your”, “character”/“characters” and “form”/“from”, which the spellchecker would not identify as incorrect.

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 attaining the required speed of 50 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 more obvious errors such as “two month” (“two months”) but also included will be less obvious examples such as “As well as television, writing for radio and the stage are also included” (“As well as television, writing for radio and the stage is also included”).

Enclosure(s) should be indicated. Although the usual business convention is to use Enc for one enclosure and Encs for more than one, any indication will be accepted in the Assessment.

Task 3

The left and right margins should be changed from the default margins set by the word processor (usually 2.5 cm or 2.54 cm) to the measurements given in the draft (such as 40 mm – 5241/A). The measured space between the left margin and the left edge of the paper and the right margin and the right edge of the paper should each have measured exactly 40 mm (4 cm). Many candidates seem to have added the 4 cm (40 mm) measurement to the default margins, resulting in very wide margins and a very short line length.

Errors in apostrophes may be those which have been misplaced – such as “the childrens’ stories” (“the children’s stories”), or omitted – such as “the directors meeting” (“the directors’ meeting”) or superfluous apostrophes – such as “the shareholder’s were present at the AGM” (“the shareholders were present at the AGM”).

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

Some candidates incorrectly inserted a reference and/or date at the end of the text. Although this was not required, its inclusion was not penalised, as it is normal house style in many businesses.

Paragraphing shown in the draft should be followed exactly. An instruction to create a new paragraph should be carried out as shown by the amendment sign.

Task 4

Letters should be produced on letterheaded paper – some candidates used plain A4 paper. A letterheading may be prepared as a template for the use of word processor operators, or may be pre-printed. Candidates should *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 and the full style is preferred, e.g. "31 December 2003".

The Special Mark (such as "PERSONAL" – 5241/A) should be typed exactly as shown in the draft, including capitalisation.

Two extra copies of the letter are required. The name of the person who is to receive a copy should appear on both the extra copies. This ensures that the file copy shows all people who received the letter.

Routing of the extra copies should also be carried out. Any indication of routing may be used, e.g. a tick, underlining, highlighting, etc. If the word "File" has been typed on the extra copies, then routing of both copies must be shown. An example (5241/B) follows:

Top Copy		First Extra Copy		Second Extra Copy	
Copy to	Peter Foo File	Copy to	<u>Peter Foo</u> File	Copy to	Peter Foo <u>File</u>

An acceptable alternative would be

Top Copy		First Extra Copy		Second Extra Copy	
Copy to	Peter Foo	Copy to	<u>Peter Foo</u>	Copy to	Peter Foo

Task 5

The table was well displayed by the majority of candidates. However, some did not display the columns exactly as shown in the draft and did not follow the style of capitalisation of the headings. Lines of ruling may be included if desired.

COMMUNICATION AND TASK MANAGEMENT

Paper 5242

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.

Candidates who had been adequately trained or had good work experience achieved success at distinction level and they should be congratulated. However, as in the Standard Level there were instances of candidates being entered for a level which was beyond their ability and they were unable to apply their limited theoretical knowledge to given situations.

Comments on specific papers

Paper 5242A

Task 1

The checklist on personality types was completed well. It was to be expected that candidates at this level would be able to state guidelines for briefing teams and give advantages of team briefings but answers, or lack of them, indicated that there is selection, or weak coverage, of parts of the Syllabus.

Task 2

This task was very poorly attempted. Most candidates did not appear to understand what was required of them. Communication in relation to reaching overall objectives produced systems such as e-mail, letter and fax rather than:

- ensuring that each individual knows exactly what he/she has to do,
- where it is to be done,
- how it is to be done,
- when it is required by.

The flexibility section of the question was interpreted as meaning time rather than:

- adjusting plans to meet changing circumstances,
- being prepared to fit in urgent tasks and catch up on non-urgent and routine work.

Task 3

The redrafting of the letter in this question was extremely well done and good marks were achieved by the majority of the candidates. However, it was amazing that many candidates totally omitted to complete the first part of the question which required them to list six letter writing faults. This shows a lack of training and that candidates should be encouraged to tick off each part of the Question Paper as it is completed.

Paper 5242B

Question 1

Candidates were required to give points showing why administrators are reluctant to delegate. This was well answered by many candidates but some gave one word answers and simple phrases and therefore did not achieve good marks.

Question 2

The memorandum layout for this question was, as expected at this level, well done. However, some candidates did not understand what should have been included in the content of the memorandum. The requirements were to give the factors of written and oral communication and should have included the purpose of the communication followed by an example such as – to give information, to complain, to request.

Question 3

Candidates do not seem to have completed many, if any, graphs in their course and as a result did not produce the requested graph but drew a table. Candidates were expected to use the figures given in the question but some invented their own information.

OFFICE PROCEDURES

Paper 5243

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

Although it should not be taken away from the candidates who were successful in this examination there were too few candidates who showed evidence of having the knowledge and skill to gain good marks at this level.

Centres should ensure that the whole of the Syllabus is covered and not take the chance that questions will not be set in certain areas. Candidates should have the opportunity to complete mock examinations since weaker candidates had difficulty in interpreting the data provided to answer some questions.

Comments on specific papers

Paper 5243A

Question 2

As was to be expected from candidates at this level good answers were given to explain differences between a chart and a graph, to say why each one is used and to give information describing a pie chart. However, when requested to give guidelines for the preparation of charts and graphs this was answered weakly. Examples of responses were 'collect information' and 'use bright colours' when in fact examples of suitable guidelines should have included:

Keep the information simple

Label each segment of a pie chart

Use suitable scales to show the information clearly

Provide a legend.

Question 3

When covering the filing section of the Syllabus, Centres should deal with 'archiving'. It appears that many Centres have only covered the surface of archiving or not dealt with it all. Many candidates did not understand the term and therefore gained very few or no marks for the whole question which carried 33 marks. Some candidates thought the term meant computerised filing.

Paper 5243B

Question 1

The second part of this question asked for types of *fire fighting equipment*. It was not expected that responses from candidates at this level would have included alarms or to have had lengthy explanations on the colour coding of fire extinguishers.

Question 2

The first part of this question asked for benefits of a 'systems' approach to the planning of office procedures and was omitted by the majority of candidates. This once again indicates that parts of the Syllabus are not being covered.

Paper 5243C

Question 1

The question asked candidates to produce a *notice* showing security and safety guidelines in relation to stationery storage. Many candidates produced a memorandum. The memorandum contained information relating to general issues such as confidentiality of documents and health and safety issues rather than relating the answer to stationery. Since candidates had produced a memorandum it was difficult to award marks for display techniques i.e. line variation, well displayed text, etc.

Question 3

This question related to itineraries. Candidates gained high marks for rules to follow when drawing up itineraries and what should be confirmed when making a booking.

However, when asked to list items of importance to the traveller, *in relation to itineraries*, rather than discussing times/arrivals, car hire details they included items such as language books, road maps and areas of interest.

INTERPERSONAL BUSINESS SKILLS

Paper 5176

General comments

Tutors at Centres are advised to read the Syllabus for modules to identify and understand what is required of them. There is an advantage in matching the candidate to a suitable business or organisation, where this is appropriate, to carry out research or an investigation. Because of mismatching some candidates have struggled to provide evidence of module objectives. All objectives listed in the Syllabus under 'Criteria for Assessment' must be evidenced in the candidates' submitted assignment. Candidates should have access to the module Syllabus and have a good understanding of its content and requirements. Where the candidate is required to include a self assessment of performance this should be outlined as a separate item within the assignment. Personal opinions, any changes that could be made in future and any modifications to tasks if they were to be repeated again, should be included in this section.

'Reference sources used' has been a weakness in many assignments submitted by candidates. Some candidates have mentioned sources of advice, such as business professionals, in the text of the assignment. In order to meet the requirements of the assessment these people, and other sources of advice, should be mentioned in the section devoted to reference sources used. A bibliography of titles or materials used, Web sites accessed, and reference to and advice sought from outside bodies, are all appropriate. Some assignments have been bulky but this would not jeopardise the candidates' pass category, providing all the evidence is present and the work has a proper lay out and is well presented.

Candidates must always be encouraged to use business 'language' and to submit their work in a business like format. As a minimum the assignment should be compiled with a title page, contents/index, page numbering, introduction, main section with headings, results and findings, summary/conclusion, self assessment (if required) and appendices. The work should be collated and submitted in good order. A binder or quality folder can help in keeping the work safe and organised, but this is not a requirement for assessment.

The use of the 'Assignment Cover Sheet for Candidates' which is included in the Syllabuses, is recommended. These can be inserted at the front of candidates' work and on completion of the assignment can be annotated by referencing page numbers. The advantages are that there would be in place a checking system for the candidate, Tutor and Examiner, to ensure that all work has been completed and objectives evidenced in the text. For these reasons the majority of candidates using 'Assignment Cover Sheets' have been successful.

Tutors and their candidates should be commended on their continuing hard work to improve the standard of work submitted for assessment.

Comments on specific papers

Candidates in some countries had problems with the elements of praise, criticism and in particular assertiveness, when compiling their assignments. Where this relates to the culture of the country then this should be acknowledged and explained with comments and opinions written in to the text by the candidate or in the form of a footnote by the Tutor. At the Advanced Level the assignment should be of a high standard with a good lay out and presentation. The report and the work in general should be written in a business like way. The use of a mixture of font styles and sizes should be discouraged as it detracts from the overall presentation.

An emphasis should be placed on the subject, i.e. interpersonal business skills as opposed to the survey carried out and the subsequent results. There is no point in writing the self assessment section of the assignment in the third person as this relates solely to the candidate and his or her personal feelings about performance and changes, if the exercise were carried out again. It should be written in the first person, to show what the candidate has learned from the assignment. The purpose and function of the sample and reference groups is clearly stated in the Syllabus and guidelines should be followed to ensure that candidates are successful with this aspect.

A number of submitted assignments were of very high quality because a great deal of effort had been made by Tutors and candidates to get things right. Some would have been of great benefit to the organisations and companies studied and one would hope that copies of the assignments or reports would be handed over to the appropriate bodies to assist them in changing and developing new skills in the workplace.

CUSTOMER CARE

Paper 5178

General comments

Tutors at Centres are advised to read the Syllabus for modules to identify and understand what is required of them. There is an advantage in matching the candidate to a suitable business or organisation, where this is appropriate, to carry out research or an investigation. Because of mismatching some candidates have struggled to provide evidence of module objectives. All objectives listed in the Syllabus under 'Criteria for Assessment' must be evidenced in the candidates' submitted assignment. Candidates should have access to the module Syllabus and have a good understanding of its content and requirements. Where the candidate is required to include a self assessment of performance this should be outlined as a separate item within the assignment. Personal opinions, any changes that could be made in future, and any modifications to tasks if they were to be repeated again, should be included in this section.

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Candidates must always be encouraged to use business 'language' and to submit their work in a business like format. As a minimum the assignment should be compiled with a title page, contents/index, page numbering, introduction, main section with headings, results and findings, summary/conclusion, self assessment (if required) and appendices. The work should be collated and submitted in good order. A binder or quality folder can help in keeping the work safe and organised, but this is not a requirement for assessment.

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Tutors and their candidates should be commended on their continuing hard work to improve the standard of work submitted for assessment.

Comments on specific papers

The results of surveys carried out do not need to be described in a cumbersome or complex way and certainly should not be the major part of an assignment, a good balance within the candidates' assignment should be sought, with good advice from Tutors. Inter-departmental collusion between employees can be used as evidence of a positive stance to customer care in organisations, but some candidates missed this point.

Some reference sources were implied in the text of some assignments and this is acceptable. A candidate was given poor advice about selecting an organisation for research and study, it was too restrictive, which led to the candidate having problems making the comparison between theory and reality. Those using the Assignment Cover Sheets were more likely to be successful because of the double checking system that the form provides.

Shortcomings identified were assignment well below the 1800 words; comments were shallow and did not reflect Advanced Level standards; the analysis of the investigation was weak; the conclusions/recommendations section was weak and could have been extended; too focused on the company; and the main elements of customer care were omitted.

Some excellent work was submitted with comprehensive texts and a good command of 'business' English identified.

ORGANISING MEETINGS AND EVENTS

Paper 5247

Advanced

General comments

The candidates' overall performance in their Assessment Assignments ranged from excellent to poor. Some candidates were well prepared and correctly organised an event, as required. They then produced reports detailing how the event had been organised, together with the documentation and methods of communication that had been used.

A few candidates achieved a Distinction and some a Pass, but there was a disappointing number who did not succeed.

Some candidates did not submit completed Student Assessment Records. These should be completed and signed by each candidate and his/her Tutor.

Some candidates organised a meeting, and not an event as required, but allowance was made as they may have commenced work on their assignment prior to the changes made in the Syllabus.

Comments on work of candidates

Most of the candidates produced reports that were legible and detailed. However, some of the information contained within the reports appeared to have been produced from textbooks and explained how an event *should* be organised. (A description of best practice is not sufficient.) Some reports were well in excess of the maximum 2,500 words, largely because of this.

Candidates often did not give specific information on what they actually organised, how they did it, when and where, with whom they communicated and how they did so, etc. Various documents had been produced but candidates' organising skills were not always apparent.

Very few candidates mentioned the communication methods they used. Copies of letters, e-mails, agendas, notices of meetings, minutes (where meetings were held as part of the organisation of the event), invitations, various venue brochures, name cards, banners, notices and transcripts of telephone conversations were attached but no detail was given of what communication methods were used and, more importantly, the factors that influenced their choice. (For example, a memo written to a colleague would use an informal approach and style of writing, whilst a memo to a senior manager would be more formal and take account of that person's role in the organisation.) Competence Criteria 1.1 and 2.1 of the Syllabus refers to this.

The selection and use of effective monitoring aids such as checklists, diaries, work schedules, etc as a means of effective and efficient event planning should also have been highlighted. Candidates are required to assess the *planning, organising and monitoring methods* they actually used (Competence Criterion 2.2). They should then state whether or not these were successful and what they would do differently when next organising an event.

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

Some assignments were rather muddled. Candidates appeared to have included mini assignments undertaken during study time. 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 very helpful if the final assignment only were submitted for assessment.) Occasionally, candidates produced some documentation but did not include a work schedule or action plan.

Further 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.

Candidates 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.

It is also recommended that candidates discuss with their Tutors the event they are able to organise, preferably a small event. Once they have decided the event they could 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 event may organise a simulated event – all the assessment requirements listed in the Syllabus, however, should still be met.)

Each candidate must produce evidence of his/her own planning and work schedule. Copies of documentation such as invitations, agendas and minutes of meetings (if appropriate), notes, short reports, transcripts of telephone calls and face-to-face conversations, publicity for the event, etc. should be included in the report. Evidence can include video and/or tape cassette material but this should be authenticated by a Tutor's observation statement.

Candidates should consider:

- what type of event they can organise,
- the documentation which would be appropriate for the event,
- the time, date and venue for the event,
- how they propose to organise the event,
- what facilities they have to help them in this task,
- how to ensure everything necessary is organised – methodical working,
- how they can produce clear documentation,
- what communication methods would be appropriate and also the effect work roles and relationships will have on the communication methods they choose,
- 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 event 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, describing exactly what the candidate has organised,
- the actual planning and organisation of the event,
- 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 choose to use,
- copies of all documentation and transcripts of telephone and face-to-face conversations,
- a conclusion on the success of the event.

Tutors may wish to note that lists explaining the purposes of meetings, the secretary's role, the chairperson's role at a meeting, meeting terminology and explanations on the essentials of minuting are no longer required as part of the final assignment.

Finally, Centres should submit the candidate's assignment to CIE together with the Student Assessment Record (SAR), making sure that it has been completed, signed and dated. Only the report detailing how the candidate organised the event should be sent to CIE – a candidate's mini assignments/tasks undertaken during class time are not required.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

Paper 5201

There was an overall pass rate of 70% for this module, which can be compared with 59% in 2001 - 2002. The most frequent errors included:

- The failure to submit all the required printouts, particularly the two different copies of the document, as required by 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 resize the imported graphic or to text wrap around this graphic.
- Widows, orphans, numbered lists or tables split across a page were not removed by inserting page breaks.
- Charts that were inserted but were unreadable, either because of the scaling of the chart or because of errors in the data series (usually because too much data had been selected as it was created).
- Errors inserting new text into a numbered list and renumbering as specified in the Question Paper.
- Errors in searching and sorting the database extract (particularly in maintaining the data integrity).