CONTENTS

OFFICE ADMINISTRATION ADVANCED LEVEL

| Paper 5241 |
| Text Processing |

General comments

The overall performance of the candidates varied considerably. 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 because they failed the Speed Test (**Task 1**). Candidates are required to key in all the text (to achieve the minimum speed of 50 wpm) within the error tolerance (six errors maximum) and within the time allowed (five minutes).

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

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

- Errors of agreement were not identified and corrected (such as "two operating system" not corrected to "two operating systems" – 5241/A, **Task 3**).

- Apostrophe errors were not identified and corrected (such as the misplaced apostrophe in "experiments' results" not corrected to "experiment's results" – 5241/A, **Task 2**).

- Abbreviations were not expanded correctly (such as "immed" ("immediate") – 5241/A, **Task 2** and "info" ("information") – 5241/A, **Task 3**).

- Underlining not carried out as indicated in the draft (such as "weigh less than two kilograms" – 5241/A, **Task 3**).

- Typing errors such as "you" instead of "your" and "out" instead of "our".

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

Although some candidates completed the task within the error tolerance, there were a few instances where candidates had not completed all the text. There were also instances where candidates had completed all the text but incurred more than the maximum six errors allowed.

Task 2

- Enclosure had not been indicated.
- Today's date was omitted.

Task 3

- The left and right margins were not the exact measurement stated in the instruction (such as 30 mm from the left edge of paper and 30 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 15 mm from the left margin – 5241/A).

Task 4

- The letter was not produced on letterheaded paper.

- The words "Our ref" were omitted.

- Today's date was omitted.

- Subject heading not typed in the style shown in the draft (such as "HOLIDAY IN LONDON" instead of "Holiday in London" – 5241/A).

- Two extra copies were not produced.

- Candidates who did produce the two extra copies did not always ensure the name of the person receiving a copy appeared on *both* extra copies.

- Some candidates who correctly produced the extra copies did not indicate any routing.

Task 5

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

- A few candidates did not display the headings and columns as drafted.

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" and "form"/"from", which the spellchecker would *not* identify as incorrect.

Task 1

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

Task 2

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

The subject heading should be keyed in as displayed in the draft, for example Initial Capitals and Underlining or ALL CAPITALS. 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).

Errors of agreement may be subject/verb or quantity/noun. These will include more obvious errors such as "4 week" ("4 weeks") but also included will be less obvious examples such as "A special leaflet describing these are enclosed" ("A special leaflet describing these is enclosed").

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 30 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 30 mm (3 cm). Many candidates seem to have added the 3 cm (30 mm) measurement to the default margins, resulting in very wide margins and a very short line length.

Page numbers should be inserted on continuation sheets – any style and font size is acceptable – page 15 of the syllabus refers.

Paragraphing shown in the draft should be followed exactly. Instructions to create a new paragraph and to "run on" should be carried out as shown by the amendment signs.

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 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 and the full style is preferred, e.g. "31 December 2005".

The Special Mark (such as "URGENT" – 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 one of these copies should be typed 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.

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.

Paper 5242

Communications and Task Management

General comments

It is pleasing to report that the scripts completed by candidates have again been of a better standard than in previous years. Most candidates demonstrated sound underpinning knowledge and/or relevant work experience but there were still a few candidates who produced answers which indicated insufficient knowledge, and no evidence of applying knowledge which would have been gained through work experience.

It must still be stressed that some Centres continue to focus on selected aspects of the syllabus resulting in gaps in candidate knowledge and thus questions were either unsatisfactorily answered or not attempted.

It appeared that questions which were not straight knowledge recall questions were received favourably by all levels of candidates who had covered the syllabus.

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

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.

Again, the work presented by many Advanced candidates was of a very high standard with answers keyed-in and organised in a way which would be expected of candidates taking a high level examination.

Centre administrators should ensure that candidates who sit both papers i.e. Communication/Task Management and Office Procedures in the same series have their documentation completed with the correct paper numbers – often these have been transposed e.g. 5242 instead of 5243 which could result in administration problems. An additional problem this year has been Centres who were entering candidates for the same level of paper but had used more than one paper at a sitting i.e. Paper A and Paper B. The indication on the front of the envelope showed scripts from only one paper. This caused confusion and required further checking of entry and attendance sheets.

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

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

Some Centres are still using rote learning 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.

Further general comments

The standard at this level has continued to improve although some unsuccessful candidates were entered for Paper B and then only had success when completing Paper C.

Candidates were well trained and it was obvious that they had had relevant work experience which led to success at distinction level and they should be congratulated. However, as in the Standard Level there were several 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 2

This question asked for examples of open questions to be used when interviewing a team leader and junior administrator involved in a clash of personalities. At this level candidates would be expected to be able to prepare such questions but the examples given were often closed questions.

Task 4

Candidates were asked to prepare a memorandum relating to confidentiality. The layout of the memorandum was excellent and the tone correct but few candidates included more than one or two points stating how confidentially should be applied.

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px; display:inline-block;">

Paper 5243

Office Procedures

</div>

General comments

The general standard of work in 2005 has continued to improve with many candidates obtaining distinctions.

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

Owing to the greater numbers of candidates achieving success when completing Paper A it has not been necessary to use Papers B and C in some of the levels and therefore there will be few or 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.

It needs to be reiterated that although there is evidence of good work 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.

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

Further general comments

There were some excellent scripts resulting in distinctions and candidates are to be congratulated.

It is expected at this level that candidates will have the ability and knowledge to consider the question carefully, plan an answer which is well constructed, and to present it in a way which is legible and easy to understand. The majority of candidates were able to do this indicating that they were well prepared for this high level examination.

Centres should note that over a period of time the whole syllabus will be tested. Therefore, Centres should not take a chance and must cover the full syllabus. Candidates should have completed several mock examinations to give them the opportunity to become proficient in interpreting data and answering questions.

Comments on specific papers

Paper 5243A

Task 1

In the second part of this question candidates were asked to design a notice relating to action to be taken in the event of a fire. Many candidates prepared a memorandum.

Task 2

Candidates were asked to list procedures and policies relating to Health, Safety and Security which could be used as part of an induction programme. This question was generally poorly answered. Candidates did not relate their answers to the question asked but quoted general Health and Safety rules such as 'do not use the lift when the fire alarm sounds'.

Paper 5243B

Task 1

This question was concerned with the management of stationery storage. Many candidates did not prepare a notice and answers related to stock rather than stationery. Candidates who produced a memorandum rather than a notice lost all of the marks for display which was part of the requirements of the question.

Task 3

This question asked for items of information which were important to the traveller. Weaker candidates gave as their answers 'passport' and 'visa'.

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:10px; text-align:center;">

Papers 5176 and 5178

Interpersonal Business Skills and

Customer Care

</div>

<u>**General comments**</u>

In general the quality of the assignments submitted during the past twelve months, 2005-2006, has been much better than previous years. The majority of candidates have worked hard and, with excellent teacher guidance and advice, have produced some excellent work. Assignments have been professionally produced and very business-like in their layout and presentation to the Examiner.

The use of the Assignment Cover Sheet for candidates is strongly recommended and has great benefits for the candidate, teacher and Examiner. It is a proper record and a check as to what should be found in the pages of the attached assignment. It helps to simplify a number of tasks and acts as a constant reminder to candidates as to what they need to include in their work. However, page references on these sheets must match the actual pages of the assignment submitted.

Centres are strongly advised to use the latest versions of the module booklets and not rely on older booklets. The latest versions contain the assignment cover sheets mentioned above. Candidates and teachers should check work against the Assessment Objectives and Competence Criteria for the year in which they are submitting work.

The requirement for all candidates to demonstrate and evidence all the objectives mentioned in the booklets under 'Criteria for Assessment' is very important. Candidates have been unsuccessful because objectives were omitted.

All Centres are reminded that they must constantly refer to the 'Assignment Guidelines' for each module in the syllabus booklet as these give general advice about how candidates should go about their research and analysis, how to present their assignments, when and to whom they should make presentations and other important matters.

Paper 5176

This is a popular module and Examiners hope the comments below will be helpful to all Centres.

Candidates did not always use assignment cover sheets, and sometimes the page numbering on these sheets did not match the pages of the assignment. Centres should work with the candidates to ensure that cross references are correct and inclusive.

Some candidates did not include a self evaluation of their performance on completion of the assignment or their presentation. Others failed to provide evidence that an actual survey had been conducted or a presentation had been made to a group.

As with other modules, it is important that all the objectives mentioned in the 'Criteria for Assessment' section in the module booklet are demonstrated and evidenced in the submitted work. Failure to do this will often lead to a 'fail' result since there has been no check that the submission is complete.

'Praise and criticism' were omitted from some assignments, yet these are important elements of this module and should be included and discussed in the assignment. Again, teachers and candidates should be encouraged to check that all the required objectives and criteria are met.

Some candidates had entered 'not applicable' on their assignment cover sheets without giving an explanation. In these unusual and rare circumstances the person must say why and give evidence or demonstrate knowledge of that particular objective.

Assignments were not always written in the first person and appeared to be the work of a group of candidates. Although candidates are encouraged to work in groups during the course, assignments submitted for assessment must be an individual's own work. Candidates might share research and discuss ideas with others, but the assignment must be the work of one person, that is, the individual candidate.

Different font styles had been used in some assignments and this is not appropriate for a business style document, in a similar way colourful decorations and lettering are not conducive to this scheme.

Paper 5178

Some common weaknesses included lack of self evaluation, SAR sheets not fully complete and no reference sources quoted. Some Centres did not use the assignment cover sheets, and therefore, there was no check of candidates' work. Centres should be encouraged to use these sheets to ensure assignments are fully complete before submission.

It is important that if a survey is conducted then a complete analysis of the results obtained should be included in the text of the assignment; it is not sufficient to make brief reference to what was discovered. One assignment had a poor analysis of the survey that had been conducted and on another occasion it was not clear how the survey had been carried out.

A Centre had submitted an assignment using an SAR sheet which was relevant to another module, amending various headings. This should not be used as each module has its own unique SAR sheet.

Some assignments were poorly presented and did not have a conventional layout of heading, contents page, introduction, main text, summary/conclusions/recommendations, appendices and bibliography. These are basic requirements of an assignment submitted under this scheme. Please refer to the syllabus for details.

On marking one piece of work the Examiner was unable to determine whether or not a presentation had been made to a group of people. Details of a presentation, together with all the facts, must be included as part of the total submission.

> **Paper 5247**
>
> **Organising Meetings and Events**

Overall comments

The candidates' overall performance ranged from very good to poor. Some candidates were well prepared and correctly organised *an event*, as required, although a small number of candidates produced reports detailing the organisation of a meeting.

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 teachers (pages 64 to 68 of the Advanced Syllabus refer).

Comments on the 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, rather than detailing how they organised their event. Centres should note that a description of best practice is not sufficient evidence for success in this Assignment.

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. Candidates, especially at Advanced Level, should be using monitoring aids efficiently. These would include action plans, schedules and checklists. One of these aids should be used and copies submitted as part of the candidates' reports, as clear evidence of the organisation process followed by candidates.

Some candidates mentioned the communication methods they used and the reasons they chose these particular methods. Copies of letters, emails, agendas, notices of meetings, minutes etc. (where meetings were held as part of the organisation of the event), invitations, venue brochures, name cards, banners, notices and transcripts of telephone conversations had been submitted. However, often no specific detail had been given of what communication methods were used and 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 Managing Director would be more formal and take account of that person's role in the organisation.)

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, page 61 of the syllabus refers). They should then state whether or not these monitoring aids were successful and what they would do differently when they organise their next event.

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

Occasionally, it was difficult to determine what event the candidates had actually organised. A brief introduction describing the event would be very helpful. However, a comprehensive description of the business for which the event is being organised is not required.

General comments

Candidates and teachers are advised to read the Assignment Guidelines given in the syllabus very carefully. The step-by-step approach included in the Introduction is highly recommended, as this will help candidates to plan and carry out their assignments.

It is also recommended that candidates discuss with their teachers the event they are able to organise. Some candidates have been rather ambitious and would be better advised to organise a *small* event. Once they have decided the actual event that they intend to organise, they should then work out how this could be done. Candidates should write a plan of how they intend to carry out the various tasks that will be required. Centres should note that candidates who cannot organise an actual event may organise a simulated event but all the assessment requirements listed in the syllabus must 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), emails, 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 teacher'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

- how to ensure everything necessary is organised – methodical working is crucial

- production of documentation that is complete and clear

- 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 right from the start of planning, 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 should describe 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 used

- copies of all documentation and transcripts of telephone and face-to-face conversations

- a conclusion on the success of the event.

Paper 5201

Information and Communications Technology

This module continues to be popular. The most common error was:

- The failure to submit all the required printouts, particularly the two different copies of the document production section. A significant number of candidates completed and printed the final version of the document but failed to submit the intermediate printout of their work.

Other errors included:

- Errors in searching and sorting the database extract (particularly in maintaining the data integrity).

- 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.

- 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 inserting new text into a numbered list and renumbering as specified in the question paper.