

**THE INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS IN MALAWI**

**DECEMBER 2015 EXAMINATIONS**

**CERTIFICATE IN FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING**

**PAPER FA 1: BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**

**EXAMINER'S REPORT**

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

The paper was well balanced as it covered all areas of the Business Communication syllabus namely, communication process, verbal, non- verbal, oral, visual, organizational and electronic communication. The examination questions also touched on a number of topics and aspects in relation to these forms of communication. The questions required the candidates to demonstrate knowledge of the content at all levels but also demonstrate the application of that knowledge to different communication situations. Additionally the questions required that candidates demonstrate mastery of English language skills, i.e. speaking, listening, writing, reading and grammar, and use these to communicate ideas in various formal and informal communication contexts. The paper was therefore a fair paper as it rewarded those candidates who deserved to pass because they had thorough preparations. On the other hand it penalized those who did not prepare well.

In general the overall performance was average with those exceptional cases where some very good candidates scored as high as 80% + and very poor candidates scored as low as 6%. A good number of the candidates showed that they had adequate preparation for the examination. These had the luxury of having a wide choice as they knew which question to tackle with confidence.

Judging from some responses it was evident that some candidates were ill prepared to write an exam in this paper. Some scripts had only parts of a question attempted and not answered impressively for that matter, resulting in a very low grade. This showed that some students never attended classes or were erratic in their attendance habits.

Of concern were the numerous grammatical errors both in continuous writing and in sentence construction and spelling showing that despite chief examiners reports stressing areas of weakness, not much is being done to improve the situation and candidates continue to be poorly equipped in grammar and other language skills.

**COMMENTS ON PERFORMANCE ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS**

**Question 1**

The question required candidates to demonstrate knowledge of the communication process.

Part (a) required the candidates to define the term “communication”. This was basically a recall question which also required the candidates to demonstrate sentence construction skills. Most candidates answered it well although paraphrasing would have been preferred to the verbatim answer that the majority gave.

Part (b) tested candidates’ ability to differentiate commonly confused elements of the communication process. Most candidates still confuse **medium** and **channel** and use them interchangeably. **Encoding** and **decoding** also proved a problem as quite a number of students transposed their explanations. Most responses lacked relevant examples

Part (c) required the candidates to explain given characteristics of communication. A number of candidates had problems explaining the terms **interactive**, **two-way** and **cyclic**, probably because they did not know the terms and attempted to explain using common knowledge of the words. This was poorly done and most candidates failed to give examples.

In general this was the most popular question and those candidates who attempted it passed.

## Question 2

This question was on non verbal communication and summary writing skills. It was one of the least popular questions. Very few candidates opted for it and most of those who attempted it failed.

Part (a) was on differentiation of verbal messages and non-verbal messages. Some candidates still think verbal messages are equivalent to oral/spoken messages while nonverbal are written messages.

Part (b) was testing candidates’ ability to summarize issues. Candidates were required to summarize given paragraphs into one sentence which captures the main idea in the paragraph. They were further instructed to paraphrase in brief. The responses obtained showed that many of the candidates have not mastered the English language. Most wrote several run-on sentences and submitted them as one summary sentence. In some cases the summary was much longer than the original paragraph, using the same words but just interspaced with the candidates own additions

Other candidates submitted notes from the paragraphs as a summary, clearly showing lack of knowledge in this area.

Part (c) candidates were asked to state five ways used in non-verbal communication and give examples. This question was poorly answered. Some candidates were repeating the answers to confuse the marker while others provided situations where non-verbal communication can be applied. Examples were nonexistent. Such type of responses showed that most students were poorly prepared.

Part (d) was testing candidates knowledge on specific terms used in describing different aspects of Non-verbal communication (*kinesics*, *proxemics*, *paralanguage*, *chronemics*, *tacesics*) using examples. Most candidates failed to explain the terms and gave an alarming wild guesses. All the candidates could not give the meaning of **chronemics** and **tacesics**. Examples were nonexistent. Candidates’ poor performance in this question shows that they do not read or study beyond what the teacher teaches in class.

### Question 3

This question focused on aspects of organizational communication. It touched on functions, directions or flow as well as electronic communication in the organization. It was the second popular question and candidates scored highly. Many of the candidates who chose this question came up with the correct answers and examples.

Part (a) required the candidates to give 5 functions of communication in an organization and give examples. This was done quite well although a number of the candidates failed to give examples of the functions.

Part (b) candidates were asked to explain the flow of communication in an organization using various directions and give the type of message which would flow in a particular direction. This was done very well. However much confusion was shown in **upward** and **downward** flow, where candidates transposed the answers. **Diagonal** communication was not well explained either, showing that most candidates did not grasp the idea in this directional flow. On **grapevine** they provided alternative names instead of explaining what it is.

Part (c) was on electronic communication particularly the internet and its use in the organization. Many candidates had problems to explain what 'internet' is and most of the explanations showed that some candidates were not very conversant with it. Instead of explaining ways of using the internet in the organization, some candidates outlined advantages of using internet and others went further to mention facilities needed for installation of the internet. Such responses clearly showed that the candidates missed the key words in the question and wildly tried to demonstrate their knowledge of this modern facility.

### Question 4

The question focused on specific writing and grammatical skills, especially the use of the 'seven Cs' in the writing process. It was fairly popular but performance was not encouraging.

Part (a) required the candidates to correct a letter which broke some specific letter writing rules. The particular rules were on format, language and grammar. Unfortunately most of the candidates failed to identify the errors in the letter and ended up writing a 'memo' despite being instructed in the question that this is a 'letter.' Many also maintained the errors in the question and worse still introduced their own errors. In addition the candidates did not pay attention to appropriate presentation style and tone of the letter. This kind of performance, shows lack of practice in writing various texts and documents hence the deficiencies in writing and composing skills.

Part (b) was testing candidates grammatical skills especially vocabulary. Candidates were required to complete sentences with words chosen from pairs of words from a given list. The responses were pathetic, mostly illogical guess work, showing that the candidates have a limited repertoire of register/vocabulary used in particular situations, just as it was exhibited in their inability to identify the errors in the letter in part (a). Of even more concern was the candidates' behaviour of ignoring clear instruction to rewrite the sentences and just listing the words of their choice.

Part (c) required the candidates to explain five of the 'seven Cs' as they relate to communication.

This was done fairly well by most candidates. There were others however who had problems finding suitable words to explain the given Cs and just repeated the given word in an attempt to explain the concept represented by the word for example:

- Conciseness means the writer has to be concise when writing.
- Clarity means that what is written must be clear to the reader.
- Consideration means that the writer must show consideration to the reader.

## **Question 5**

This question covered oral and visual communication focusing on commonly used aspects of these forms of communication.

Part (a) presented several oral communication contexts and asked the candidates to explain what is involved in each of them and give examples. The expected response was to include a description of the context itself and the specific functions or roles of the Sender and Receiver in the communication activity. Although many of the candidates were able to explain what is involved in the various oral communication contexts, most failed to furnish examples to support their explanations thereby losing a significant number of marks. Some candidates failed to differentiate a report from a speech. Video conferencing gave the most problems as the majority of candidates had no idea what this involved and gave wild guesses.

Part (b) was on Visual Aids, their examples and their relation to Oral Communication. Candidates managed to explain Visual Aids but failed to give examples and relate to Oral Communication.

Part (c) required the candidates to outline 5 ways in which Visual Aids can be used to enhance an Oral Presentation. The focus of this question was widely misunderstood in the following ways:

- Some candidates listed down advantages and disadvantages
- Some candidates gave examples of visual aids.
- Some candidates explained what a presenter should do to have an effective Oral presentation.
- Some candidates gave only three ways and repeated those using different words to confuse the marker.

Those who passed this question did so with a lower average or marginal pass.

## **Question 6**

This question focused on business writing namely memo and report writing. This was probably the least preferred question and not very well done.

Part (a) candidates were asked to explain the 5 Ws of effective report writing, stating the kind of information which might be expected from each in a report. Most candidates were able to indicate what each W stands for but failed to explain the type of information expected on each W.

Part (b) was an application question which required the candidate to write the actual report using the 5 Ws to present complete information to the reader. The required report was to be in a memorandum form, reporting items which were stolen from an office which was broken into during the night. This question called for creativity on the part of the report writer, to be able to think of the likely items to equip an office of the sort and the likely items burglars would go for. Although the candidates were given suggestions on the type of information to include they did not develop the report so as to provide complete information needed in a report; they just limited themselves to the suggestions provided in the question.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Having scrutinized the question paper for syllabus coverage, assessed the question paper for quality and fairness, and marked candidates scripts, the following recommendations to various stakeholders should be considered in the interest of improving students' performance:

### **STUDENTS;**

At this level students should develop a culture of reading, a quickest way to develop their language skills, expression and vocabulary. This can be done by giving the students reading assignments where they have to report on what they have read either orally or in written form. This approach will invariably improve both their writing and presentation skills.

Students should learn to read the question and understand what it requires. Most of them read the questions quickly and miss out on key words.

### **LEARNING INSTITUTIONS/ LECTURERS**

Instructors should ensure full syllabus coverage by lecturers. In some instances one would tell that certain topics were not covered or were taught hurriedly from the way the students avoided answering the questions.

Institutions should ensure that lecturers are provided with schedules and allocated adequate time to do practical work for students to practice the various language skills.

Lecturers should teach students how to approach question/items and how to recognize key words which is the focus of the question. Some students failed not because they did not know the answer but because they misunderstood the question.