

**THE INSTITUTE OF CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS IN MALAWI**

**JUNE 2016 EXAMINATIONS**

**CERTIFICATE IN FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING**

**PAPER FA 1: BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**

**EXAMINER'S REPORT**

**General Comments**

The paper covered all the necessary areas to meet the aims of the course subject. I.e. from communication process through written, visual, computerized communication ending with oral communication.

In general the examination was fair to students as many students demonstrated knowledge and practical skills in Business Communication.

Many students opted to take question 1, 2 and 5 followed by question 3, 4 and 6. Majority of students demonstrated good performance from questions 1, and 5 with many students getting an average of 18 marks for each question. Question 6 was unfavorable. This was evidenced by the low number of candidates who opted for it.

Grammar continues to be a problem with many candidates. Candidates failed to get marks because of poor sentence construction, and wrong spellings. Candidates were not able to explain clearly for the marker to understand a point.

Besides it has been observed that some candidates do not read and understand the instructions from the question paper and answer booklet. For example:

- Some candidates could not differentiate a question which demands them to '*explain and/or outline*' from a question which demands them to '*state*'. The students were approaching the questions as demanding the same amount of effort. As a result they lost marks.
- Some candidates could not start the answers to each question on a fresh page. For example question 1's response could end on page 2 and question 2's response could start from page 2 as well. The situation was made worse when the candidates failed to indicate question numbers on the top of the page.
- Some candidates failed to indicate the exact number of the question on the top of the page i.e. they indicated wrong question numbers.
- For questions that demanded candidates to complement the responses with examples, it was noted that some candidates could only give response to one part without giving examples.

Although some questions were straight forward, some candidates failed them e.g. question 2, 3, 4 and 6. It seems some candidates either sit for the examinations without attending classes or finishing syllabus. This made them have problems to respond to questions. A candidate who has completed the whole syllabus should be able to differentiate a structure of a letter and memo; short forms used in business letters; explain elements of communication; barriers to communication and ways of minimizing them; importance of visual aids; factors to be considered when planning for visual aids; differentiate verbal and non-verbal communication; ways for preparing for an interview; non-verbal signals to be used during interviews; and questions likely asked during interviews.

It was noted that there was a tendency amongst the candidates to repeat points in a move to deceive the marker to award more marks when the points are the same.

Lastly it was noted that some candidates were responding to the parts of a question randomly and not logically. For example if question 1 had three parts. One candidate could write question 1(a) on page 1, question 1 (b) on page 4 and question 1 (c) on page 6. In between the candidate could write other questions like 4, 5 and 6. This confuses the marker when awarding marks to questions and consumes lot of time looking for the responses.

## **Performance on Individual Question**

### ***Question 1***

It had three parts on communication process and barriers as well as social media.

In part (a) candidates were given a diagram of the communication process with such elements as *message, channel, receiver, feedback and sender*. The candidates were asked to explain the diagram in relation to what happens in communication. Majority of the candidates demonstrated knowledge of the meaning of the communication terms in the diagram. However, it was observed that some candidates were explaining the diagram in general instead of explaining the elements that were indicated in it as a result they missed the elements and included those that were not in the diagram thereby losing marks.

Part (b) had two sections focusing on barriers to communication. The first section asked the candidates to explain the meaning of the term *barrier to communication*. The majority of the candidates demonstrated knowledge of the term. However, the major

problem was wrong spellings of the most important terms in the definition e.g. interference, hinder, disturb, and prevent. These terms were wrongly spelt.

The second section demanded the candidates to outline the barriers to communication and ways of minimizing such barriers. Although some candidates managed to provide responses as required some problems were observed. It was noted that some candidates could list the barriers without indicating ways of minimizing them. Others wasted their time giving the meaning of the barrier as it could not attract marks.

Part (c) had three sections on *social media*. In the first section, majority of students had problems defining the concept *social media*. From section two, many candidates had problems to give examples of social media. Some were citing radio, TV, newspaper, telephone as examples of social media. From section three candidates had problems to give advantages and disadvantages of social media. This problem emanated from their failure to understand the concept of *social media*. Other candidates misunderstood the question. They were giving advantage and disadvantage for each example of social media thereby wasting their time and getting no marks for extra effort.

## **Question 2**

The question was on effective listening and verbal agreement. The question had three parts.

Part (a) asked the candidates to explain characteristics of an effective listener. Some candidates were able to give the appropriate characteristics of an effective listener. However some candidates lost marks because:

- They provided benefits of the characteristics instead of explain it.
- They provided characteristics of the speaker instead of those of the listener.
- They provided non-verbal cues that a listener can use to show that one is listening

Part (b) demanded the candidates to outline benefits of listening in business using relevant examples. Some candidates were able to provide the benefits with appropriate examples. However, other candidates lost marks as they only provided the benefits without giving the relevant examples.

Part (c) required the candidates to complete sentences using the correct form of the verbs that were provided against each sentence. Majority of candidates had problems to write the correct form of the verb. For example *three hours* is a period therefore it is followed by a verb “*is*” and not “*are*”.

### **Question 3**

Question three was on oral communication especially on meetings, visual aids, and oral sentences. It had three parts.

Part (a) has two sections. The first section required the candidates to define the term *oral communication*. Although some candidates were able to define it others had problems as they confused on non-verbal communication.

The second section required the candidates to explain the purposes of the following types of meetings: Adhoc committee, Annual general meetings, Extraordinary meeting, and Management meetings. Candidates had problems to give the purpose of Adhoc committee, extraordinary meeting and Management meetings.

Part (b) had two sections. First section asked candidates to mention importance of visual aids in oral presentation. Majority of the candidates managed to get correct responses on this question.

Section two asked the candidates to give factors to be considered when planning for visual aids. Although some candidates managed to give the correct responses, others failed. They failed because they were giving responses like *pencils, rulers, papers, place and time*. Others provided redundant responses like *age, education level, religion, and culture*.

Part (c) asked the candidates to correct sentences. Some candidates managed to correct the sentences while others had problems to correct them. This reveals the deep routed problem of grammar amidst the candidates who seat for the examination.

### **Question 4**

The question focused on business letter writing skills and correcting sentences. It had three parts.

Part (a) had two sections on appropriate closing of letters and meaning of short forms used in business letter writing. First section asked the candidates to state the appropriate closing phrase for such salutations as *Dear Sir/Madam, Dear Frank*. It was observed that some candidates could give appropriate closing phrases while others had problems. The majority of candidates were transposing the responses. *Dear Sir/Madam*

ends with *Yours faithfully* while *Dear Frank* should end with *Yours sincerely* or *Best regards*. It was noted that other candidates were providing situations when the salutations can be used instead of the appropriate closing. Yet others lost marks because they provided wrong spellings.

Section two demanded the candidates to give the meaning of such terms as *re*; *pp*; *encl*; and *cc*. Most candidates goofed on this section. They provided wrong responses as follows:

- *re*: reference
- *pp*: post poned, printed paper, previous page, personal property
- *enc*: attached
- *cc*: copy carbon, complementary close, send letters to many people

Part (b) asked the candidates to write a letter *persuading* a church that had an outstanding debt with a cloth manufacturing company to pay immediately. The following errors were observed from the responses of the candidates.

- Very few candidates could present the letter with appropriate format, content and style.
- Poor format or layout: some candidates presented a memo. Other candidates transposed the addresses. The date was not provided. Title was presented before the salutation. The candidates presented wrong complementary close (they provided *Yours sincerely* instead of *Yours faithfully*). No signatures and designations were provided by many candidates.
- Poor content: some candidates had problems in the presentation of the body of the letter. Some candidates presented the letter with a bad tone, no persuasion and a few content.

- Poor style: grammar, language and spellings continue to be a problem amongst many candidates. E.g. ‘ *I hereby remaining you ...*’; ‘*it has come to my/our notice...*’; ‘*.....as soon as possible*’; ‘*pay us immediately*’, ‘*with reference to the subject.....*’, ‘*with reference of the subject named above*’, ‘*With high interest.....*’, ‘ *I hope you remember that debt*’, ‘*it will be convenient if my letter get you in time*’, ‘*I shall be grateful if my letter /requests meets your favourable consideration*’, ‘*I am here to request...*’, ‘*.....above mentioned subject....*’, ‘*we will be happy if you are paid us*’, ‘*firstly as for our management, we would.....*’, ‘*I will to inform you*’, ‘*make sure u need to.....*’, ‘*you are owe us*’, ‘*as a title underlined above*’, ‘ *we shall be happy if this letter can reach you and respond as we asked to.....*’, ‘*you hold us in your heart*’, and ‘*sinceary and sinceyery*’, ‘*yours faifhful*’, ‘*we met strong problem*’, ‘*.....will asisted*’. The candidates could not be specific on the amount owed and the date the debt is to be secured. All these made them to lose marks.

Part (C) required the candidates to identify the words that have been used incorrectly and then write the correct words. Very few candidates managed to get the answers correct. It was observed that some candidates were identifying similar words instead of correcting wrongly spelt words. Others identified wrong words.

### **Question 5**

Question five focused on non verbal communication, interview and completion of sentences using appropriate words. The question had three parts.

Part (a) had two sections focusing on meaning of terms related to non-verbal communication. First section asked the candidates to define the term *non-verbal communication*. Most candidates confused the term *non-verbal* with *oral* communication. Others provided examples although the question did not demand them to do so.

Section two asked the candidates to explain such terms as gestures, facial expressions, posture, and appearance using examples as they relate to non-verbal communication. The following problems were noted amongst the students:

- They were good at giving examples rather than explaining the terms.
- Others were giving explanations without examples.
- They provided wrong explanations indicating that they were not covered during teaching/learning period. For example:
  - Facial expressions e.g. raising a hand, nodding
  - Gestures e.g. smiling, o-o-oh
  - Posture e.g. drawing
  - Appearance e.g. man running away

Part (b) had three sections focusing on preparation for interviews, non-verbal signals used during interviews, and questions likely to be asked during interviews. The first section asked the candidates to give advice to a friend who has been invited to attend an interview in particular on things to do in preparation for the interview. Some candidates provided correct responses. However, other candidates experienced problems in responding to the question. The following are the problems:

- They provided things one needs to take when going for interviews.
- They provided the list of the things without demonstrating ways for preparation e.g. *venue, time, date*.

Section two asked the candidates to give advice on the non-verbal signals that one can apply to show confidence in the interview. The following problems were noted amongst the candidates:

- They did not understand the term *non-verbal signals* as such they provided such wrong responses as *being brief, asking questions*.
- They provided non-verbal signals one can use before getting into the interview room. E.g. *Arrive on time, knocking on the door*. The question demanded those non-verbal signals that one can use during the interview.

Section three required the candidates to give advice on questions commonly asked by interviewers. Some candidates were able to give correct answers like *Tell us about yourself? why are you the suitable candidate? What is your salary expectation?* However, other candidates lost marks because of the following notable mistakes:

- They provided questions which are not commonly asked during interviews e.g. *how old are you? Are you married?*

- They provided mere statements instead of questions e.g. *Make sure to introduce yourself, your background.*
- They provided types of questions used in interviews e.g. *Direct and Indirect questions, Open and closed questions.*
- They provided questions likely asked by interviewee e.g. *when should we expect the results of interview to be out?*

Part (c) asked the candidates to choose appropriate word to complete the sentence. This was tackled very well by the majority of the candidates.

### **Question 6**

The question centered on communication roles, effective memo writing as well as identifying the documents from which the excerpts were taken. It had three parts.

Part (a) asked the candidates to explain roles that communication plays in an organisation. Some candidates performed very well. However, others failed as they were confusing them with directions of communications.

Part (b) had two sections. The first section required the candidates to write a word *memo* in full. It was well done by majority of candidates although others (very few) provided the meaning of the word *memo*.

Section two required the candidate as a supervisor of accounts office to communicate to Accounts Assistant informing him/her about the supervisor going on leave and the need for the Accounts Assistant to act in the absence of the supervisor. The following observations were made:

- Some candidates could not follow the memo format e.g. the signature could not be included at the end. Others were repeating their names and position at the end. Others could write a letter instead of a memo.
- Some candidates had problems with grammar/spellings. Grammar continued to be a problem to many candidates. e.g. use of cliché like *'I hereby ...'*; *'it has come to my notice...'*; *'.....as soon as possible'*; *'with reference to the subject.....'*, *overdraft of two million, working in may behaf, they are same work.....to be done, I will be absence, to present on my absence, 'I would like to inform you about the annual leave in the next two days,' 'according to the absence of my position I want to tell you to be in my position until came,' 'I spected to give me quick answer', ' a day after tomorrow'.*



- The candidates could write date in short form e.g. 09/06/2016 instead of 9<sup>th</sup> June, 2016
- Others were giving wrong titles. *E.g. Working as Accounts Assistant; Absence; My absence duty information; Working hard to my absence.* Short titles are always recommended.
- Others could write the memo without the reference.

Part (c) asked the candidates to identify the documents from which the excerpts were taken as well as stating their use in the organisation. Some candidates were able to identify the appropriate documents from which the excerpts were taken and their use. However, other candidates had problems.

## **CONCLUSION**

In general the standard of the examination was good. It managed to examine the students from various areas of business communication. The performance of the candidates was average. Lecturers have a big role to play to ensure that students master all the areas of business communication.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The following recommendations should be considered for improvement in the performance of the students:

- Candidates should indicate the question number on top of every page on the space provided.
- Candidates should start every question on a fresh page.
- Institutions should be advised to teach their students to differentiate questions which demand explanation and description from those that demand mentioning, stating, indicating and outlining.
- Institutions should pay special attention to improve students' skills in memo and letter writing especially on different types of letters or memos, date, referencing, format of letters and memos and elements of letters and memos.
- Business communication lecturers should emphasize on the need for the students to give specific examples when answering examination questions. This will help students to score more marks as giving examples is one way of demonstrating that students understand and apply what they learnt in class.

- The lecturers should coach the students on how to approach the examination questions. It was observed that candidates could start answering the questions without understanding what the questions demand. Other candidates were repeating the concepts in the course of explaining them.
- Lecturers should complete their Business Communication syllabus before the candidates go for final examination.
- The institutions should also focus on improving grammar for their students to increase chances of passing Business Communication.
- Institutions should promote a reading culture among candidates so as to improve language and communication skills.