

**THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTANTS EXAMINATION COUNCIL OF MALAWI**

**JUNE 2014 EXAMINATIONS**

**CERTIFICATE IN FINANCIAL ACCOUNTING**

**PAPER FA 1: BUSINESS COMMUNICATION**

**EXAMINER'S REPORT**

**GENERAL COMMENTS**

The June 2014 examination paper covered a number of topics in the syllabus and the questions demanded both recall and application of the candidates' knowledge to particular situations. The seven questions in the examination paper covered all the topics in the syllabus. The candidates attempted all the questions with varying degrees of popularity. In general, the performance of the candidates was average. Nevertheless, there were some candidates who scored very high marks while others scored below 30%. Some responses which the candidates gave were a clear indication that the level of preparedness for the examination was very minimal. In some cases, candidates wasted time copying the questions before answering. In their responses, the candidates made a number of spelling and grammatical errors. The errors were numerous in those questions which required creativity like the letter and the memorandum.

**COMMENTS ON INDIVIDUAL QUESTIONS**

**Question 1**

Most candidates attempted the question on communication process and most of them scored above average. It would appear that most candidates understood what was required in the question, as such, they gave the correct answers. Nevertheless, some candidates had problems explaining the elements of the communication process; such that instead of giving an explanation of the term in question they used the same term in the explanation. For example – *a sender is someone who sends a message*. Such responses were an indication that the candidate either did not know how to answer the question or did not have the facts and was just using a wrong guess. In part (b) (i) the term *channel* was confused with the term *medium*. While in part (b) (ii) some candidates were not serious when giving the differences between speaking and writing because they gave responses which were too basic. It would appear that candidates attempted to answer the question using their general knowledge without relating it to communication as expected. For instance, some candidates said that *speaking is when you use your mouth to communicate while*

*writing is when you use some other material like a pen and paper.* Essentially, the question was looking for the differences between oral and written communication.

### **Question 2**

The question on meetings was not popular among the candidates and those who attempted it scored low marks. Most of the candidates failed to give the meaning of the term '*convene*.' The candidates erroneously confused it with chairing the meeting. The writing of the notice provided candidates with an opportunity to apply what they had learnt and also provided examiners with an opportunity to appreciate the candidates' level of communication competence. The answers showed that many candidates did not know what was required in the question. In part (b) none of the candidates was able to write a correct notice of a meeting as required. In addition, the candidates failed to present the agenda items properly although the items were provided. In fact, most candidates merely copied the agenda items provided by the examiner without summarizing them as the question required. In part (c) instead of explaining why minutes should be *accurate*, *complete*, and so on, the candidates gave the meanings of the words without relating them to minutes.

### **Question 3**

The question on media of communication and business writing was fairly popular among the candidates. And those who attempted it scored average marks. Part (b) of the question was poorly framed in the sense that it required the candidates to give the medium that they would use to send messages in the given situations including a reason for the choice. Unfortunately, the given situations gave the candidates a wrong cue for the responses. Most of the candidates gave channel of communication instead of medium as asked in the question. In addition, instead of giving *oral written medium* as the answer, they gave answers such as; newspaper, radios, memos and letters because it sounded sensible that way. In part (c), the candidates were expected to write a memorandum outlining possible results of going on a strike and discouraging it. The responses showed that most candidates knew the layout of memos, but some candidates just used expressions from the question which could not provide substance worth the argument. On the other hand, there were many mechanical errors: ungrammatical sentences, wrong spellings and so on.

### **Question 4**

The question on the principles of business writing and letter writing was another popular one among the candidates, but most candidates scored low marks. In part (a) candidates showed a fair knowledge of what the given terms mean. However, they could not answer the second part which demanded them to state the importance of the terms in relation to business

communication. It appeared that candidates did not recognize that the question had two sections i.e. *meaning* and *importance*. In part (b) candidates were asked to write a letter claiming the difference for an undercharged treadle pump. The performance showed that the candidates had knowledge of business letters but had problems in formatting the letters and using the correct language. Other candidates failed to link the salutation to the complementary close and the majority of the candidates were not aware of the logical flow of paragraphs for a claim letter.

### **Question 5**

The question on organizational communication and barriers to communication was fairly popular among the candidates. The question asked the candidates to give the purposes of the given communication concepts to employees in an organization and the meanings of the barriers to communication which were given. They were also expected to show how the concepts would be barriers to communication. In part (a) candidates did not seem to have had the correct responses; as such, they used wrong guesses to answer the question. While those candidates who managed to offer something sensible gave their answers in very bad English. Part (b) of the question required the candidates to give the meanings of the given barriers and to show how these become barriers to communication. The responses showed that the students had a fair knowledge of the barriers but most candidates were unable to show how these impede communication. However, most candidates did not answer the question fully.

### **Question 6**

The question on visual communication was fairly popular among the candidates and most of them scored average marks. The question demanded the candidates to show their knowledge of visual communication and how effective it is. Part (a) required them to define visual communication. Responses revealed that candidates tend to confuse between visual and oral communication. In part (b) they were required to state the advantages and disadvantages of visual communication. It was observed that candidates are fairly aware of the pros and cons of using visual communication. Part (c) was done fairly well. Those candidates who were weak gave factors to consider when going for an interview instead of the visual signals which they were asked in the question.

### **Question 7**

Question seven focused on oral communication and it was the least popular among the candidates. Those who attempted it scored very low marks. Part (a) required the candidates to explain the difference between oral and nonverbal communication. However, some candidates had problems differentiating oral and nonverbal communication. It appears that candidates did not know what was required in the question and they just imagined wrongly that they were asked

to write a speech when in actual fact the question asked them to write notes for a speech. In fact, the question said they should write an outline of the speech which simply meant they were required to write notes but the candidates wrote the speech itself. Almost all the candidates who opted for this question did not present a suitable layout of a speech. In addition they were supposed to know that motivational talks are forms of persuasive writing. In the content, very few candidates offered convincing reasons for choosing accounting as a career. In part (c) candidates were expected to outline factors that contribute to lack of interest during presentations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Learning Institutions**

The institutions that teach the students should play their role to ensure that the students pass the examination, therefore the tutors should:

- Give the candidates enough time to practice Business Communication.
- Teach their students to differentiate a question which demands explanation from one which demands mentioning, outlining, stating and so on.
- Strive to improve students' skills in notice, speech, memorandum and letter writing including the different types of letters.
- Emphasize on the need for students to give specific examples when answering examination questions. This will help the students to score more marks.
- Demonstrate to students on the differences of such terms as purpose, function, importance and advantage. Students do not seem to know the requirement of some terms when they are used in a question.
- Ensure that they cover the whole syllabus so that the candidates should have a choice of questions in the examination.

### **The candidates**

The candidates themselves should take responsibility of preparing for the examination and answering the questions correctly, therefore, they should do the following:

- Approach the examination with a sense of seriousness in order to avoid a situation where they misspell some of the words used in the question itself.
- Avoid wasting their time in the examination room by copying the question.
- Make sure that they prepare adequately for the examination so that they should have the correct facts to answer the questions.

- Use the facts to answer a particular question instead of merely reproducing what they know on the topic. The candidates should also learn to apply their knowledge to real life situations as asked in the questions.
- Ensure to have word attack skills so that they are able to answer questions correctly.
- Make a deliberate effort to improve their level of language in order to reduce the errors they make. They should also improve on their vocabulary in order to ensure that they use the right words when answering the questions.
- Learn to read the questions carefully so that they should answer the questions fully, especially where the question has two parts.