

June Test Series 2006

Chief Examiner's Report

Communication

Level 3

General Comments

This paper provided a fair and accessible test of Level 3 skills. The pass mark was towards the lower end of the usual range.

Candidates appeared to find the subject matter engaging, but its closeness to their own concerns tempted some to include extraneous material from their own experience. Nevertheless, many made effective use of the source material in answering the questions set. The majority of candidates were able to gain full marks for Question 1 and fewer appeared to spend excessive time on identifying the relevant points required. In Question 2, some candidates experienced difficulty in differentiating between "problems" and "causes" and were therefore limited in their response to the first part of the question. Few candidates were able to draw close comparisons between the arguments in Documents 1 and 2 and many answers simply made general comments stating that there were points of agreement without closely examining the writers' viewpoints. A surprising number of responses compared Documents 2 and 3 instead of 1 and 2 as requested.

Question 3 was generally not well done. The cartoon in particular attracted some idiosyncratic interpretations, which nevertheless were often sufficiently credible to be rewarded with a mark, but many candidates did not effectively consider how or how well the images linked to the document in which they appeared. Similarly in Question 4, the mark of the competent Level 3 candidate was the ability to synthesise material from one or more documents and to use it to fashion a coherent, evaluative response, in this case to the issue of how effective the solutions suggested in the source material might be to the problems faced by teenagers.

On this occasion, Question 5 required the writing of an article, which candidates often find more accessible than a formal report or letter. Nevertheless, some candidates lost marks through failing to appreciate the requirements of this form of writing. It is essential to include a heading, to use appropriate paragraphing and possibly other formal devices for organising ideas in writing, to identify the intended audience and maintain consistently a suitable tone for that audience. Some responses lacked an introduction, and some - perhaps through lack of time - were not brought to a clear conclusion. Several candidates did not confine themselves to the information contained in the source documents; others simply copied out large sections with only a cursory linking commentary. As always, the best answers were those from candidates able to illustrate a coherent and comprehensive argument with relevant examples, and demonstrate a secure command of language in expressing their ideas. The standard of spelling, punctuation and grammar was rarely more than satisfactory for candidates at this level.

Recommendations to Centres

Centres are reminded that at Level 3, mastery of the basic rules of spelling, punctuation and grammar is essential, and it should not be assumed that all candidates studying at Level 3 in academic or vocational subjects will necessarily have this ability. Ensure ALL candidates who are entered for the Communication Key Skill at this level have the appropriate skills and knowledge to allow them to be successful.

Candidates should be given opportunities to practice techniques which commonly feature in Level 3 tests: identifying and briefly summarising the main points of a text; analysing images used to illustrate text and evaluating their relevance and suitability; synthesising viewpoints from different documents. Centres where coaching is provided in the

conventions of writing letters, reports and articles give their candidates a considerable advantage when approaching the test. For example, guided exercises in writing articles for different purposes and audiences would be most useful.

Coaching in examination technique would also help to ensure that candidates perform to the best of their abilities. Poor time management too frequently prevents otherwise capable candidates from being successful. Questions, or parts of questions, asking for simple identification of information seldom require detailed explanation; time spent on unnecessarily long answers here would be better spent on sections of Part A specifically asking for explanations, and on the extended response to the question in Part B.

Guidance should be given in reading and interpreting the requirements of typical question formats. For instance, where a candidate is asked to "assess", "explain" or "consider" the "extent to which" one argument or viewpoint is supported by other information provided, they should be alerted to the fact that this is an invitation to use the tools of contrast and comparison to discuss, as objectively as possible, the issues raised by the given information, with the likelihood that more than one viewpoint is possible.

Chief Examiner
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