

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT MARCH 2006

Communication

Level 3

General Comments

The paper performed appropriately as a means of testing candidates' ability to demonstrate the required skills at Level 3, with a good balance of straightforward opportunities to gain marks for simple identification of points made within the source documents and more challenging questions requiring synthesis and interpretation. The agreed pass mark was 28.

As a topic, "Voting at 16" proved engaging for candidates, and produced some thoughtful responses. A few candidates based some of their answers too much on personal opinion rather than on the opinions contained within the source material.

Question 1 proved more difficult than expected for some candidates; marks were lost through failing to consider both documents 1 and 2 and sometimes because answers did not focus sufficiently on the ample number of reasons provided in the documents. Some answers were far too long, causing candidates to run out of time at the end; candidates should be aware that the first question almost always simply asks for identification of the salient points and does not require a lengthy explanation.

Most candidates were able to identify – though again often at unnecessary length - the three attitudes towards granting votes at 16 asked for in Question 2, though those who attempted to use the quotation from Jim Sheridan were often unsuccessful in explaining precisely how he viewed this issue. Too many candidates ignored, or paid scant attention to, the second part of the question, which carried half the marks. Systematic attempts to explain how the attitudes identified in Document 2 were reflected in other documents often paid dividends but sometimes these were too generalised, either because they relied too heavily on passages quoted verbatim from the text so that the candidates' own views were unclear, or because there was little or no detail in the explanation.

In Question 3, most candidates scored full marks for the first part of the question but found the second part more difficult. Many appeared to have missed that the "opposite view" requested was that "young people are interested in politics", with the result that many responses focused on the view that young people are responsible. Only a minority of more able candidates were able to explain successfully how the images in Document 1 showed political interest in young people.

Several candidates did not attempt Question 4, presumably to allow themselves sufficient time to answer Question 5. Only a few candidates correctly identified more than one justification for lowering the voting age from material in Document 1, with the majority giving lengthy explanations including multiple examples of the same point, that young people already have considerable legal rights at 16. Most candidates appeared to have a sound understanding of how the writer of Document 4

disagreed with this point and many provided an effective explanation as a response to the second part of the question. However, other ideas, such as the need to enlist existing political interest amongst young people to prevent voter apathy or comparisons with other countries, were largely overlooked.

In Question 5, it was rare to find the correct format used for writing a report. A few centres had clearly taught their candidates this skill, and this usually benefited them in their ability to organise their material effectively as well. Some candidates wrote letters or essays instead, which often also adversely affected the tone of their writing. The use of the first person should be minimal in a formal report, and candidates also lost marks through failing to recognise that terms such as "Document 1", "Document 2" and so on would mean nothing to the intended recipient of the report, their local MP, and therefore if necessary the title of the source material should be given in full (in Question 5). Although a recommendation was called for, in better answers all viewpoints from the source material were acknowledged and evaluated objectively before arriving at a considered judgement. Although in general candidates were competent in expressing their ideas with coherence and adequate control, only a minority demonstrated the standard of spelling, punctuation and grammar expected of candidates at this level.

Recommendation to Centres

Centres should not enter candidates at Level 3 unless they are satisfied that the basic rules of spelling, punctuation and grammar have been adequately grasped. 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. It is apparent that some centres have not sufficiently prepared candidates in the conventions of writing letters, reports and articles. In this paper, many "reports" were submitted with no heading or sub-headings, a pre-requisite for gaining the mark for correct format in this case.

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. The art of synthesis needs to be taught as many candidates find it difficult to explain and discuss identified points. Candidates need to ensure they read the test paper carefully and answer all parts of each question, although candidates should be reminded that questions in Part A do not require lengthy explanation. Time spent on unnecessarily long answers here would be better spent on the extended response to the question in Part B, which, it should be emphasised, is worth 50% of the total marks for the paper.

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