

# **CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT JANUARY 2006**

## **Communication**

### **Level 3**

#### **General Comments**

This paper performed appropriately as a means of testing candidates' ability to demonstrate the required skills at Level 3. The agreed pass mark was 29, reflecting the typical achievement of the minimally competent candidate.

The topic of "First Time Buyers" was sufficiently engaging for candidates; although perhaps more familiar to those who were more mature, this can sometimes tempt candidates into introducing irrelevant material from their own experience. On the whole, Part A was relatively straightforward provided candidates read the questions thoroughly and answered all parts of them. In Question 2, a large number of candidates ignored the request to relate the points identified in the images to information about "second home-owners" in Document 3 and lost a significant number of marks accordingly. Several misinterpreted the term to mean the owners of previously-owned homes, or substituted the phrase "second-time buyers" instead, either of which made it difficult to produce an effective response to the question. The images themselves were generally interpreted well, although some responses failed to mention the age of the first-time buyers in Image 2. The majority of candidates were able to identify four ways of dealing with the shortage of affordable housing in Question 3, but it was rare to find an answer which satisfactorily assessed the extent to which Document 1 supported these views. In Question 4, almost all candidates were able to identify the strain put on relationship with partners, but fewer were certain about the effect on the relationship with parents. Some introduced ideas not included in the source material – which therefore could not be rewarded – such as the need to borrow money from parents and the negative impact of that. Few candidates answered the second part of the question well. Dave's problems were often either merely stated without comment or not made explicit at all, and the relevant points made in Documents 1 and 2 were rarely explained in detail or linked clearly to Dave's situation.

As in the previous series, a significant minority of candidates lost marks in Question 5 through failing to provide a heading or inappropriately using a letter format. Most adopted a suitable tone for their choice of audience, but the standard of spelling, punctuation and grammar was again generally poor for candidates at this level. The majority of responses were expressed in the candidate's own words with perhaps a few judiciously chosen quotations from the source material, but the weakest candidates sometimes lifted whole passages from the documents. There were some rather mechanical responses, which nevertheless presented relevant information from the source documents addressing the issues requested by the bullet points in the question. Better candidates included introductory and concluding paragraphs, were able to discern the subtler points raised by the source material and effectively linked their ideas in a

balanced and coherent fashion. Some answers were rather brief, suggesting inadequate time management.

## **Recommendation 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. Centres where coaching is provided in the conventions of writing letters, reports and articles give their candidates a considerable advantage when approaching the test. The minimum requirement for an article, for example, is that it is given a heading. It is not expected that candidates imitate the multi-column format of a typical magazine or newspaper; although neither penalised nor rewarded by examiners, this can be distracting in a hand-written response and is not a good use of candidates' time and effort.

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" or "explain" the "extent to which" one set of data is supported by another, 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.

Candidates should appreciate that they are only rewarded for information which is taken from the source documents and should not use previous knowledge or personal opinions unrelated to the source material.

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