

Edexcel Key Skills CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT - NOVEMBER 2008 Communication - Level 3

General Comments

The November 2008 paper provided an appropriate, and suitably discriminating, test of Level 3 skills.

In general, candidates responded well to this paper. The topic, "Who needs a degree?" clearly struck a chord with many candidates and answers to Question 5 reflected the extent to which the majority were able to engage with the subject. The questions followed a familiar format and candidates on the whole seemed adequately prepared.

The marks for Question 1 were reasonably easy to achieve by simple identification of reasons why a degree is seen as worthwhile. Many candidates identified the financial advantages mentioned in both documents 1 and 2, thereby achieving the mark for 3.2.1, but weaker candidates sometimes only used one of these two documents to provide information for their response. Most candidates identified some of the several arguments put forward in Document 3 questioning the value of a degree, but there was less certainty about the precise viewpoint of Document 2 with many weaker candidates misinterpreting both the information about the historical rate at which graduate earnings grew and the conclusions about the effects on graduate pay of increased numbers in higher education. Consequently, answers to the second part of the question about the extent of agreement between the writers of documents 2 and 3 rarely gained high marks. Weaker candidates often attempted unsuccessfully to argue that the respective writers were in almost complete agreement. Some candidates included irrelevant material drawn from Document 1.

Most responses to Question 3 included acceptable interpretations of the meaning of the two images, though a few did not explain that the street beggar in the cartoon was supposed to be a graduate. The majority of candidates gave some explanation of how the images supported the text they accompanied though these often lacked clarity and detail. In Question 4, the factors affecting the growth of graduate earnings were fairly easily found in the bullet-pointed section of Document 2, although careful reading was required to identify correctly that attendance at only certain types of university appears to influence pay significantly. Candidates offering the third bullet point as a factor were not rewarded since this refers to post-graduate qualifications rather than a degree.

Candidates usually cope more readily with the demands of an article, demonstrating familiarity with the appropriate tone and structure though many still fail to provide a heading. Stronger candidates expressed their ideas in an engaging and well-organised fashion without relying unduly on the precise wording of the source material. Most responses showed reasonable understanding of the ideas in the source documents though

some candidates introduced information not contained therein; for example, several candidates put forward views about the social life to be enjoyed at university or offered the "gap year" as an alternative. Alternatives to university were rarely thoroughly examined and explained.

Although there were some examples of very accomplished work, many candidates lack the expected degree of control and accuracy in their written English and lose marks accordingly. Common errors included misspellings - sometimes of words included in the source documents, such as debt, profession, employer/employee, Britain - omission or incorrect insertion of apostrophes (for example, before the final 's' in a simple plural), incorrect subject-verb agreement, omission or incorrect use of commas and omission or inaccurate use of capital letters.

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.

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. It is worth highlighting the fact that almost half the marks in Part A of the paper are awarded for the ability to evaluate and explain how documents differ and/or agree in their approach to a specific issue. Centres where coaching is provided in examination technique and the conventions of writing different types of document give their candidates a considerable advantage when approaching the test. For example, guided exercises in writing in various formats for different purposes and audiences would be most useful.

Chief Examiner