

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT January 2008

Communication - Level 3

General Comments

The January paper performed satisfactorily in providing an appropriate test of Level 3 skills. The pass mark, reflecting the level of minimal competence, was set at 28.

The source material provided a good variety of viewpoints on a topic, 'Families and Households', which was slightly less accessible than some. Candidates needed to read the source material and the questions carefully. Some confusion was evident between 'single person' and 'single parent' and between 'house' and 'household', and in some cases undue emphasis was placed on the difficulty faced by young people in getting onto the property ladder, a concern only briefly touched upon in the source documents.

Question 1, as is often the case, required only straightforward identification of relevant points. Stronger candidates were often characterised by their ability to achieve this in a few well-chosen words. Some seemed unaware of the instruction to choose information from Documents 1 and 4 and offered suggestions from Document 2, e.g. 'living close to city centre hustle and bustle' or Document 3, e.g. 'renting'. On the whole, though, this question was answered well with many candidates being awarded full marks.

In Question 2, most candidates identified trends from Document 1 relating to changing households, though some did not understand the term 'trend'. However, a surprisingly large number of candidates misread the question and tried to show how arguments in Document 3 supported the trends in Document 1 rather than vice versa. As a result, the explanations lacked focus and were rarely sufficiently detailed or clearly explained. Few candidates considered the implications of the word 'extent' in the second part of this question, or in Questions 3 and 4.

The cartoon attracted a range of imaginative interpretations in answers to Question 3, though few appeared to recognise its humorous intention. Most problematic was the meaning of 'Home Improvement Programme' with suggestions ranging from a grant aimed at persuading young people to leave home to a TV makeover programme. Some associated it with the Joseph Rowntree Project featured in Document 3. The majority of candidates tried to relate the cartoon to the other three documents, but few considered that the extent of its relevance might differ for different documents or even within documents. Weaker answers lost marks through focusing on how the cartoon supported Document 4, or through making a very general statement about 'the other documents'.

Question 4 was generally answered well. There was ample material in Document 3 from which to select the 3 advantages requested, and almost all candidates were able to make some comparison with the views of the

writer of Document 2. Better answers recognised that there were some points of potential agreement as well as opposing views.

Although Question 5 asked for candidates to write an article, several offered essays, letters or even reports. Most recognised the need for an article to begin with a suitable heading, and tried to write in paragraphs although these were not always organised effectively. Several attempted to reproduce the appearance of a magazine by writing in columns. This is unnecessary and can be self-penalising since it takes up time, often reduces legibility and seems to distract candidates from organising their ideas sensibly. Most candidates showed understanding of the changes affecting the make-up of families and households and better candidates showed the implications of these changes for housing policy and different approaches to the problems arising. Most answers contained some attempts at suggestions for future housing policy though these were sometimes cursory and generalised. Spelling, punctuation and grammar were often weak, with words contained in the source documents, notably 'accommodation', frequently misspelt and commas and apostrophes often omitted or misused.

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. Common errors, such as confusion of there/their, were/where, etc., and the misuse of capital letters, commas and apostrophes, should have been eradicated in candidates at this level. Opportunities should be given 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 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 articles for different purposes and audiences would be most useful.

It was apparent that some centres had encouraged their candidates to tackle Part B first, presumably to ensure this question was not left unfinished if time was short. However, Part A of the paper tests reading skills but also ensures that candidates have the opportunity to be thoroughly familiar with the source information before expressing their own ideas in writing. There is a danger that candidates answering Question 5 first will have insufficient grasp of the issues to be able to synthesise them effectively in their answer.

Keith Washington - March 2008