

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT JUNE 2004

Communication

Level 3

General Comments

This paper provided a challenging test within the Level 3 specification for this cohort. The pass mark was set at 28, reflecting the typical achievement of the minimally competent candidate at Key Skills Level 3.

Though perhaps of less everyday interest to candidates than the topics of some recent papers, the subject matter, "Chip Technology", appeared to pose few barriers to general understanding, and rarely tempted candidates to draw inappropriately on personal experience. However, there were many examples of candidates allowing their own personal opinion or moral stance to influence their responses and prevent them from producing an effective synthesis of relevant information from the source documents, resulting in loss of marks.

The questions in Part A were progressively more difficult, and thus Question 3 and Question 4 in particular successfully differentiated candidates by ability. At Level 3, it is expected that candidates can synthesise information from different sources, and a significant number of marks is awarded for demonstration of this ability. In Question 2, candidates found little trouble in identifying potential problems with chip technology, but were generally less successful in exploring the extent to which these were balanced by the benefits. Similarly in Question 3, most responses included some valid interpretation of the meaning of the images, but few were able to show how, and how far, the images supported the views in the text of the documents in which they appeared. To achieve this successfully, candidates needed first of all to explain what views were present in the text and then to show why the image was or was not a suitable illustration of this view.

The need for careful reading of both the question paper and all the source documents was clearly illustrated by many responses to Question 4. Better candidates correctly identified Professor Warwick's "stated goals", but some attributed various other miscellaneous benefits of chip technology (already rewarded in Question 1) to him; less able candidates seemed unsure of the meaning of the term "goal" in this context. The second part of this question was poorly answered, and in a significant number of cases ignored altogether. Despite the clear instruction to draw from "all three documents" to explain "in your own words" the extent to which the source material supported these goals, many candidates did not refer to Document 3 in their answer, and/or resorted to transcriptions of large passages of the text with no valid commentary of their own.

As in previous test series, in some cases too much time was spent on answering questions in Part A, with the result that the extended answer to the question in Part B (worth 50% of the total marks) was either too brief or not attempted. Many candidates appeared unaware of how to format a

report, and some appeared to be confused by the prompt that the intended recipient of the report was the Chief Executive of a hospital trust, so that they produced a letter or a memo instead. On the other hand, some candidates neglected some of the areas required by the question through their efforts to keep to prescribed sub-headings they had been taught were appropriate for a report. The majority of responses showed a reasonable level of understanding, but only a few contained depth as well as breadth of information. The standard of spelling, punctuation and grammar was poor for candidates at this level. Common errors included poor use of commas and apostrophes, the inability to structure complex sentences, incorrect use of capital letters and misspelling of common words such as there/their/they're, were/where, and so on.

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. It is apparent that some centres have not sufficiently prepared candidates in the conventions of writing letters, reports and articles. In the June paper, for example, very few responses to Part B included a heading and sub-headings, a minimum requirement for a written report.

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 "explain" or "explore" 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.

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