

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT MARCH 2008

Communication - Level 3

General Comments

This paper provided a satisfactory test of Level 3 skills. The pass mark, reflecting the level of minimal competence, was agreed at 29, indicating a provisional national pass rate of just over 50%.

In general, candidates responded well to this paper. Climate change is a topical subject, accessible to candidates, and the source documents provided a range of different viewpoints. The tone of Document 4 proved to be a key discriminating factor; weaker candidates often failed to discern the writer's point of view accurately.

The majority of candidates scored full marks on Question 1. There were many possible effects to choose from in both Documents 1 and 2. However, occasionally marks were lost through misunderstanding of the question (confusion over cause and effect) or of the information (especially how the Gulf Stream works and the part played by the "chimneys" of cold water).

In Question 2, many candidates did not understand exactly what is meant by a "trend". Markers treated this with some flexibility; lack of scale in the diagram meant that precise interpretations were difficult. The second part of the question – a greater test of Level 3 skills – was rarely very well done, though competent candidates made reasonably effective attempts at comparison, though often neglecting the phrase "to what extent". Some candidates misread the question and discussed how the information in Document 3 supported the charts rather than vice versa, which limited the effectiveness of their explanation. Stronger candidates realised that the second chart was a *prediction* of emission levels in 2025 and therefore provided a guide to estimating future levels rather than the current situation.

Three marks were available in Question 3 for identification of the steps taken by government or industry to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Several candidates attempted to make three points about using different alternative fuels, but these were felt to be too similar in approach to warrant more than one mark. The point about phasing out of CFCs was judged to be historical and therefore not allowed. Many candidates did not fully appreciate the writer's arguments in Document 4 and sometimes used quotations in their argument to support steps taken when in fact the writer makes the opposite point (for example, he argues that renewable fuels are **not** sufficient to meet "a fifth of the UK's rising needs", whereas many candidates appeared to believe the opposite was true). References to recycling were largely irrelevant to the discussion in Question 3 since in Document 4 the example given is of *domestic* recycling.

The viewpoint that domestic recycling is "far too small-scale" to make significant difference to global warming was sometimes used to some effect as part of a general point about Document 4's attitude to

individual contributions. However, this issue is not identified in Document 3 and therefore not of direct relevance to the assessment required in Question 4. Most candidates were able to identify two contributions, although there were responses which confused these with the industry or government measures asked for in Question 3. Two separate marks were allowed for responses which differentiated between reductions in domestic energy consumption achieved through, on the one hand, selection of energy-efficient equipment and, on the other, through energy-conservation techniques such as loft insulation, etc. provide some explanation though very few managed full marks because their answers were not sufficiently well-focussed or incisive. The assessment of the usefulness of these contributions was often omitted or ineffective, with the instruction to use information from Documents 2 and 4 sometimes ignored.

The context for the task for Question 5, an article for a community magazine, allowed the majority of candidates to achieve the marks for format and tone, although there were still too many with no heading. As with the January paper, many candidates attempted to reproduce the appearance of a magazine by writing in columns. This is time-consuming for the candidate and counter-productive, since it gains no additional marks and often reduces legibility and clarity of organisation of ideas. A few responses were more essay than article. The confusion over cause and effect with respect to global warming and climate change was again apparent in some cases. Generally, the causes were less well explained. Some answers did not address the bullet points in the question about contributors to global warming or the effectiveness of national efforts to save the planet. Other weaknesses present in some responses included a lack of balance and the excessive introduction of personal opinion. The standard of spelling, punctuation and grammar was rarely more than satisfactory for candidates at this level, with many candidates unable to spell relatively common words accurately or to demonstrate correct use of commas and apostrophes.

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. 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.

Keith Washington - May 2008