

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT NOVEMBER 2007

Communication - Level 3

General Comments

This paper provided a straightforward test of Level 3 skills.

In general, candidates responded well to this paper. The topic, "Manufactured Pop", was accessible and familiar to the vast majority of candidates, who nevertheless avoided the temptation to stray from the source material in most cases. Answers to Question 1 successfully identified reasons for the popularity of boy bands, though some candidates gave what was essentially one reason – the personal attractiveness of boy band members – more than once, since it was stated in both of the specified documents in different forms. Fewer candidates identified the role of the management team in manufacturing success. Weaker candidates sometimes tried to argue that the fact that 'girls like them' was a cause of boy bands' popularity rather than an effect.

The identification part of Question 2 posed few difficulties to many candidates, although some candidates incorrectly took the *Top of the Pops* spokeswoman's comment that 'it makes for a better show' to refer to miming rather than playing live. Very many candidates struggled to answer the second part of the question, however, since references to miming in Document 2 were tangential to the writer's main theme. The best answers were from those who recognised that miming, in this writer's view, was a symptom of a wider lack of authenticity to be found in modern pop music but not necessarily to be condemned in its own right.

Interpreting the cartoon in Document 3, supported as it was by a caption, proved to be well within the powers of almost all candidates; the differentiating factor was the quality of the synthesis, explaining how far the cartoon supported the views of the two documents. Better answers referred to Louis Walsh's account of the way he carefully selects the members of his bands to form the 'perfect package', his use of words like 'control' and 'conveyor belt', and from Document 4, the reference in the title 'Factory Dreams' and the term 'manufactured bands' to support their interpretation of the cartoon. Most candidates were able to provide some explanation though very few managed full marks because their answers were not sufficiently well-focussed or incisive.

In Question 4, marks were lost through candidates not paying attention to all aspects of what was asked of them. The assessment of the impact on pop music was often cursory if present at all, although in this question sometimes candidates made implicit reference to this in identifying the negative effects on music fans and artists.

Unusually, this paper asked candidates to write an essay for Part B. Some used the entire essay question as a title which was allowed somewhat reluctantly, since this would not be entirely appropriate for publication in a pop music journal. Too many had no title at all, and there are still

candidates who appear to be unaware of the need to use paragraphs as a means of organising written information. Most produced an acceptable essay, though weaker answers showed lapses of fluency, undue (and sometimes unacknowledged) reliance on the source material for their expression of ideas, poor organisation and failure to address all aspects of the question. The standard of spelling, punctuation and grammar was rarely more than satisfactory for candidates at this level, though only a few scripts exhibited disastrous lack of control and accuracy in this series.

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 essays for different purposes and audiences would be most useful.

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Communication