

## **KEY SKILLS COMMUNICATION (JUNE SERIES) 2004**

### **Chief Examiner's Report**

#### **General Comment**

In June 2004, CCEA offered tests in Key Skills Communication at Levels 1, 2 and 3. As usual, there was a small number of candidates entered at any level in the June series.

Once again there was evidence that the majority of candidates were entered at the appropriate level and I am pleased to report yet again, that the percentage of candidates from CCEA centres who achieved a pass grade in all levels of the external tests, exceeded the percentage of candidates who achieved a pass grade nationally.

#### **Level 1**

The test paper adopted the usual pattern of eight short pieces of stimulus material followed by five questions on each piece. The stimulus material reflected a wide range of interests and was designed to appeal to candidates. It also provided variety in its presentation. There is evidence that the paper was successful in testing Level 1 Communication skills fairly. The level of language in the paper and the total time allocated proved to be appropriate.

Most of the candidates who undertook the Level 1 test responded positively to the questions and showed that they were able to read and understand the stimulus material.

The following points mirror those made in previous reports and identify the areas in which errors were most frequently made at Level 1. Extra attention in those areas would improve candidates' performance.

- Some candidates did not read the stimulus material carefully and, as a consequence, focussed on inappropriate information in their responses. Careful reading is essential if candidates are to spot the distracters in the multiple choice questions.
- There are serious weaknesses in the basic skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Incorrect use of capital letters and full stops frequently were not identified and a high percentage of candidates were unable to correct spelling errors
- The main purpose of a document is frequently misunderstood.

#### **Level 2**

The test paper adopted the same pattern as the Level 1 test with eight short pieces of stimulus material being followed by five questions on each piece. The stimulus material was sufficiently varied in approach and presentation to appeal to this level of candidature. As in previous series, the Level 2 paper also successfully provided a fair test of candidates' communication skills at that level and complied with the guidance given by QCA. The performance of the candidates would indicate that the language was appropriate and that they had sufficient time in which to complete the paper. The difficulties experienced by candidates at Level 2 once again reflected the Level 1 difficulties.

**The following points highlight the most common errors made on the Level 2 paper:**

- As previously, it is necessary to highlight that too many candidates lost marks through careless reading of the stimulus material. As a consequence, those candidates could not focus properly on the relevant material required to answer the questions.
- Limitations in vocabulary were evident as many candidates were unable to substitute suitable words from a given list
- Basic punctuation questions, such as identifying where commas were missing in a list, were poorly answered and deliberate spelling errors in the stimulus material were not correctly identified. This is probably the area in which candidates lose the greatest percentage of marks.

**Level 3**

It is a matter of immense satisfaction that candidates from N Ireland perform very well at Level 3. Although the entry for the June series is small, the high standard was maintained.

The paper set for the June series, like those set in previous series, tested Level 3 Communication skills in a fair and balanced way, allowing candidates of differing abilities to respond positively to the questions posed. There was evidence that the language used in the papers was appropriate for candidates at this level. The test paper followed the familiar pattern and covered the higher order skills of reading and synthesising information about complex subjects from three documents. Two of the documents included images, and one question was based on those images. Candidates were required to organise information and to adopt a style of writing appropriate to complex subject matter.

**The following specific comments highlight particular aspects of candidates' performance in the June series:**

- The improvement in time management, commented upon in the May series report, was sustained in this paper. There was evidence that the majority of candidates have learned to spend time on questions in proportion to the marks awarded for them.
- Candidates at Level 3 are always required to synthesise key information, to organise it and to express it clearly. There continues to be ample evidence of weak synthesis.
- As previously stated, it is necessary to draw attention to the need for candidates to be made aware of the distinction between, and requirements of, a variety of command words. This would enable them to direct their writing more accurately at the set tasks.
- Some candidates still do not read questions carefully in order to understand their requirements. For example, candidates were asked in one question to use information from Documents 1 and 2. Some wasted valuable time by including additional information from other documents which could not be rewarded.
- Work on the question on images has shown steady improvement over the series and candidates scored quite highly – even if some of their interpretations were extreme!

- As previously indicated in this report, a high proportion of marks are awarded for technical accuracy. Improved spelling, punctuation and grammar would improve results.
- The extended-answer question asked candidates to produce a structured report and clearly stated the requirements of the report. The report was usually well done, but candidates need to be aware of the appropriate format and structure to adopt, and they also need to be reminded to include a main heading, sub-headings and other stylistic features to add clarity to the work. It is also necessary to maintain a balanced approach in a report and to use and sustain a formal tone throughout the work.

## **Principal Moderator's Report**

Most centres produced portfolios of a good to high quality demonstrating not only a thorough approach to portfolio development but also an effective internal standardisation process – an essential element of Accreditation. Accredited centres are reminded to ensure that evidence of Internal Standardisation is explicit. The signature of the Moderator is required on the CCEA Tracking Sheets. Additionally, annotation on the body of the documents produced can indicate where assessor and moderator judgements have been made.

An increasing number of centres are becoming highly effective in setting tasks that generate interesting and purposeful evidence that clearly meet the standard.

Centres are reminded to address any issues raised in their Centre Report. Moreover, centres should also take into account the new 2004 Standard which came into effect in September. These changes should be welcome as they represent a reduction in the assessment burden for centres and allow for greater opportunities to generate evidence from a wider range of subjects.