

KEY SKILLS COMMUNICATION (JUNE SERIES) 2005

Chief Examiner's Report

General Comment

In June 2005, CCEA offered tests in Key Skills Communication at Levels 1, 2 and 3. However a pre-set marks awarding system for Levels 1 and 2 is being operated so this report is concerned only with Level 3. This system is likely to operate permanently so future reports will probably address Level 3 issues only.

Following the usual pattern, the June series at Level 3 was taken by very few centres. The overall performance was average although the percentage of candidates from CCEA centres who achieved a pass grade exceeded the percentage of candidates who achieved a pass grade nationally at Level 3.

Level 3

Entry details show a very narrow range of candidates and their results were varied. There were a few who performed well and demonstrated competence in the skills required at Level 3. Another small group of candidates made minimum effort and did not attempt the tasks beyond the first one. The majority were bunched in the middle range – many just failing to achieve the pass mark. There was no evidence that timing was a problem in this series, and those who failed did so because they lacked the ability to focus on the appropriate information from the documents. In many instances they identified superficial facts and failed to recognise the main issues. These candidates were also characterised by their lifting of sizable extracts from the documents with little attempt at synthesis.

The source booklet for the June series, contained three documents which were highly topical and of obvious interest to candidates. The level of language in the documents was appropriate in both content and length and was easily understood. Two of the documents contained images, and these were, on the whole, reasonably interpreted.

The test paper made the typical demands on candidates. In Section A candidates were required to demonstrate ability in the higher order skills of reading and synthesising information from the documents. They were asked to select and read material, identify and compare different lines of reasoning. As usual, one question was based on the interpretation of images. In Section B they were required to synthesise key information and organise the information in a coherent form, adopting a style of writing appropriate to complex subject matter.

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

- Eighteen per cent of the total marks for the paper are awarded for technical accuracy. It is regrettable that so many Level 3 candidates squander the opportunity to gain higher marks through the making of very basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. This remains the single greatest cause of the loss of marks.
- The need for candidates to be made aware of the distinction between, and requirements of, a variety of command words has been highlighted previously. Once again, too much time was spent on the straightforward identification questions which carry few marks and should be

completed in the minimum time. Attention needs to be drawn to this to enable candidates to direct their writing more accurately at the set tasks.

- There was much evidence of weak synthesis. Frequently candidates simply lifted material from the documents without any attempt at synthesis or use of their own words.
- Some candidates did not read questions carefully in order to understand their exact requirements. This resulted in partly answered questions and failure to focus on the questions' real demands.
- Work on the question on images has shown steady improvement and many candidates scored quite highly although some candidates concentrated on the description of the images rather than their interpretation.
- Time management was not a noticeable problem in this paper. While there was some evidence of rushed work by a few candidates in Section B, others adopted the strategy of beginning with Section B in order to ensure that the long question was completed. This plan has its obvious advantages but, on the other hand, candidates are less familiar with the content of the documents at the earlier stage. Whatever strategy is adopted, candidates need to learn to spend time on questions in proportion to the marks awarded for them.
- The extended-answer question asked candidates to write a structured report and gave clear guidelines about the required content. Candidates showed significant weaknesses in the structure of their reports and frequently failed to understand the purpose of this particular report. As a minimum, a report is expected to include a heading and sub-headings and to use additional features such as paragraphs, numbering or bullet points. Knowledge of the correct layout of a report is assumed at Level 3.