

KEY SKILLS COMMUNICATION (MAY SERIES) 2005

Chief Examiner's Report

General Comment

In May 2005, CCEA offered tests in Key Skills Communication at Levels 1, 2 and 3. However QCA operated an altered awarding system for Levels 1 and 2 which did not require standardisation by the awarding bodies. This report, therefore, is concerned only with Level 3.

As is usual, the May series at Level 3 was taken by a wide range of centres. The overall performance was very much better than that of the March series and the percentage of candidates from CCEA centres who achieved a pass grade was greater than the percentage of candidates who achieved a pass grade nationally at Level 3.

Level 3

Entry details show a wider spread of candidates, many of whom performed well and demonstrated good command of the skills required at Level 3 – synthesis and the technicalities of spelling, punctuation and grammar. The candidates who scored most highly did so through succinct synthesis of ideas. Timing was a problem for a significant number of candidates however, and some found difficulty in focusing on, and selecting the appropriate information from the documents provided. These candidates were less able to use that information quickly and, consequently, some candidates were unable to finish the test in the set time.

The source booklet for the May series presented four documents which were of obvious interest and appeal to candidates. While the level of language in the documents was appropriate and there was no evidence of lack of understanding of the content, some appeared to struggle with their length. Two of the documents contained images, and these were, on the whole, accurately interpreted. The noticeable improvement in performance on the image related question, previously commented on, has been sustained.

The test paper followed the usual pattern. 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, and to 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 May series:

- Candidates were asked to select 'material from the documents'. In this series there was a tendency to write from personal experience, sometimes with little reference to the documents provided. This probably was because the material was highly relevant.
- Another group of candidates lost marks by lifting material directly from the documents, making little effort to use their own words or use any form of synthesis.

- Once again it is necessary to point out that candidates need to be made aware of the distinction between, and requirements of, a variety of command words. Particular difficulty seems to be caused by the term 'assess' which requires analysis rather than the straightforward identification it frequently received. In the May paper, the first two questions required candidates to 'identify' three reasons and three ways. This requirement would have been met by writing only the names of the reasons and ways. No explanation was necessary so valuable time might have been saved. It was particularly sad to see one candidate write two pages of material which, although good quality, could not be rewarded. Once again, we appeal to tutors to draw this fact to candidates' attention so that they might be enabled to spend their time more effectively on the extended-answer question.
- Some candidates still do not read questions carefully in order to understand their exact requirements. For example, one question really had two parts and asked candidates both to 'explain' and 'to what extent'. In some cases only one of these requirements was fulfilled.
- The question on images was, generally, well done although some candidates simply described the images rather than interpreting them as expected. The overall improvement in the work on images is welcomed.
- Technical inaccuracy is the cause of the greatest loss of marks. A total of 9 marks out of the total 25 are allocated to spelling, punctuation and grammar, but the majority of candidates at Level 3 are awarded marks in Bands 1 and 2 because they make very basic technical errors.
- The extended-answer question required candidates to write an article and gave clear guidelines about the required content. An article requires an overall heading as well as some stylistic features, such as sub-headings, bullet points or paragraphs, which would add clarity to the text. These details were frequently ignored. However, it is also evident that some centres have worked hard on these issues and their candidates produced well-structured articles.