

**Key Skills Communication
March Series 2004**

Chief Examiner's Report

KEY SKILLS COMMUNICATION (MARCH SERIES) 2004

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General Comment

In March 2004, CCEA offered tests in Key Skills Communication at Levels 1, 2 and 3. However, QCA, as an experiment, operated an altered system for Levels 1 and 2 which did not require standardisation by the awarding bodies. This report, therefore, is concerned only with Level 3.

The March series at Level 3 was taken by a limited number of centres. The overall performance was markedly below that of recent series. However, the percentage of candidates from CCEA centres who achieved a pass grade was approximately equal to 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 more highly did so through succinct synthesis of ideas. A significant number, however, appeared to be less prepared for, or able to cope with, the demands of the paper. Although the test was of a comparable standard to that of previous series, this latter group of candidates found difficulty focusing on and selecting the appropriate information from the documents provided. They also appeared to be less able to use that information quickly. As a result, some candidates were unable to finish the test in the set time.

The source booklet for the March series presented three documents, one of which contained a number of images. Candidates' interpretation of the images was, on the whole, valid. Performance on the image-related question, however, varied significantly from centre to centre. There was evidence that the language used in the documents was easily understood by candidates at this level.

The test paper followed the usual pattern. Candidates were required to demonstrate ability in the higher-order skills of reading and synthesizing information from the documents. They were asked to select and read material, identify and compare different lines of reasoning, synthesise key information and organise the information in a coherent form, adopting a style of writing appropriate to complex subject matter. As usual, one question was based on the interpretation of images.

The following specific comments highlight particular aspects of candidates' performance in the March series.

- Too many candidates lost marks by lifting material directly from the documents.
- In every series it has been necessary to highlight that candidates need to be made aware of the distinction between, and requirements of, a variety of command words. In the March paper, one question required candidates to 'identify' four ways. This particular question required an answer that simply named the four ways and should have been done in a very short time using four lines. Sadly, however, some candidates wrote several pages giving detailed explanations which could not be rewarded. It would be profitable for candidates if their attention were drawn to ways in which their time might be saved on such questions. This would enable them 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. Careful reading directs candidates more accurately to the relevant responses and secures better results.
- The question on images was, generally, well attempted, although some candidates simply described the images rather than interpreting them, as expected. The overall improvement in the work on images is welcomed.
- Again, it is necessary to point out that a high proportion of marks is awarded for technical accuracy. Disappointingly, the majority of candidates at Level 3 are awarded marks in Bands 1 and 2 because they make very basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Once again, the extended-answer question required candidates to write a letter and gave guidelines about the required content. The difference in performance between centres was obvious in letter writing. One common error was the inclusion of the sender's name in the sender's address at the top of the letter. Marks were also lost through incorrect layout of the letter, failing to include the date, linking the salutation and the complementary close incorrectly, and by confusing the sender's and the recipient's addresses.
- The need for candidates to check that they have met all the demands of the questions is again emphasised. Shortage of time may be a problem in this regard, but a final check by candidates could help them detect some of the errors made.