

**Key Skills Communication
(Spring Series) 2004**

Chief Examiner's Report

KEY SKILLS COMMUNICATION (SPRING SERIES) 2004

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General Comment

In January 2004, CCEA offered tests in Key Skills Communication at Levels 1, 2 and 3.

As is usual, January, there was a small entry at each level in this series. The overall performance was very good and, yet again, the percentage of candidates from CCEA centres who achieved a pass grade in the external tests exceeded the percentage of candidates who achieved a pass grade nationally at Levels 1, 2 and 3.

Level 1

The test paper adopted the familiar pattern of eight short pieces of stimulus material followed by five questions on each piece. The stimulus material covered a wide range of interests and gave variety in the presentation of information. The results achieved proved that the paper was successful in testing Level 1 Communication skills fairly. The difficulty of the language used in the paper was appropriate since the vast majority of the candidates responded positively to the questions and showed that they were able to read and understand the stimulus material.

The following points largely repeat those made in previous reports and identify the same areas in which errors were most frequently made at Level 1. The questions in which candidates performed poorly involved:

- the interpretation of stimulus material;
- identification of the incorrect use of words;
- errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

In order to improve performance, candidates must be aware that:

- it is essential to read the stimulus material carefully in order to pick out the information required to answer the questions. This is of great importance since some of the alternatives in the multiple choice questions are very similar to the correct answers;
- close attention must be given to the basic skills of spelling, punctuation and grammar as well as to the correct usage of vocabulary. There are deliberate mistakes on the paper which must be identified.

These points need to be addressed at the Level 1 stage in order to prevent their repetition at subsequent stages.

Level 2

The Level 2 test paper adopted the same pattern as the Level 1 paper with eight short pieces of stimulus material followed by five questions on each piece. There is clear evidence that the paper successfully provided a fair test of candidates' communication skills at Level 2 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.

As in previous series, unfortunately the difficulties experienced by candidates at Level 2 once again reflected the Level 1 difficulties.

The questions in which candidates performed poorly at Level 2 involved:

- the interpretation of stimulus material;
- use of paragraphs;
- errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

In order to improve performance, candidates must be aware that:

- careless reading of the stimulus material results in the loss of many marks. It is essential to focus properly on the relevant material in order to answer the questions.
- the accurate use of spelling, punctuation and grammar are very important in this test.

Level 3

Entry details show that a small number of centres entered fairly large numbers of candidates, the majority of whom performed very well and demonstrated good command of the skills required at Level 3 – synthesis and the technicalities of spelling, punctuation and grammar. In addition, these candidates were able to focus on, and select the appropriate information from the four documents provided, and then to use that information very quickly. Very few candidates were unable to finish the test showing that work had obviously been done on effective time management.

The source booklet for the January series, presented four documents, one of which was totally composed of images. Although four documents were presented, there is no evidence that they required longer reading time. Their content was accessible and interesting, allowing candidates of differing abilities to respond positively to the questions posed. Candidates' interpretation of the images was, on the whole, valid. 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 synthesising information from the documents. They were required 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. One question was based on the interpretation of images.

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

There was evidence of some very good synthesis in this series, although a number of candidates did incur penalties by lifting material from the documents.

Yet again it is necessary to highlight that candidates need to be made aware of the distinction between, and requirements of, a variety of command words. For example, in this particular paper, one question required candidates to 'identify' three benefits, while another asked them to 'list' four reasons. These particular sections could have been done in three and four lines respectively, however some candidates wrote several pages giving detailed explanations which could not be rewarded. Attention needs to be drawn to this point to enable candidates to spend their time more profitably 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 response and secures better results.

The question on images was, generally, well answered and many candidates showed very original thinking. There has been a steady, overall improvement in the work on images.

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. This task was well done by candidates from some centres where clear direction had obviously been given in the art of letter writing. However, others lost marks by failing to lay out their letters correctly. Many omitted the date, many linked the salutation and the complementary close incorrectly, and some confused the sender's and the recipient's addresses.

Finally, candidates are advised to check that they have met all the demands of the questions. Shortage of time may be a problem in this regard, but a final check may detect some of the errors made.

Principal Moderator's Report

The evidence submitted for moderation in this series was generally of a high quality across the levels. Centres have realised that they need only submit evidence that meets the requirements and as a consequence, the portfolios are much 'slimmer' and focused on meeting the standard. This practice is to be commended as it indicates a greater understanding of Key Skills and a reduction of workload for assessor and candidate alike.

Assessor comment for the oral components across the levels is now more appropriate in indicating *how* the candidate met the specific criteria. Moreover, additional supporting evidence has proved useful for moderation purposes.

Centres are commended for using ICT to present written documents of a high quality. Where this is the case, assessor annotation on the body of the document produced not only helps indicate where specific evidence requirements have been met (eg 2.2 Summary), but also helps authentic the candidates' work.



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