

**Key Skills Communication level 3 test
January 2006 (First-Time Buyers)****Chief Examiner's Report**

The pass mark for this paper was set at 29 (out of 50 marks), with 38.8% of City & Guilds candidates achieving a test 'pass'.

Specific Questions**Part A**

Candidates and tutors should remember that, in Part A, the following two assessment criteria are being tested:

- identifying accurately, and compare the lines of reasoning and main points from the documents and
- synthesising the key information in a way that is relevant to the purpose

Spelling, punctuation and grammar are not marked in this section of the paper but there are marks given for synthesis and the use of the candidate's own words. Parts of the questions asking the candidate to 'identify effects', 'describe the meaning of' or 'identify positive aspects of', concentrate on the skills of extraction and selection. Parts of questions requiring the candidate to 'assess the extent the images support the text', 'compare two views' and 'to assess the extent to which views differ', all presume an ability to synthesise the information presented in the documents and to comment on both text and images, where used. Candidates need to remember to read the questions carefully and to refer to all of the documents required by the question. In Part A it is usually most effective if the candidate names the documents used in answering a particular question or parts of a question. Too often, only one of the required documents has been used to generate an answer or the second part of the question has been overlooked.

Question 1

Question 1 was an identification question asking candidates to identify three reasons why young people may consider buying property. Four marks were available for this answer.

The majority of candidates gained a good mark for this answer. Where full marks were not awarded it was usually because the candidate had misread the question or had identified a reason that did not relate specifically to buying a property (as distinct from renting), such as getting away from parents.

Question 2

This question was based firstly on the images (two graphs) in Document 4. The candidate was asked identify the main points in each image and to discuss the extent of the relation of these points to information about second home owners in Document 3. 7 marks were available for this answer.

Interpretation of statistics rather than photos or drawing seems to be more familiar to candidates and, on the whole, full marks were gained for the first part of the answer. Where a mark was lost it was usually because they identified the second image as being about first time buyers in general rather than relating it to those under 27. The second half of the answer was more problematic. Many candidates failed to link the information from the images to the issue of second homeowners in

Document 3 at all. Those that did often made only brief reference with little discussion to 'assess the extent'. One examiner remarked that in 145 scripts marked not a single candidate produced a 'however... ' which would have gone some way to fulfilling the requirement for a measure of 'extent'.

Question 3

Question 3 asks the candidate to identify four ways of dealing with the shortage of affordable housing from the views expressed in Document 3. The candidate was then asked to discuss the extent to which Document 1 supports these views. There were 8 marks available for this answer.

Most candidates identified at least four ways of dealing with the shortage of available housing. These had to be viable ways. 'Bringing down the divorce rate' was not accepted. Few, however, discussed the extent of support for these in Document 1 by qualifying the judgements. Some tenuous links were made and these were rewarded appropriately. When dealing with 'extent of support' candidates need to remember to look at both support and counter arguments.

Question 4

The candidate was asked to use information from the documents to give one example of how difficulties faced by first time buyers can affect relationships with partners and one example of how they can affect their relationship with parents. Then they were asked to discuss how far Dave's problems in Document 3 are supported by information from Document 1 and 2. Six marks are available for this answer.

Most candidates were able to identify the example of how the difficulties of first time buyers affected relationships with partners and parents. Some based this on personal experiences rather than the required evidence from the documents. A significant number ignored the second part of the question either because they felt it was too difficult or in a conscious attempt at time management in making a timely move to Part B. Answers, where they did attempt synthesis, tended to be simple descriptions of what Document 3 said about Dave rather than matching his circumstances to valid points from Documents 1 and 2.

Part B

In Part B candidates are given marks for:

- using a format and style of writing that is appropriate to the purpose
- organising the relevant information from all three documents clearly and coherently
- using own words where appropriate and
- writing legibly using accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar

Question 5

Using information from the documents provided, the candidate was asked to write an article for a college or community newspaper highlighting the issues first-time buyers should take into account when considering buying property. These should include:

- availability of affordable property
- alternatives to buying
- financial considerations
- personal considerations

Candidates need to be reminded that this Part B question carries 25 marks, 50% of the whole paper and the length and substance of the answer should reflect this.

- 3.3.1 3 marks are allocated for this section. To obtain the mark for the form of an article the candidate must include a heading. Most did this but some with obvious ability wrote something unrelated to the article such as 'Part B answer'.

Most managed to gain the 'style and structure' mark, largely through use of paragraphing. Other stylistic features, such as bullet points and sub-headings were also rewarded. Some centres seem to encourage candidates to write 'articles' in columns like newspaper articles. This is by no means a requirement and unless structured paragraphs are also included, gains no marks.

Tone was mostly appropriate. It varied from vary formal to chatty and in some cases was quite humorous. Any reasonable variation was judged appropriate provided a consistent tone was maintained throughout.

- 3.3.2 In total there were 13 marks awarded for this section covering both the process of writing and the content.

Some candidates gained good marks for the use of their own words in an effective manner. On the whole this was answered more effectively than in some previous papers. Clearly candidates feel more at ease writing creatively for an article than the more formal requirements of a letter or report. Candidates who relied on copying sections from the source material or simply linked together quotes with little attempt to use these in interpretation were penalised.

The opinions and arguments concerning finance and personal considerations seemed to be appreciated more fully than those associated with affordable property and alternatives to buying. There is a tendency among some candidates to just list points under relevant headings, sometimes with the over-use of bullet points. A rounded article, demonstrating the correct level of understanding, needs the use of some discursive text with the inclusion of examples and statistics to exemplify comments.

In the organisation of material the best marks were gained by candidates who used the structure provided in the task set but added an appropriate introduction and conclusion. In addition, logical sequencing within sections is required together with linkage between one part of the article and another. Overall there also needs to be a balance of coverage.

- 3.3.3 Finally, 9 of the 25 marks for this question are awarded for accuracy of spelling, punctuation and grammar. At level 3, good use of complex

sentences is required. To gain good marks, the piece of writing must be of an appropriate length, be of almost faultless accuracy and successfully synthesise the information required.

In the words of one examiner:

‘ This continues to be the most disappointing aspect of the paper. Spelling of words featured in the source documents was often poor. Lack of subject – verb agreement was often common. Long involved sentences with many clauses strung together with repeated use of the same conjunctions continues to be a feature of the writing of too many candidates. Articles with effective content were often ruined by confusion about when to use commas and full stops.’

General comments

On the whole candidates seem to have enjoyed this paper and most, even those who were obviously under 27, had a surprisingly mature attitude to house buying. Occasionally, an article was produced that demonstrated real understanding and flair. In some centres candidates seem to be being encouraged to attempt Part B before Part A, possibly as a time management strategy. This is not recommended as these candidates do not have the benefit of the time spent perusing the source documents in order to answer the Part A questions. They often wrote the article from general knowledge rather than demonstrating their ability to select and synthesise relevant information from the documents.

Examiners reported that many of the candidates being entered for Level 3 did not have Level 3 Communication capability. It appeared that some candidates had had no preparation for the test at all. Some showed no evidence of training in reading and analysing complex documents and writing articles. Accuracy was weak and skills in synthesising lacking.

Finally, the Chief Examiner would like to stress that the time allowed for the Level 3 Communication paper (except where reasonable adjustments have been applied for and agreed) is one hour and thirty minutes. This includes the time required to read the source material and to proof read and check the answers. Centres are liable to be audited on this issue and all matters of examination administration.

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2 March 2006