

4800-011

Essential Skills

Northern Ireland

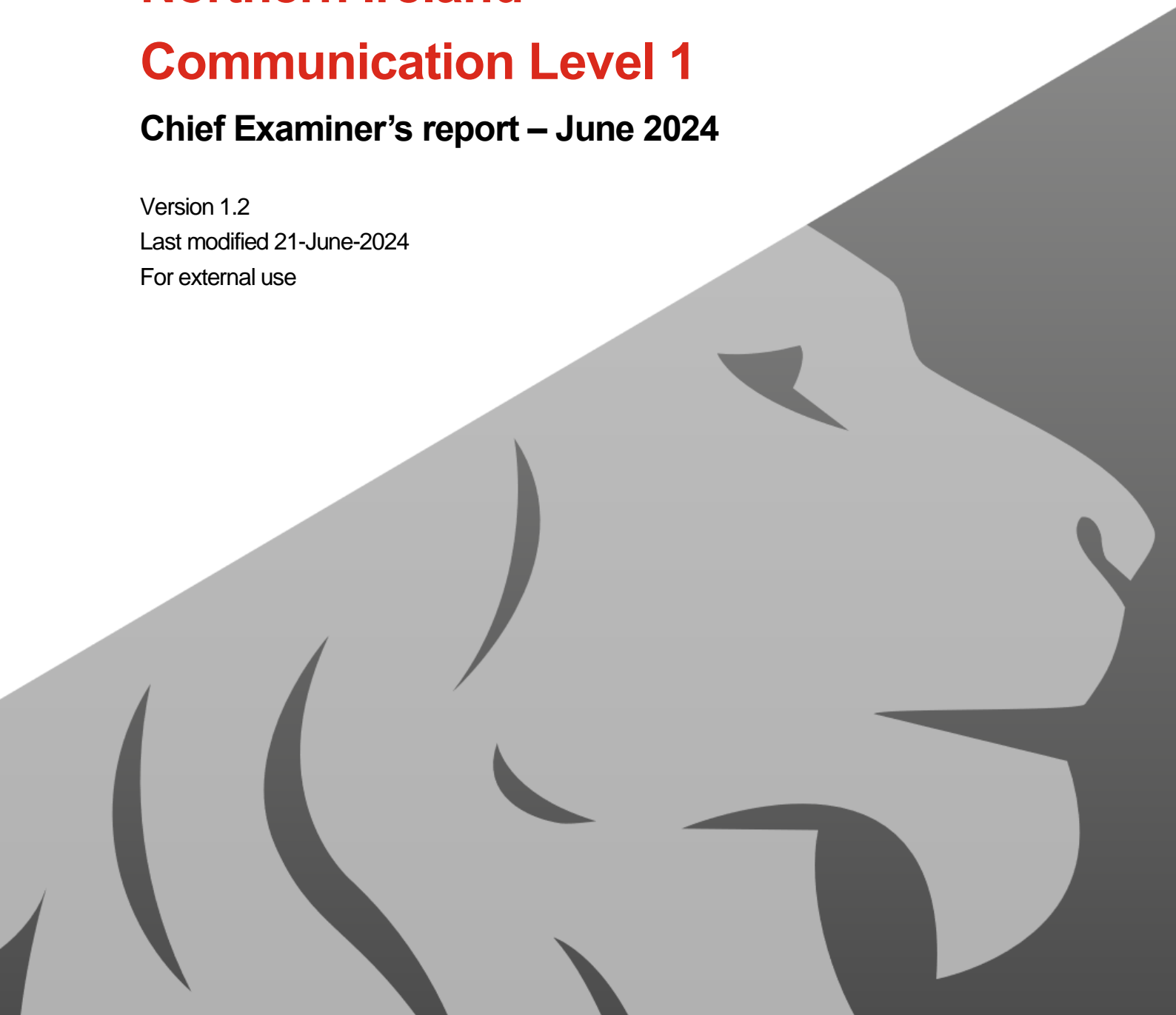
Communication Level 1

Chief Examiner's report – June 2024

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 4800-011 Essential Skills Northern Ireland Communication Level 1.

2. Overall Performance

This report covers the period from November 2023 to April 2024.

Most candidates' performance continues to show good preparation and practice, with a high number achieving a pass. For candidates who do struggle, there are some key areas in which extra development and preparation would be beneficial.

In the reading section:

1. Reading each question carefully and considering exactly what information it is asking for
2. Reading source documents carefully and fully so that accurate information is provided in response to questions
3. Answering with the correct number of responses that questions ask for
4. Identifying suitable responses to source documents.

In the writing section:

1. Spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Properly addressing the task set and providing enough detail to meet it
3. Format and structure, including paragraphing and writing in a logical order with a clear beginning, middle and end.

2.1. Areas of good performance

Overall:

Successful candidates attempted most or all of the questions on the paper, maintaining performance across the reading section and both writing tasks.

In the reading section:

Successful candidates were able to accumulate marks across all the assessment criteria (a-d), showing familiarity with the different question types and the responses required. In particular, criteria (a) and (b) were answered very well, with candidates demonstrating a good understanding of the texts they were given. They were able to recognise main points and ideas as well as find more detailed information, and they could identify the different ways in which these were presented (ie layout features). Importantly, successful candidates were able to give more than one response to a question when asked to, and they could find answers spread through the whole document as well as those contained within one paragraph or section.

Crucially, successful candidates read questions carefully in order to give accurate answers.

In the writing section:

Many candidates performed well in the writing section, with notable improvements in the composition of clear, coherent, logical and well-structured responses. Successful candidates tended to read the writing tasks carefully and fully, paying attention to the details they were asked to cover in their responses. They showed good time management skills by answering both questions in full and leaving some time at the end for checking and correcting errors.

Strong candidates continued to show a good understanding of language and tone, using a style that was appropriate for the task set. For example, when writing a job application, they might begin with, 'Dear Mr Smith,' rather than, 'Hi John'.

Strong candidates also demonstrated the ability to structure responses with a clear beginning, middle and end, which lent coherence to their writing.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar are areas that have always presented a challenge to candidates, but those who were successful were able to demonstrate a good understanding of at least two of these. Most were able to punctuate the beginnings and ends of sentences correctly, and many showed a good understanding of the use of capital letters for proper nouns. Where more complex words were included in the question brief, these were spelled correctly.

2.2. Areas for development

Overall:

1. Checking and proofreading answers

Many successful candidates showed evidence of checking and correcting errors, such as adding more information to responses in the reading section, crossing out and correcting spelling errors in the writing section, or indicating where a new paragraph should begin. Extra marks were often picked up in these ways, so encouraging this practice in the time remaining at the end of the exam would be of significant benefit to all candidates. In the case of some borderline but unsuccessful candidates, an extra two or three marks gained in this way would mean the difference between a pass and a fail.

In the reading section:

1. Reading and considering questions carefully

This advice always bears repeating, as not reading questions carefully enough can lead to a significant loss of marks. These lost marks could be due to misreading what is being asked, or due to missing key information such as instructions to look at a specific area of the source document. One commonly seen example was that candidates sometimes only gave one response where more responses were asked for, losing the opportunity to pick up the extra marks. As the number of responses required is always stated in the question (e.g. Give **three** ways that...), careful reading can prevent losing marks in this way.

Another reason why careful reading is so important is to prevent answering anticipated questions rather than the questions actually being asked. Sometimes candidates appeared to focus on certain key words such as 'main points' and answer the question they expected. However, a question on main points could, for example, ask candidates to identify those points, or it could ask them to identify the layout features used to convey the main points. Seeing certain key words and rushing to answer, instead of considering the question, can therefore lead candidates down an incorrect path. This can result in responses that do not answer the question at all. This can affect very capable candidates as well as those who are struggling, so practising reading questions carefully would benefit all.

Candidates may find it useful to underline or circle important instructions in the question before attempting an answer, particularly words such as 'why', 'how', 'who', and the number of responses required. Not only does this encourage the candidate to consider the question carefully before answering, but it may also help with checking.

2. Reading and considering the source documents carefully

Some candidates struggled to find information in all areas of the provided source documents, such as in text boxes, headings, links and lists, or spread throughout the whole document in multiple paragraphs or sections.

Where some candidates were able to pick out main points and specific details of a text, they struggled to understand a text more deeply, or to follow an argument to its conclusion. Candidates need to be able to consider and understand the document as a whole and its meaning, as well as to find details within it.

Source documents may contain a lot of different information and ideas, including main points, specific details, opinions, facts, arguments, personal stories and experiences, contact details, instructions, advice, and more. Candidates need to read and consider these carefully when answering questions to make sure they provide accurate answers. It is therefore important for candidates to practise reading many different types of texts for them to become familiar with the different ways in which information is presented.

3. Identifying suitable responses (criterion d)

Some candidates struggled to answer questions about how they could or should respond to a text or to a particular point in the text. For example, candidates may find it difficult to identify one or more specific steps to achieve something explained in the text, such as following key instructions, or they may struggle to identify ways to access more information, such as following links or finding contact details. Candidates need to become familiar with the ways in which texts provide these details or suggest further action.

4. Using the information provided in the source documents rather than answering from own knowledge and experience

There continued to be a few candidates who turned to their own knowledge or experience of a topic rather than using the source documents provided. This may be more likely when a topic is very familiar, such as a subject related to an apprenticeship or a course of study. It is important for candidates to remember that all answers in the reading section should be based on the information in the source documents provided; candidates will never be expected to use their own knowledge of a specific topic. Even accurate information cannot be given marks if it is not found in the provided source material.

Candidates should also be prepared to look at the source documents provided in the exam, rather than remembering texts they may have encountered in class or in practice tests. This is particularly important when identifying layout features, contact details, or features intended to provide more information. For example, not all source documents use bullet points for lists or direct readers to more information using links. Not all texts include a title, subheadings or

images. Not all texts provide phone numbers or emails for further contact. Candidates need to give answers relevant to the documents they are provided with, rather than simply listing common features of texts they have encountered before.

In the writing section:

1. Punctuation

Out of spelling, punctuation and grammar, it tended to be punctuation that presented the greatest challenge for candidates. Candidates must remember that correct punctuation (as well as spelling and grammar) is required in all responses, including speeches and emails to friends.

Common punctuation errors continued to be seen frequently. These included omitting full stops at the ends of sentences, placing full stops where they were not needed, or using commas where full stops were needed. In some cases where full stops were not present at all, the overall clarity and coherence of the response also suffered. Use of a lowercase 'i' when candidates referred to themselves was another common error. The use of uppercase and lowercase letters was often confused in addresses and particularly in postcodes.

Although handwriting is not assessed, legibility did have an impact in cases where it was impossible to distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters (most commonly the letters S and C), or to distinguish between a full stop and a comma. While benefit of the doubt is applied where possible, poorly formed letters may lead to unintended errors.

A small number of candidates wrote their entire answer in capital letters, therefore losing a significant number of punctuation marks.

2. Spelling and grammar

Common errors continued to pose a difficulty for candidates. These included 'alot', 'writting', 'aswell', 'collage' instead of 'college', using 'of' instead of 'have' ('could of', 'would of', etc.), and 'yous'/'you'se'/'use' instead of 'you'. Common homophone errors were also seen often, including 'here/hear', 'there/they're/their', 'to/too/two', 'were/where', etc. Learning and preparation should cover these common issues in order to help candidates avoid building up errors that can lead to a significant loss of marks.

Amongst some candidates, the use of articles 'a', 'an' and 'the' posed a particular challenge. Other candidates struggled more with subject-verb agreement, and some found maintaining a consistent tense to be particularly challenging. Encouraging candidates to practise the areas they find particularly difficult and to look out for these while checking their answers is recommended.

3. Language and tone

Some candidates continued to struggle with their use of language, using language that was inappropriate in tone or level of formality, constructing clumsy sentences, including unnecessary repetition of words like 'and' or 'also', choosing incorrect words for the context they were used in, or misusing common words and expressions. Candidates should remember that 'textspeak' should not be used in the exam and is not considered appropriate for any of the tasks the candidate will be asked to complete.

As at least one of the writing tasks requires a formal response, candidates should be familiar with formal language and how it is used in different contexts. For example, a formal letter or email should begin with something like, 'Dear Mrs. (Name),' or, 'Dear Sir/Madam,' and not, 'Hi Jane'.

4. Relevant detail and on-topic responses

There are still some candidates who are not covering all of the required detail in their writing responses. Successful candidates were able to address each of the bullet-pointed details listed in the question, to expand on these points, and to meet the requirements of the task.

In rare cases, candidates wrote answers that were entirely off topic, ignoring the writing task set in the question. This led to a significant loss of marks on the content of their answers.

Every writing question will give the candidate a task to complete. The question will always list the details that the candidate is expected to cover in their response. At Level 1, these details are clearly presented in bullet point form. As with the reading section, careful reading of the question is key.

Candidates should also consider the purpose of the text they have been asked to produce; for example, if they are writing an email asking people to attend an event, they should include details of when and where that event will take place. If they are asking for a reply, they should include contact details for this.

Candidates should be aware that they do not have to include their own name, address, email or any other personal details in their response, but can include fake details instead, eg John Smith, Fake Street, Fake Town, FT6 1FT.

5. Format and structure

It is important candidates are familiar with the expected format and structure of:

- letters
- emails
- speeches
- articles.

Some candidates still struggled with formatting and structuring these properly. Articles without titles were commonly seen, and sometimes letters were presented without addresses and occasionally without opening and closing salutations. Using paragraphs was a challenge for many candidates, with some including no paragraph breaks at all.

While there has been improvement in the structuring of responses with a clear beginning, middle and end, there were still some cases where endings or conclusions were not properly included, with arguments ending abruptly and answers not rounded off or finished. There continued to be some emails and letters with no sign off or sender's name, despite excellent formatting at the beginning of the response.

Candidates should understand how to present their responses in a structured, logical sequence, making use of paragraphs, with a clear beginning, middle and end.

6. Writing too much or too little

The majority of candidates do provide answers of an appropriate length that are able to cover the requirements of the task successfully. This shows good teaching and exam preparation. However, there was still a small number of candidates who wrote finished answers that were too short, therefore not providing enough information to properly address the task or to demonstrate writing ability.

There are two writing questions on the paper, one worth 6 marks and one worth 9 marks. Candidates should aim to write 80-120 words on the 'short' question and 120-140 words on the 'long' question. Responses that are much too short are penalised across certain categories, as one or two sentences is not enough to demonstrate consistent ability in some areas. If candidates write extremely short responses, that they believe have covered all the detail requirements of the question, they should be encouraged to expand on these points or to explain their arguments in more depth.

7. Only answering one of the writing questions

It was rare to see only one writing question attempted, but there were still occasional examples of this issue. Candidates who only answer one writing question cannot gain any marks on the unanswered question, and they are also penalised across spelling, punctuation and grammar. It is therefore extremely difficult to pass if only one writing question is attempted. Candidates should be advised that if they are running out of time, a brief summary or bullet point answer is preferable to no answer at all. This can mean the difference between a pass and a fail.

3. Recommendations and Advice for Centres

1. Candidates should not be entered for the exam before they are ready. Adequate learning and practice should take place first to ensure that candidates are able to meet the criteria and are prepared for the types of questions they may be asked. Utilising the sample papers and worked examples on the City & Guilds website is recommended as a way to assess whether a candidate is ready or would benefit from further learning. Candidates should be prepared to gain enough marks across **both** sections of the paper. Ability in reading only or writing only is not enough to pass.
2. Familiarity with the question types and the format of the exam is extremely important. Making use of the sample papers on the City & Guilds website is strongly recommended.
3. As the assessment contains both reading and writing sections and involves a substantial amount of reading of source documents and questions, practice and preparation should include time management techniques.
4. Candidates should be aware that in the **reading** section they do not need to answer in complete sentences or to repeat the stem of the question in their answer (although answers do need to be legible). This can help with managing time during the exam.
5. It is essential that candidates read all questions fully and consider what is being asked of them before attempting to answer. This may involve underlining important instructions on the question paper in both the reading and writing sections.
6. Many candidates would strongly benefit from checking their finished responses in both the reading and writing sections.
7. As part of the learning process, candidates should be exposed to all types of source documents, including websites, articles, formal letters and emails, leaflets, promotional material and advertising, amongst others. Any of these may be encountered as source documents in the reading section.
8. As part of the learning process, candidates should practise formatting and structuring specific types of documents correctly (letters, emails, speeches and articles), and should be aware of the type of language, tone and level of formality required for different situations, for example (but not limited to): job applications, writing to the council, writing to a friend, giving a speech to colleagues, and writing an article for a college magazine.