

4800-011

Essential Skills

Northern Ireland

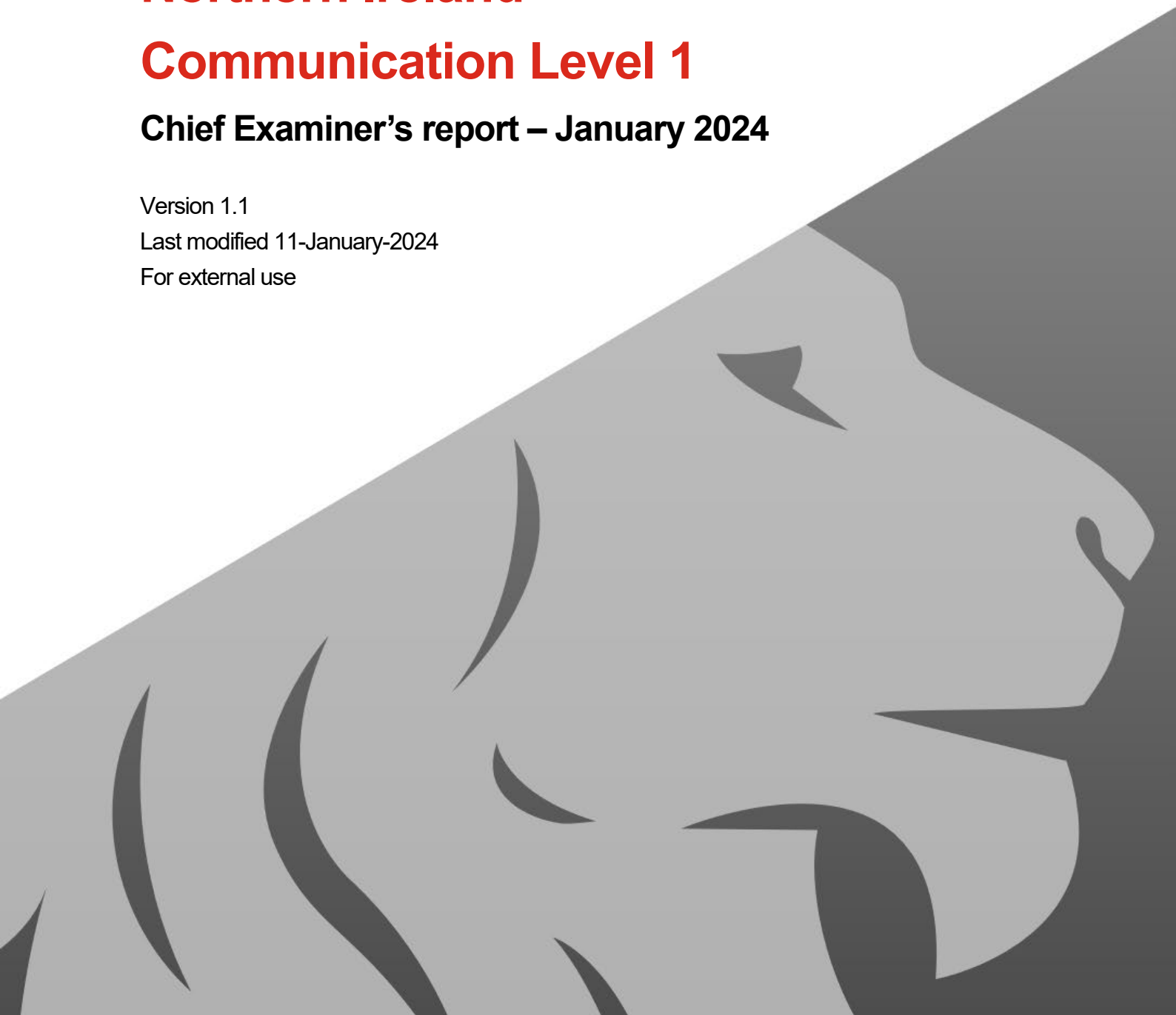
Communication Level 1

Chief Examiner's report – January 2024

Version 1.1

Last modified 11-January-2024

For external use



Document revision history

Version	Changed by	Summary of change	Approval date
1.0	Assessment	Created	03 Jan 2024
[00]	[Department name]	[Description]	[day Month year]

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Overall Performance	4
2.1. Areas of good performance	4
2.2. Areas for development.....	6
3. Recommendations and Advice for Centres	11

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 April 2023 to October 2023.

Candidates' performance across both sections of the paper continues to show good teaching, preparation and practice, with a high number of candidates achieving a pass. Candidates who did struggle tended to find the following areas most challenging:

In the reading section:

1. Careful reading of the whole question, paying attention to the number of responses required
2. Careful reading of the source documents to be able to provide accurate and/or detailed information
3. Identifying suitable responses to source documents, such as contact details or further actions.

In the writing section:

1. Spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Providing sufficient and accurate detail to properly meet the task set
3. Language, tone and levels of formality
4. 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:

Most candidates appeared to be well prepared for the paper, including a familiarity with different question types and a good ability to understand and engage with different source documents. Candidates generally answered all questions in the reading section and provided complete responses to both writing tasks. Most maintained a consistent performance across both sections of the paper. This indicates good exam preparation and time management.

In the reading section:

As in previous periods, successful candidates tended to accumulate marks across all the assessment criteria (a-d). They read questions carefully and followed instructions well; where more than one response was required, they gave the correct number of responses stipulated in the question.

Successful candidates showed a good understanding of the source documents. They were able to identify the main points as well as find more detailed information when required. They could locate answers spread throughout the whole document as well as those contained in one paragraph or section. Importantly, they were able to identify which questions could be answered with main points, words or short phrases from the text, and which required a more detailed response in order to be answered accurately.

Most candidates were able to identify organisational features used to convey information in the source documents, and they were familiar with the different ways in which texts can be laid out to aid the reader.

In the writing section:

Candidates continued to show a strong performance in the writing section. Successful candidates were able to address the task by providing sufficient, clear and accurate detail, using format and language appropriate for purpose and audience. They utilised paragraphs well and gave their responses a good, logical structure, including a beginning or introduction, a middle, and an ending or conclusion.

Strong candidates understood when a formal or informal response was required based on the task set, and they were able to maintain a consistent style throughout. Importantly, this formality or informality was carried through into any opening and closing salutations, titles, subheadings and/or conclusions.

Successful candidates tended to show a good understanding of at least two of the following categories: spelling, punctuation and grammar. They were able to write in full sentences, with beginnings and ends of sentences clearly delineated with capital letters and full stops. Simple spellings were correct where included, and responses included more ambitious spellings as well. Words included in the question brief itself were spelled correctly in the candidates' responses.

2.2. Areas for development

Overall:

1. Checking and proofreading answers

Most candidates would benefit from checking and proofreading their responses in both sections of the paper. This may help them to catch simple spelling, punctuation or grammar errors in the writing section, for example. In the reading section, checking might help identify questions that have not been answered fully or that require more responses. 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 the question carefully

While this advice is included in each report, it does bear repeating again, as this is the key area in which many candidates struggle. Questions tend to include more than one important word or instruction, so candidates need to ensure they have fully read and considered each part of the question before answering. They may find it useful to practice reading questions and looking for the following things:

- Any **key words** such as 'why', 'what', 'how', or 'who', or instructions or action words such as 'identify', 'list' or 'explain'.
- **What** exactly they are being asked about, such as a specific topic from the document, or precise information such as names or dates. Candidates who do not pay enough attention to this will often respond with information that does not fully or accurately answer the question.
- **Where** they need to look – which document, or whether they are being directed to a specific part of the document.
- **How many** responses they should give. If more than one response is needed, this will be clearly stated in the question (eg Identify **three** organisational features...). Many candidates lose the opportunity for extra marks by missing this important detail.
- Any words that suggest they should provide quotations from the text, such as 'quotes' or 'evidence'.

Candidates may find it useful to underline or circle important instructions in the question before attempting an answer. Not only does this encourage the candidate to consider the question carefully before answering, but it also may help with checking.

2. Avoiding anticipating certain questions

Some candidates appeared to anticipate certain questions and to answer the question they expected, rather than reading the actual question in front of them carefully enough. While it is important for candidates to familiarise themselves with and practise answering different types

of questions as part of their exam preparation, it is also important to stress that each paper is different. Questions will not necessarily be phrased in exactly the same ways as they appear on practice papers, and nor will particular types of questions appear on every paper or in a set order. The number of marks available for each question also varies.

3. Reading and considering the source documents carefully

Candidates should be able to read and understand source documents in detail. While most candidates showed a good ability to understand the main points and ideas of documents, some struggled when asked to identify specific details from the texts. This may mean re-reading the documents or parts of the documents for information that they did not absorb on first read. Candidates should practise careful reading of the texts at a sentence level. They will also find it useful to practise re-reading with a specific goal in mind, rather than attempting to answer all the questions using their memory of the text after only one reading.

It is also important that candidates do not expect all answers to a question to be found in the same section or paragraph of the source document. This may sometimes be the case, but other times the answers will be spread through the whole document, or located in subheadings, tabs, text boxes and other features that are not part of the main text.

4. Identifying suitable responses (criterion d)

Some candidates still struggled when asked for responses to texts, such as finding contact details, identifying links that lead to further information, or recognising appropriate actions that can be taken in response to the information given. In some cases, these answers may be direct lifts from the text, such as a specific helpline number. In other cases, the questions will be more open, requiring candidates to use their understanding of the information given in the documents to find answers that lie beyond the text. Utilising the practice papers available on the City & Guilds website should help candidates prepare for these types of questions.

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

A small number of candidates 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 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.

In the writing section:

1. Punctuation

Most successful candidates showed strengths in at least two of the following categories: spelling, grammar and punctuation. Candidates who struggle in these areas would therefore benefit a huge amount from extra learning and practice.

Out of the three categories of spelling, punctuation and grammar, it is punctuation that the majority of candidates tended to struggle with. Candidates must be able to write in full sentences and to punctuate the beginnings and ends of these correctly. It is vital they are familiar with the use of capital letters and full stops, as writing that misuses or is devoid of these quickly accumulates errors, as well as impacting the clarity and coherence of a response. Other common errors included the use of lowercase 'i' when candidates referred to themselves, and incorrect use of upper and lowercase letters in addresses and postcodes. Comma splices were also frequently seen.

Although handwriting is not assessed, legibility did have an impact where it was impossible to distinguish between uppercase and lowercase letters (most commonly 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, making it impossible for them to gain high marks in this category. To be able to achieve full punctuation marks, candidates must show that they understand where capital letters are needed and where they are not.

Candidates should be aware that correct punctuation (as well as spelling and grammar) is required in all responses, including speeches and emails to friends.

2. Spelling and grammar

As with punctuation, candidates who struggle with spelling and/or grammar would gain a lot from extra learning and practice in these areas. For some candidates, the use of articles and pronouns, as well as subject-verb agreement, presented a significant challenge. Some candidates struggled to maintain a consistent tense in their responses, switching at random between past and present. This particularly seemed to be the case when relating a personal story, such as in a speech or article. It is recommended that candidates focus extra practice on the specific areas they struggle with.

Common homophone and near-homophone errors continued to be seen, such as here/hear, there/their/they're, to/too/two, were/where/we're, weather/whether, college/collage, passed/past, etc. Other common errors included 'alot', 'writting', 'aswell', using 'of' instead of 'have' (could of, would of, etc), and 'yous'/'you'se'/'use' instead of 'you'.

Learning and preparation should cover these common issues in order to help candidates avoid building up simple errors that can lead to a significant loss of marks. Encouraging

candidates to look out for these errors while checking their finished answers is also recommended.

3. Language and tone

Many unsuccessful candidates struggled with their use of language, either using incorrect expressions and clumsy phrasing, or writing with an inappropriate tone for purpose and audience. In particular, many candidates employed an incorrect or inconsistent level of formality, perhaps beginning a formal letter with 'Hi Dave', or started a speech with 'Ladies and Gentlemen' but ending on 'that's it, folks!' 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.

Other common language issues included overuse of words like 'and' and 'also', repetitive phrasing in general, incorrect expression that sometimes caused a lack of clarity, and misused cohesion markers such as the incorrect use of 'however', 'therefore', 'furthermore', etc. '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.

4. Relevant detail

Some candidates continued to struggle in this area, writing responses that only briefly touched on or omitted some of the details asked for in the writing task. Candidates should practice writing responses that:

- accurately meet the task given. For example, an email to invite a friend to dinner should include an invitation to dinner, rather than, say, a review of a restaurant visit.
- include all the detail asked for in the task. This means candidates should address and expand on **all** the listed bullet points in the question.

Utilising the practice papers on the City & Guilds website should give candidates an idea of what to expect from the writing tasks, including how the specified details are laid out in bullet point format. Candidates may find it useful to track which details they have included, such as by ticking off the bullet points as they cover them, or creating a plan before beginning their answer.

In rare cases, candidates wrote answers that were entirely off topic, ignoring the writing task set in the question. This meant that a significant number of marks could not be accessed.

5. Format and structure

Format and structure continued to be an area for improvement with some candidates. It was rare for answers to lack any formatting at all, but many responses omitted important elements, such as titles for articles or addresses for letters.

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

- letters

- emails
- speeches
- articles.

While most candidates showed a good ability to structure their responses in a logical order with a good beginning or introduction, it was still common to see no ending or conclusion attempted. Instead, responses ended abruptly without any attempt to 'wrap up', or with no closing salutation or sender's name. Candidates should be aware that ending their responses appropriately is important, even when they have covered all the required detail.

While there has been improvement in the use of paragraphs, there were still some candidates who used haphazard or confusing paragraphing, and a few who did not use paragraphs at all. Candidates should be aware that paragraphs are required in **all** responses, even speeches.

6. Writing too little

It is encouraging to see that the vast majority of candidates are now writing responses of an appropriate length to fully answer the task set, showing excellent teaching and exam preparation. However, there were still a few candidates who wrote answers that were too short, therefore not providing enough information to properly address the task or to demonstrate writing ability. In a few cases, candidates only wrote one or two sentences for each task.

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.

7. Only answering one of the writing questions

It was rare to see only one writing question attempted, but there were still a few 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.
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. Candidates should be aware that although handwriting is not marked, illegible writing and poorly formed letters may lead to unintended errors. While markers give benefit of the doubt wherever possible, it is sometimes impossible to distinguish between upper and lowercase letters, full stops and commas, or correct and incorrect spellings.
6. 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.
7. Many candidates would strongly benefit from checking their finished responses in both the reading and writing sections.
8. 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.
9. 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.