

4800-011

Essential Skills

Northern Ireland

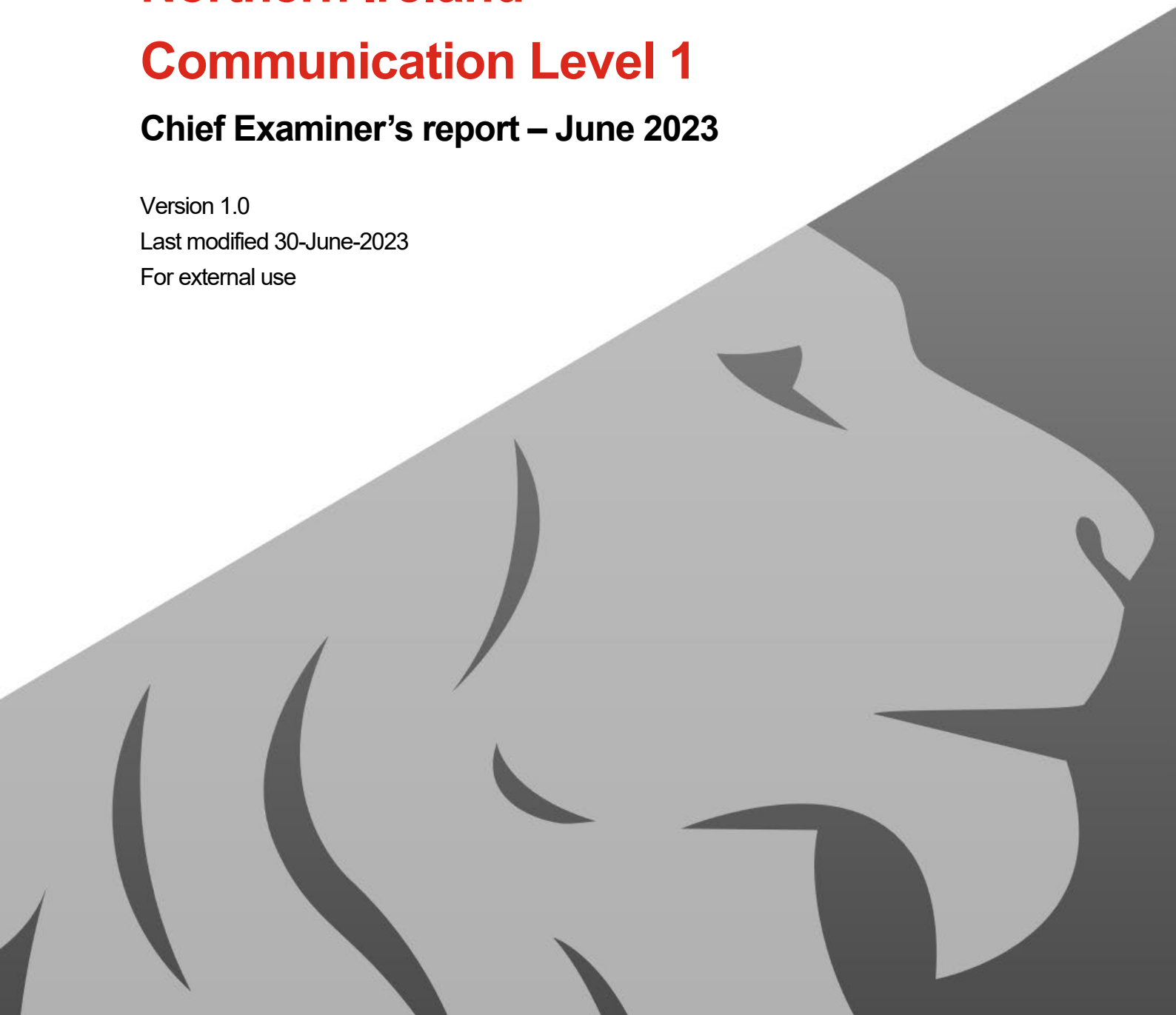
Communication Level 1

Chief Examiner's report – June 2023

Version 1.0

Last modified 30-June-2023

For external use



Document revision history

| Version | Changed by | Summary of change | Approval date |
|---------|-------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| 1.0 | Assessment | Created | 30 June 2023 |
| [00] | [Department name] | [Description] | [day Month year] |

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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 October 2022 to April 2023.

There continues to be a high number of candidates passing. Candidates' performance in both sections demonstrates good teaching, preparation and practice. For those who do struggle, the following areas tend to cause the most issues:

In the reading section:

1. Not reading questions carefully
2. Not reading source documents carefully enough to be able to provide accurate and/or detailed information
3. Not providing the number of responses stated in the question.

In the writing section:

1. Spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Providing enough detail to properly meet the task set
3. Format and structure, including paragraphing and writing in a logical order with a clear beginning, middle and end
4. Using language and tone appropriate for audience.

2.1. Areas of good performance

In the reading section:

Most candidates showed familiarity with the different question types, indicating good teaching and exam preparation.

Successful candidates were able to accumulate marks across all the assessment criteria (a-d). They read questions carefully and were able to give accurate answers, finding relevant information in the source documents. Where more than one response was asked for in the question, successful candidates gave the appropriate number of answers. While it is not a requirement, many candidates who underlined key words in the questions (such as 'who', 'why', 'how' and the number of responses asked for) were able to recognise important instructions in the question and give accurate answers.

Most candidates understood the source documents and engaged with them well, identifying the main points of the text and recognising the organisational features used to convey these. They were able to read the documents in detail to find specific information, including where answers were spread through the whole document and not just contained in one paragraph or section.

In the writing section:

Many candidates showed a strong performance in the writing section. Successful candidates were able to address the task by providing an appropriately structured response that covered

all the detail asked for in the question. They demonstrated the ability to write in a clear and coherent style, using language appropriate for purpose and audience, and were able to finish their responses with a good ending or conclusion.

Strong candidates understood when a formal or informal response was required based on the situation presented in the task. For example, when writing a job application, they began with 'Dear Mr Smith' rather than 'Hi John'.

Successful candidates also had a good command of at least two of spelling, punctuation and grammar. They were able to punctuate the beginnings and ends of sentences correctly. Where more complex words were included in the question brief, they spelled these correctly in their response.

Overall:

Successful candidates attempted most or all of the questions on the paper. There was a notable improvement in candidates' ability to maintain a good performance across both sections of the paper, with fewer cases of candidates providing weaker answers in one section compared to the other. This shows good time management and exam preparation.

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, or help them to spot that they have not provided enough responses on a reading question. 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

Many candidates did not read questions carefully, which led to a significant loss of marks through not providing relevant information, not providing the number of responses asked for in the question, or giving details from the wrong source document. The number of responses required will always be stated in the question (e.g. Identify **three** organisational features...) and so careful reading should avoid careless loss of marks.

There continued to be cases in which candidates answered the questions they were expecting, rather than the actual questions being asked. While it is important for candidates to practise and to familiarise themselves with the ways questions are asked on the practice papers, it is also vital that they do not try to anticipate questions rather than reading them carefully. Questions on live papers will not necessarily be phrased in the exact ways they are on the practice tests, and they may ask for more or fewer responses. It bears repeating that careful reading of the question is key.

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 also may help with checking.

2. Reading and considering the source documents carefully

There will always be questions that require a detailed reading of the source documents. Some candidates were able to identify the main points and ideas of a document but struggled to pick out relevant details. Practice and preparation that involves reading many different types of documents to obtain specific information should help these candidates to perform better on these questions.

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.

Finally, some questions will require the candidate to consider meaning in the document, rather than simply locate an answer that is explicitly stated in the text. Candidates therefore need to understand what they are reading as well as find details within it.

3. Utilising information and identifying suitable responses (criteria c and d)

Some candidates still struggle when asked what the reader can or should do in response to the information provided in the source documents. When asked questions such as who can be contacted and how, or how further information may be accessed, candidates should be able to look for details such as phone numbers and addresses, links and other ways to access additional information, as well as find or give suggestions for further action.

4. 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

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

Some candidates struggled to punctuate the beginnings and ends of sentences correctly, often misusing or completely omitting full stops. In some cases, this also had an impact on the clarity and coherence of the response. Lowercase 'i' when referring to themselves was another common error. Use of upper case and lower case 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 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. Language

Unsuccessful candidates often struggled with their use of language, either using language that was inappropriate in tone or level of formality, or making a variety of language errors. The latter included misuse of common words and expressions, excessive use of words such as 'and' and 'also' within one sentence or paragraph, clumsy or confusing phrasing, and a general lack of clarity. 'Text speak' 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'.

3. Spelling and grammar

Certain common errors continued to be seen regularly. 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 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.

4. Relevant detail

While there was a general improvement in candidates' ability to cover relevant detail in their responses, this did still present a challenge to some candidates. Those who were successful were able to cover all the details asked for in the question, and to expand on these points. Less successful candidates did not address all the details, or they only mentioned each point briefly without any expansion, which meant their answer did not contain enough information to successfully meet the task set.

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 listed 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, e.g. John Smith, Fake Street, Fake Town, FT6 1FT.

5. Format and structure

Some candidates still struggled with formatting and structuring their responses properly. Weaker candidates made little attempt to structure their answer with paragraphs or a proper beginning/introduction, middle, and end/conclusion. Some only provided a block of text with no formatting at all.

Some candidates understood paragraphing but omitted important formatting elements of the text type they were asked to produce, such as articles without titles or letters without addresses.

One particularly prevalent issue was a lack of ending or conclusion to properly finish the response. Articles and speeches ended abruptly with no attempt to round things off or to summarise arguments. Letters and emails lacked any kind of sign off and sometimes the sender's name. This was often the case even when answers began with excellent formatting and a strong beginning. This may have been a result of eagerness to move to the next question when all the key points of the current question had been covered. Candidates should be aware that ending a response properly is important, and that this is something to look out for when checking their answers at the end of the exam.

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

- letters
- emails
- speeches
- articles.

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

There was significant improvement in this area, with the vast majority of candidates providing answers of an appropriate length. This shows good teaching and exam preparation. However, there were still a small number of 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 wrote answers that were much longer than required, which tended to lose coherence or lead to a rushed second response.

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. 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.