

4800-021

Essential Skills

Northern Ireland

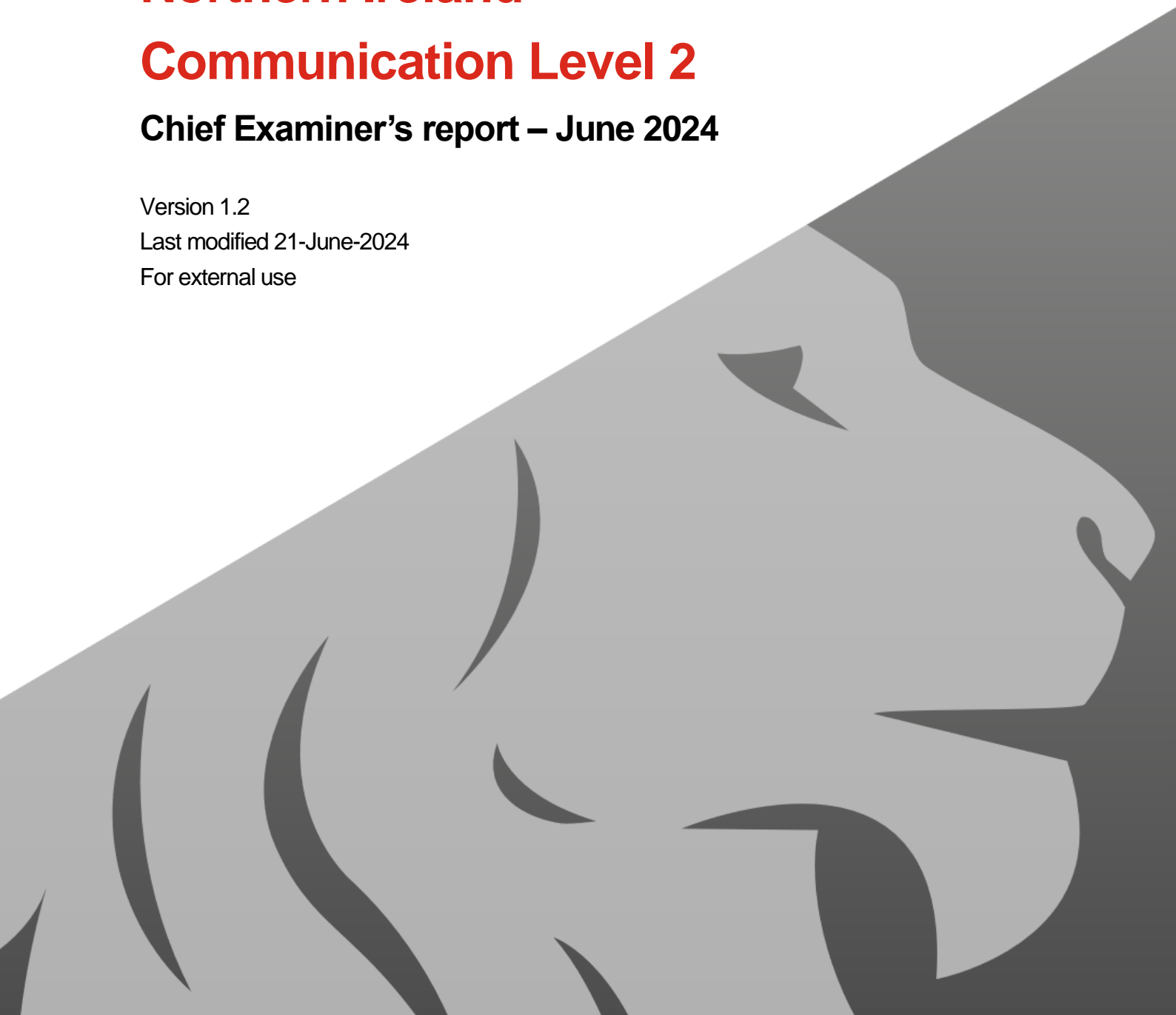
Communication Level 2

Chief Examiner's report – June 2024

Version 1.2

Last modified 21-June-2024

For external use



Document revision history

Version	Changed by	Summary of change	Approval date
1.1	Assessment	Created	03 June 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..... 12**

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide centres with feedback on the performance of candidates for 4800-021 Essential Skills Northern Ireland Communication Level 2.

2. Overall Performance

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

Most candidates showed a good performance across the criteria (a-e), with a high number achieving a pass. However, some struggled with the following areas, which presented a challenge:

In the reading section:

1. Reading questions carefully
2. Providing enough information or responses
3. Analysing and understanding texts in depth
4. Identifying more than one language technique and providing examples from the source document provided
5. Answering questions that require using both source documents
6. Providing accurate and explicit comparisons between source documents.

In the writing section:

1. Spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Language
3. Writing detailed responses that fully address the task and expand on important points
4. Format and structure, including using paragraphs and writing in a logical order with a clear beginning, middle and end.

2.1. Areas of good performance

Overall:

Successful candidates attempted all or most of the questions on the paper, including full responses to both writing questions. Many showed evidence of checking and correcting finished answers, such as adding extra information in the reading section, crossing out and correcting spelling errors in the writing section, or marking where a new paragraph should begin. This shows good time management skills and exam preparation.

In the reading section:

Successful candidates were able to accumulate marks across most or all of the assessment criteria (a-e), showing familiarity with the different question types and the responses required, as well as good teaching and exam preparation.

In particular, criterion (a) was answered very well, with the majority of candidates scoring highly on questions of this type. The candidates were able to select the correct source document to answer the question being asked and to obtain relevant information from it. When asked, they were able to utilise the information found in the text to identify important details or further actions they should take.

Candidates also showed a good ability to recognise the purposes of texts. They could follow arguments and understand meaning and different points of view within the source documents. There has been an improvement in candidates' ability to recognise bias and identify biased statements, although this does still present a challenge and is an area for improvement with some candidates.

Strong candidates were able to identify several different language techniques and provide examples of these being used in the text.

Crucially, successful candidates read questions and source documents carefully and took time to consider what they were being asked. This meant they were able to give relevant, accurate answers and provide the correct number of responses required for each question.

In the writing section:

The writing section proved to be a harder challenge for candidates, although most still performed well and achieved good marks. Successful candidates provided clear, concise and effective responses that met the task set. They used paragraphs well and structured their responses in a logical order with a clear beginning, middle and end.

Importantly, successful candidates addressed all the required detail in the question brief and expanded on important points to give full, detailed answers.

Candidates' use of persuasive language and techniques was a particularly strong area in their responses, showing a good understanding of how to appeal to the reader in a variety of situations. There were also improvements in the use of appropriate tone for the situation, including in formal texts. However, language did still pose some challenges for some candidates, and areas for improvement in this are detailed below.

Typically, successful candidates were able to demonstrate a good understanding of at least two of the three areas of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Strong candidates were able to use different sentence structures accurately and effectively, including complex sentences where appropriate.

2.2. Areas for development

Overall:

1. Checking and proofreading answers

As mentioned above, many successful candidates showed evidence of checking and correcting errors. 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 the question carefully

Not taking the time to read questions carefully can result in a significant loss of marks. These lost marks may be due to misreading what is being asked, missing key information such as instructions to look at a specific area of the source document, or not paying attention to how many responses the question is asking for.

Some candidates appeared to notice certain key words in the question and then rush to answer, missing other vital information. For example, a candidate who sees 'biased phrases' in the question and who is well prepared for questions of this type might begin to answer straight away, missing other information that states answers should come only from one specific person in the document. In this way, even very capable candidates can provide responses that do not answer the question. Skim-reading questions will often have a similar result. Therefore, reading questions carefully is a skill that would benefit all candidates.

In addition to this, there were still some candidates who answered the question they were anticipating rather than the actual question being asked. While it is important for candidates to practise and become familiar with the question types, it is also vital that they do not try to anticipate questions rather than reading them carefully, or to expect questions to be posed in the same way as they are on the practice papers.

Candidates may find it useful to underline or circle important instructions in the question before attempting an answer, particularly key words such as: 'why', 'how', 'who', 'examples', 'explanations', 'compare', 'give two', etc. Not only does this encourage the candidate to consider the question carefully before answering, but it may also help with checking.

2. Identifying more than one language technique and giving examples

The majority of candidates were able to identify at least one language technique from the source documents, and most were able to give an example of it being used in the document.

However, a number of candidates were not able to access further marks on this question type, as they did not respond with further language techniques. Some candidates provided layout techniques instead, some gave another example of the same language technique, and some gave quotes from the text without identifying a technique. Careful reading of the question will reveal how many language techniques are required, whether and how many examples from the document are required, and whether layout techniques are also acceptable.

3. Understanding and analysing texts in relation to audience needs (criterion e)

While most candidates showed a good ability to find specific details and main points in texts, as well as to identify their purpose, some struggled more to understand and analyse texts in depth. This included understanding why the author made the choices they did (in language, layout and content) in relation to their intended audience, as well as identifying the responses the author wanted. It also included understanding the meaning of a document as a whole and the overall argument being made. Often, questions of this type cannot simply be answered with quotes lifted from the document, instead requiring the candidate to engage with the text to put arguments or opinions into their own words, or to explain the author's intention or use of language. Candidates should be prepared for these 'open' questions as well as those that require finding details in the text.

4. Using more than one source document to answer a question

Some candidates struggled to provide enough responses when asked to give information from both source documents, often listing information from only one of the documents and therefore missing the chance to gain full marks on these questions.

There will always be some questions in the reading section that require candidates to use both source documents to answer the question. In all cases, this is clearly stated in the question. Candidates may simply need to find information using both documents, or they may be asked to find information that is similar or information that is different. When candidates are directly asked to 'compare', they may look for similarities or differences. More about the latter question type is covered in the point below.

5. Comparing different ideas and points of view

While there was a high number of candidates who were well prepared for this question type, there were still some who struggled to gain full marks on it. When a question specifically asks the candidates to 'compare' two different documents, candidates should be aware that they can look for similarities or differences, or both. It is important that they are aware that explicit comparison is needed. In other words, they need to employ language that makes it clear

whether they have identified similarities or differences (eg words such as 'whereas', 'in contrast', 'disagree', 'but', 'both', 'similarly', 'agree', etc). Accurately listing or summarising relevant information from each document is important when answering these questions, but it is not enough on its own to access all the marks available.

Some candidates scored low or zero marks on this question by comparing the wrong things in the documents. These questions usually ask candidates to compare a particular subject or view that appears in both documents. Candidates must look for similarities and differences that are relevant to this subject or view, or they will not be able to gain marks. They are not being asked to compare one whole document with the other whole document. It bears repeating that careful reading of the question is vital.

6. Drawing from the candidate's own knowledge and experience

A small number of candidates continued to use their own knowledge and experience to answer questions rather than looking for the answers in the source documents. All answers to the reading questions are based on the information provided in the source documents. Even accurate knowledge cannot be awarded marks if it is not found in the provided text.

In the writing section:

1. Punctuation

Out of spelling, punctuation and grammar, punctuation continued to present the greatest challenge for candidates. Comma errors were the most common, with a high number of candidates using commas in place of full stops (ie comma splicing). While commas in lists were generally used well, other uses of commas were much weaker, and occasionally candidates omitted them altogether. Some candidates also struggled to use apostrophes correctly.

Candidates were mostly aware of the use of capital letters at the beginnings of sentences but did not always use them for proper nouns. Use of a lowercase 'i' when candidates referred to themselves was another common error.

Candidates must remember that correct punctuation (as well as spelling and grammar) is required in all responses, regardless of the situation or level of formality, including speeches and emails to friends.

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.

2. Spelling and grammar

Common errors continued to be seen, including 'alot', 'writting', 'aswell', 'becuse', 'faitfully', 'collage' instead of 'college', 'of' instead of 'have' ('could of', 'would of', etc.), and 'yous'/'you'se'/'use' instead of 'you'. Common homophone errors also frequently occurred, 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 look out for these while checking their answers is recommended.

3. Language, tone and levels of formality

A number of candidates continued to find the use of language challenging, either using language that was inappropriate in tone or level of formality, or making a variety of language errors. Amongst the latter, clumsy expression, unnecessary repetition of words like 'and' or

'also', and misusing common words and expressions were all common. Candidates should also remember that 'textspeak' is not considered appropriate for any of the tasks they 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 not begin with, 'Hi John'.

4. Writing detailed responses that fully address the task and expand on important points

There were still some candidates who did not cover all the required detail in their writing responses. Successful candidates were able to address all the details asked for in the brief, to expand on these points, and to meet the requirements and purpose of the task set. 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.

While at Level 1 all the required details are presented in a bullet point list, at Level 2 the required details may not appear in this form. Instead, they may be included in one or more paragraphs of the question brief. Candidates need to be able to pick out the important details they are asked to cover, and they must address all of these in their response. Making use of the practice papers on the City & Guilds website is a good method of preparing candidates for the ways in which writing questions are worded, and to practise picking out the details they need to include in their answers.

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.

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, including use of paragraphs

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

- letters
- emails
- speeches
- articles.

Some candidates still struggled to format and structure their responses properly. Articles without titles were often seen, and sometimes letters were presented without addresses. While most candidates used paragraphs well, there were still some who did not use them effectively, or who wrote in one big block of text without any paragraphs at all.

Most candidates were able to structure their responses in a logical order with a good beginning, middle and end. However, there were still some that lacked a sufficient ending or conclusion to properly wrap up their arguments and finish the response. Candidates should be aware that ending a response properly is important, so some time should be taken to do this before moving to the next task. This is also something to look out for when checking their answers at the end of the exam.

6. Using a variety of sentence structures correctly and effectively

Most candidates continued to use a range of sentence structures effectively, including complex sentences. However, some still struggled in this area. The most common issues seen amongst those who did struggle were sentences left unfinished, conjunctions used incorrectly, or too-long sentences that tended to lose structure and clarity as they went on.

7. Writing too much or too little

The majority of candidates provided answers of an appropriate length, but there were still some who wrote 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 100-120 words on the 'short' question and 140-200 words on the 'long' question. Responses that are 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.

8. Only answering one of the writing questions

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. Exam preparation should ensure that candidates can write two responses in the set amount of time. 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.

3. Recommendations and Advice for Centres

1. It is vital that adequate learning and practice have taken place before a candidate is entered for the exam, 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 essential. 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, it is recommended that preparation includes 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 are taught to read all questions fully and carefully consider what is being asked of them before attempting to answer. Candidates may find it useful to underline important instructions on the question paper, particularly key words such as 'why', 'how', 'who', 'language', 'layout', 'compare', 'biased', 'persuade', etc., as well as any instructions to give a certain number of responses in their answer, eg 'give two facts'.
6. Many candidates would 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, internet forums, articles, business reports, formal letters and emails, leaflets, promotional material and advertising, amongst others. Any of these may be encountered as source documents in the reading section. In addition, candidates should be shown documents with similar or different points of view and should become familiar with the process of comparing these.
8. As part of the learning process, candidates should practise formatting and structuring specific types of documents correctly (ie letters, emails, speeches and articles), and

should be aware of the type of language, tone and level of formality required for different situations.