

**4800-011**

**Essential Skills Northern Ireland**

**Communication Level 1 – Reading and Writing  
External Assessment**

**Chief Examiner's report – April 2017**

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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 – Reading and Writing external assessment.

## 2 Overall Performance

This report covers the period from January 2017 to April 2017.

Pass rates for Communication are good, with strong performances often shown in the writing questions, though a significant number of candidates are failing due to the following main reasons:

In the reading section:

1. Being entered for the exam before sufficient learning has taken place.
2. Unfamiliarity with the type of questions that may be asked.
3. Not reading the questions properly.
4. Not providing enough information or responses in the answers.

In the writing section:

1. Poor use of spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Poor use of language, including language that is inappropriate for purpose and audience.
3. Lack of adequate format and structure, or use of format and structure that is inappropriate for purpose and audience.

### Areas of good performance

In the reading section:

Successful candidates generally gained marks across all of the assessment criteria (a-d), demonstrating a clear understanding of the questions being asked and the types of responses expected. This suggests these candidates received good teaching and preparation before the assessment.

A common ability shown by most successful candidates was a recognition of the number of responses needed for each question. Questions generally state the number of responses expected, but where this is not the case, stronger candidates were able to provide a sufficient amount of responses by noting the number of marks available for the question.

In the writing section:

Candidates generally responded well to the scenarios and writing tasks, with stronger candidates clearly demonstrating an ability to suit language, format and structure to purpose and audience. Strong candidates were able to write in a consistent tone and with an appropriate level of formality when needed.

Successful candidates included all the relevant detail asked for in the question, and presented their responses in a logical order with a clear and coherent style.

Stronger candidates also demonstrated a good command of at least two of spelling, punctuation and grammar.

Overall:

Successful candidates answered most or all of the questions on the paper, suggesting good preparation and an ability to allocate enough time to each question and for checking.

### **Areas for development**

In the reading section:

#### 1. Familiarity with question types

Weaker candidates did not demonstrate a clear understanding of what was being asked of them. Preparation should ensure that candidates are familiar with the types of questions they may be asked and the types of responses they are expected to provide. Making use of sample papers on the City & Guilds website is recommended.

#### 2. Reading the question carefully

Many weaker candidates did not read the question properly and either gave inappropriate responses or gave fewer responses than the question explicitly asked for. Candidates should be encouraged to read questions and source documents carefully and to take note of the number of responses required and the number of marks available for each question.

#### 3. Open questions

Some questions require lifting information directly from the source documents. Other questions are more open, involving a more detailed reading and understanding of the text, its purpose, and how it presents the main points and ideas. Weaker candidates often struggled with these open questions. Teaching and preparation should ensure that candidates are familiar with this type of question and the more detailed reading and understanding that is needed to be able to give appropriate responses.

#### 4. Identifying main points and ideas and how they are presented (criterion a)

Weaker candidates often misunderstood what was being asked of them when required to find layout features in source documents. These questions do not always explicitly ask for layout features, so teaching should prepare candidates to recognise the different ways this type of question may be asked. Candidates should be able to identify structural features that convey important information and ideas, or that make the document more appealing or accessible to the reader.

Many weaker candidates also struggled to identify main points and ideas in a text. There are certain signposts, such as subheadings and bullet points, which indicate the main points of a document. Often candidates simply listed layout features when asked to identify the main points and ideas of a text, or vice versa. Greater familiarity with the types of questions and the types of responses expected would ensure that candidates do not lose a significant number of marks on questions that address this criterion.

In the writing section:

## 1. Punctuation

Weaker candidates often omitted full stops, particularly in informal texts and emails. Correct punctuation is required in all responses, even in informal situations. Candidates should also take care with handwriting, as poorly formed letters may appear to be upper case when lower case is required, and vice versa.

## 2. Grammar and language

Candidates for whom English is a second language often made a greater number of grammar and language errors, typically including omitted words, incorrect use of language, omitted or incorrect use of pronouns, omitted articles, incorrect subject-verb agreement and general lack of clarity.

## 3. Inappropriate tone

Weaker candidates often wrote in a tone that was unsuited to audience and purpose. Candidates should pay attention to the task they have been set and be able to identify the correct tone and language to use when writing to/for a specific person or audience.

## 4. Format and structure

Weaker candidates often gave responses that had little or no structure, or that did not match format and layout to audience and purpose. Teaching and preparation should ensure candidates are familiar with the correct format and structure of different documents, including letters, emails and articles. Candidates should understand how to present information and arguments in a structured, logical sequence, with a clear beginning, middle and conclusion where appropriate.

## 5. Writing too much or too little

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 too short are penalised across certain categories. Many weaker candidates either did not write enough to demonstrate an ability to write well, or wrote too much and so ran out of time or made more errors. Very long answers tended to lose coherence.

## 6. 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. Teaching and 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.

## 7. Common errors

Certain errors were made more commonly than others; these include using 'of' instead of 'have' (e.g. should of, would of), 'attend to' when the candidate should have written 'attend' (e.g. I would like you to attend to a meeting), 'now a days' instead of 'nowadays', 'collage'

instead of 'college', common homophone errors (their/they're/there, to/too/two, here/hear, etc), and 'yous' or 'use' instead of 'you'.



### **3 Recommendations/Advice for centres**

1. Candidates should not be entered for the exam before adequate learning and practice has taken place.
2. Familiarity with the question types 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, practice and preparation should include time management techniques.
4. Most questions explicitly tell the candidate how many responses are required. Where this is not the case, candidates should always take note of the number of marks available for the question. If a question asks the candidate to list layout features, for example, and there are five marks available, candidates should look for five layout features.
5. It is important that candidates are taught to read all questions fully and understand what is being asked of them before attempting to answer. Marks can easily be lost due to not reading questions carefully.
6. Many candidates would strongly benefit from checking and proof reading their finished responses.
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.

#### 4 Additional information

Centres should be aware that pass marks may vary from paper to paper as a result of an awarding process undertaken by City & Guilds. Any difference in pass marks reflects the perceived and actual difference in demand of the exam papers, including the source materials and the questions themselves. Therefore, it is possible that two candidates with the same score may have different overall results (pass or fail) if they have taken different versions of papers.

For further information about the Level 1 coverage and range, please refer to the qualification specifications and assessment criteria (section 5 of our **Essential Skills qualifications handbook**). These criteria are common to all awarding organisations' Essential Skills qualifications, and were developed by CCEA Regulation.

Whilst the technical content and demand of the Essential Skills qualifications align with the **Department for the Economy (DfE) Essential Skills Standards and Curriculum**, it is important to bear in mind that the qualifications explicitly require candidates to demonstrate purposeful application of their literacy skills.

Our Essential Skills qualifications handbook and the DfE Essential Skills Standards and Curriculum document can both be accessed from our [Essential Skills \(4800\) qualification documents webpage](#).

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