

4800-021

Essential Skills

Northern Ireland

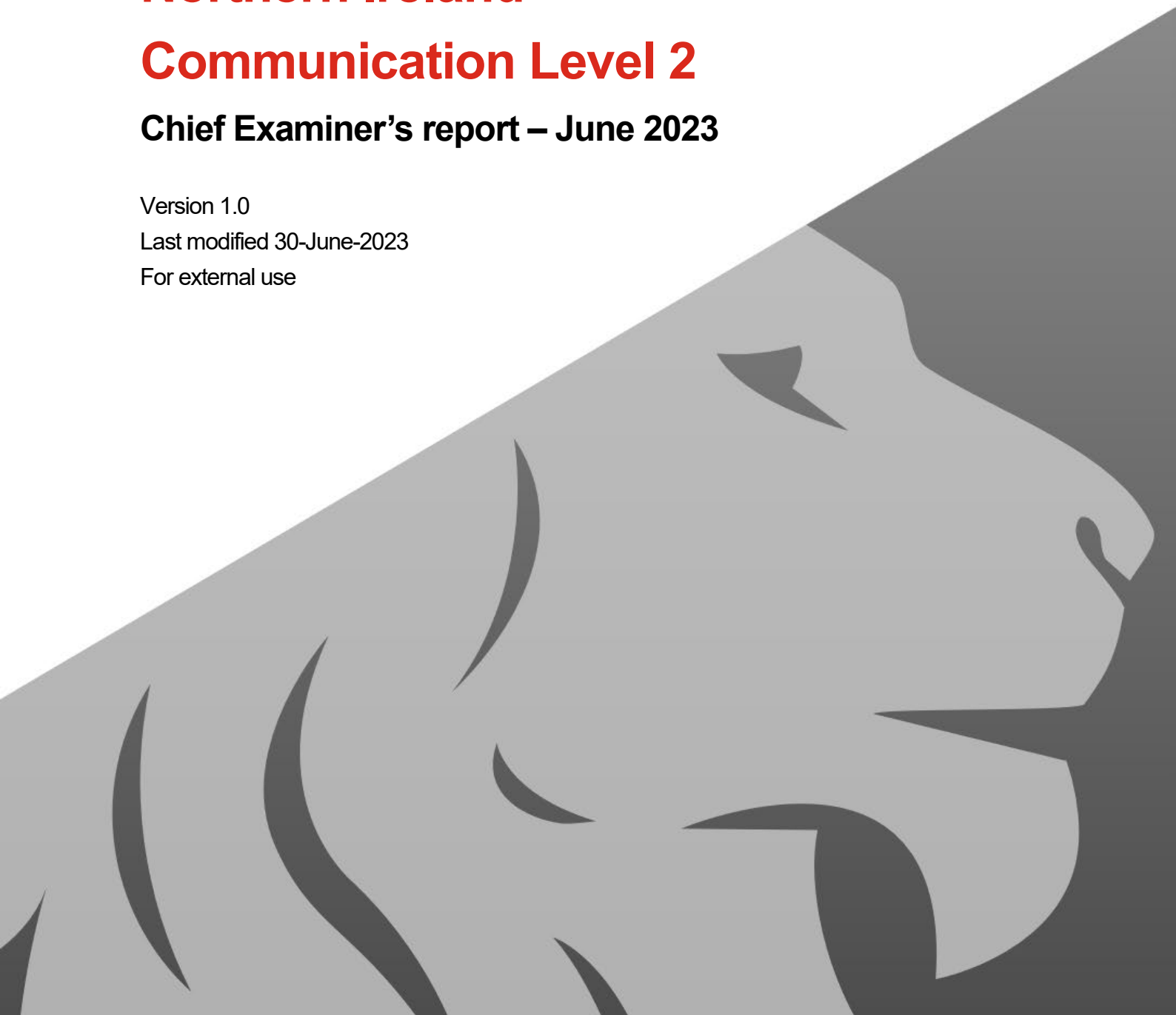
Communication Level 2

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]

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 Oct 2022 to April 2023.

A high number of candidates continue to be successful, with good performance across the criteria (a-e). Candidates are performing well across both the reading and writing section, showing good teaching and exam preparation.

For those who do struggle, the following areas tend to present the biggest challenge:

In the reading section:

1. Reading questions carefully
2. Providing enough information or responses
3. Providing accurate and explicit comparison between source documents.

In the writing section:

1. Spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Language
3. Including sufficient detail, and expanding on important points
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

In the reading section:

Most candidates showed they were prepared for the exam and familiar with the different question types, indicating good teaching and exam preparation. Successful candidates were able to gain marks across the different criteria (a-e).

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 correct answers and provide the correct number of responses required for each question. While it is not a requirement, many candidates who underlined key words in the questions (such as 'who', 'why', 'examples', 'explanations' and the number of responses asked for) were able to recognise important instructions and give accurate answers.

Most candidates could read and understand source documents and follow the arguments within them, identifying the main points of the text as well as reading in detail.

Strong candidates could identify and compare different opinions in the source documents, and they were able to identify similarities or differences using clear comparison words (such as 'in contrast', 'whereas', 'both', 'similarly', etc.).

Successful candidates showed a good ability to recognise biased language as well as various language techniques, and to identify examples of these being used within the text.

In the writing section:

Candidates continued to perform well in the writing section, providing clear, concise and effective responses. Successful candidates were able to use paragraphs correctly and structured their answers in a logical order with a clear beginning, middle and end.

Candidates continued to demonstrate a good understanding of persuasive language and techniques, utilising these where appropriate to influence the reader in a variety of situations, including applications and appeals for help or donations.

Successful candidates typically showed a good command of at least two of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Strong candidates were able to use different sentence structures accurately and effectively, including complex sentences where appropriate.

Importantly, successful candidates provided all relevant details required to effectively address the task, and they expanded on important points to give full, detailed answers.

Overall:

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.

Successful candidates attempted all or most of the questions on the paper and gave responses that were not rushed or unfinished. Many successful candidates' work showed evidence of checking finished answers.

2.2. Areas for development

Overall:

1. Checking and proofreading answers

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. Many successful candidates' work showed evidence of checking, and in the case of some borderline candidates, an extra two or three marks gained in this way could mean the difference between a pass and a fail.

In the reading section:

1. Reading the question carefully

Many candidates did not read questions properly, resulting in loss of marks through not providing relevant information, not going into enough detail, not providing the number of responses asked for in the question, or giving details from the wrong source document. In some cases, they misread or skimmed over key instructions and therefore provided incorrect answers, such as giving explanations when asked for examples. Careful reading of the question paper will prevent careless loss of marks in this way, improving a candidate's overall performance.

There continued to be cases in which candidates 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. 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 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 also may help with checking.

2. Comparing and contrasting different ideas and points of view

Many candidates still struggled to achieve full marks on comparison questions. It is important that candidates 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 (e.g. 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. Candidates should practise giving clear and explicit comparisons of two different sources.

Some candidates were not able to recognise the ideas, information or points of view being presented in the sources, leading to an incorrect comparison. Even if comparison is explicit, it cannot gain marks if it is not accurate.

3. Identifying the correct source or section of the source material to best answer the question

Where questions required candidates to select the correct source document to provide a specific piece of information, some candidates struggled to identify which document they should look at. For example, if a candidate is asked to give evidence from a particular person, they need to select the source document written by that person.

Some candidates also struggled to find the relevant paragraph or section within a source document to best answer the question. If directed to a specific paragraph, all answers to that question will be found within that paragraph. When not directed to one area of the source document, answers may be found spread throughout the whole document, or they may be contained within one section of the document. Candidates should practise finding answers from multiple places within a document, as well as practise looking for answers contained in one specific paragraph or section.

Careful reading of each question should help candidates to recognise where they should be looking for their answers.

4. 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. Including relevant detail

Some candidates continued to omit important details from their writing responses. 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.

As with the reading section, careful reading of the question is essential!

Candidates should also consider the purpose of the text they have been asked to produce, and what information is vital for fulfilling that purpose. For example, if they are writing an article to persuade people to attend a meeting, they will need to say where and when the meeting will take place. If they do not, their reader will not be able to attend the meeting even if the candidate has successfully persuaded them to do so!

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.

2. Punctuation

Candidates should be aware that correct punctuation (as well as spelling and grammar) is required in **all** responses, regardless of the task and intended audience, including speeches, articles and informal emails.

Unsuccessful candidates typically struggled with at least two categories out of spelling, punctuation and grammar. For most, punctuation seemed to pose the biggest challenge, with many losing a significant number of marks due to comma errors. While most candidates could utilise commas in lists correctly, other forms of comma use were much weaker, with a high number of candidates still using commas in place of full stops (comma splicing). Some candidates also struggled to use apostrophes correctly.

Use of upper case and lower case letters was generally good, but a small number of candidates wrote their entire answer in capital letters, therefore losing a significant number of punctuation marks.

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 and/or punctuation may lead to unintended errors.

3. 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. These included the incorrect use of common words and expressions, using slang or popular phrases from social media that are not grammatically correct, 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.

Some candidates demonstrated an inability to use language appropriate for intended audience, particularly in formal contexts. For example, a formal letter or email should not begin with 'Hi John'. 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 situations.

4. Common spelling and grammar errors

Certain common errors continued to be seen regularly. These included '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 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.

5. Format and structure, including use of paragraphs

Format and structure is an area that has seen some improvement, particularly with letters and emails. However, some candidates still struggled to format and structure their responses properly. In many cases, important formatting elements were omitted, such as articles without titles or speeches without openings that address the audience.

While many candidates were aware of the purpose of paragraphs and generally used them correctly, some simply wrote their response in one block of text with no paragraphs, or they used paragraphs in a haphazard way.

Most candidates were able to structure their responses in a logical order with a good beginning and middle. However, a common 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 sometimes lacked a sign off. 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. Using a variety of sentence structures correctly and effectively

This is an area that has seen significant improvement, with candidates generally employing a range of sentence structures effectively. Good use of complex sentences adds variety and interest to the candidates' writing, which has been a pleasure to read.

However, this is an area that some candidates did still struggle with. Some used only simple sentences in their responses, which resulted in a stilted feel that lacked flow and cohesion. Other candidates attempted to use complex sentences but either left their sentences unfinished or used punctuation and/or conjunctions incorrectly. A small number of candidates wrote entirely in long rambling sentences that either lost all clear structure or made the response feel muddled and difficult to read.

As well as practising constructing complex sentences, candidates should be aware that using a variety of different types of sentence structure in their answer is important.

7. Writing too much or too little

This is another area of improvement, with the 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 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.

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 has taken place before a candidate is entered for the exam.
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, 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, e.g. 'give two facts'. Marks are easily lost due to not reading questions carefully.
6. Many candidates would benefit from checking their finished responses in both the reading and writing sections. The extra marks that can be picked up in this way can mean the difference between a pass and a fail.
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.