4800-011
Essential Skills Northern Ireland Communication Level 2

Chief Examiner's report – Jun 2026

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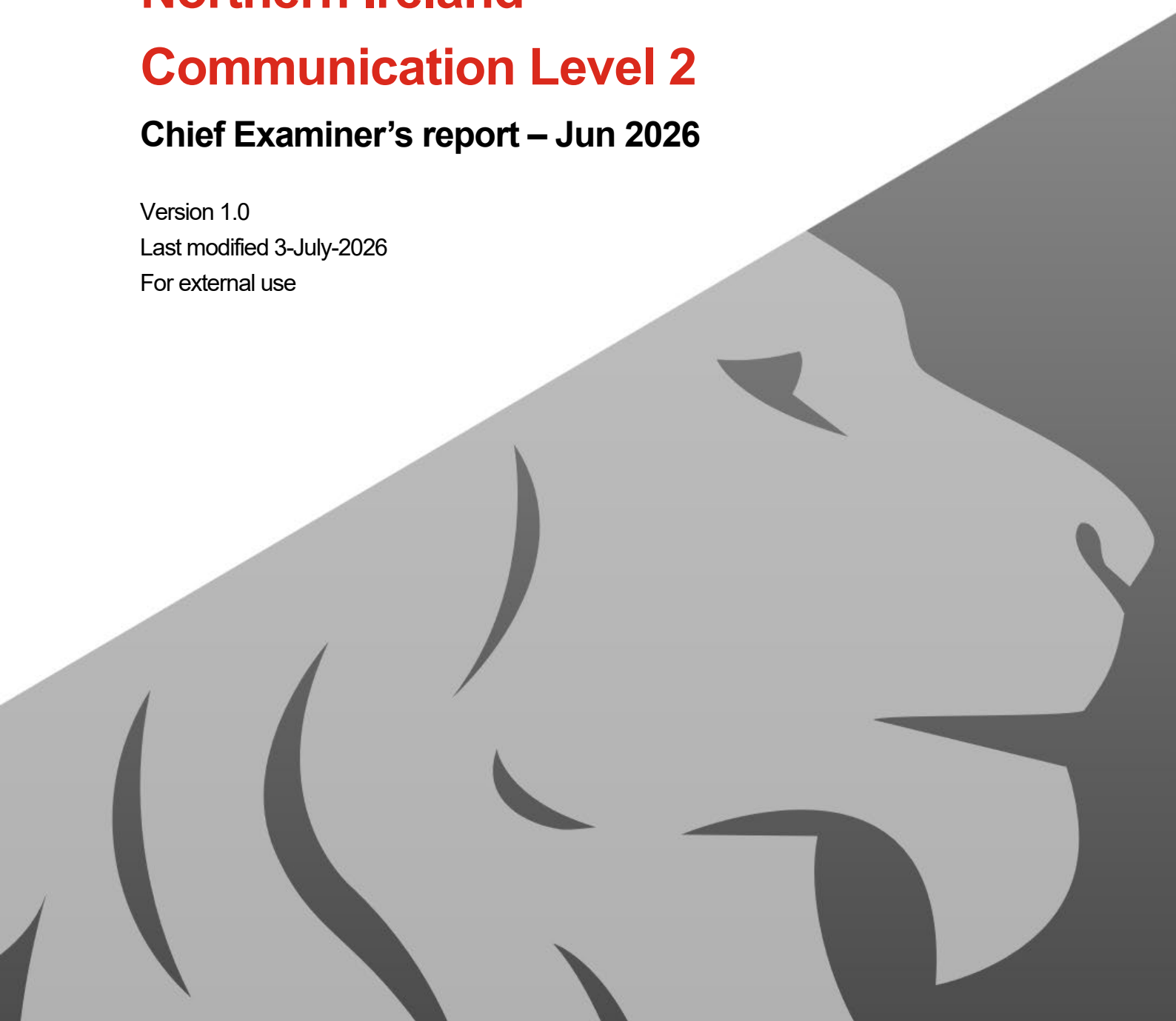

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1. Introduction

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 2.

2. Overall Performance

This report covers the period from November 2025 to April 2026.

There continues to be a high number of candidates achieving a pass, showing good preparation and an understanding of source documents and questions. For lower-scoring candidates, there are some common areas for which extra learning and preparation would be beneficial. These include:

In the reading section:

1. Reading each question carefully and considering exactly what is being asked
2. Selecting the correct source document to answer questions
3. Answering questions that require using both source documents
4. Identifying more than one language technique and providing examples from the source document
5. Analysing and understanding texts in depth
6. Comparing source documents to find similarities and differences.

In the writing section:

1. Spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Using accurate and appropriate language
3. Writing detailed responses that fully address the task and expand on important points
4. Format and structure
5. Sentence structure, including accurate use of complex sentences.

2.1. Areas of good performance

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. They could identify the purposes of texts, find detailed information within them, follow arguments, and understand different points of view.

Higher-scoring candidates were able to find more than one language technique used in the source document and give examples of these, as well as identify biased language and distinguish fact from opinion.

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:

Many candidates performed well in the writing section, showing good preparation and practice. This was especially the case in the composition of responses, with most candidates writing answers that were clear and coherent, that maintained a logical order and covered most or all of the detail required in the task.

Candidates showed a good improvement in their ability to format and structure responses appropriately, demonstrating a familiarity with the requirements of letters, emails, speeches and articles. Most were able to structure responses with a good beginning, middle and end, utilising paragraphs well. It was encouraging to see so many candidates well prepared for this.

Candidates' use of persuasive language and techniques continued to be another strong area, with many showing a good understanding of how to appeal to the reader in a variety of situations.

While spelling, punctuation and grammar tended to be more challenging aspects for many candidates, successful candidates were usually able to demonstrate skills in at least two of these. Strong candidates were able to use different sentence structures accurately and effectively, including complex sentences where appropriate.

Overall:

Successful candidates attempted all or most of the questions on the paper, maintaining performance across the reading section and both writing tasks.

2.2. Areas for development

Overall:

1. Checking and proofreading answers

Many successful candidates continued to show evidence of checking and correcting errors, such as adding more information to responses in the reading section, crossing out and correcting spelling errors in the writing section, or indicating where a new paragraph should begin. 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 and considering questions carefully

It is vital that candidates read questions carefully and take the time to consider exactly what is being asked. Skimming a question, or spotting certain key words and rushing to answer, can lead to misunderstanding questions, missing important information or instructions in the question, and giving incorrect answers.

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 high-scoring candidates can provide responses that do not answer the question. Therefore, emphasising the importance of reading questions carefully is beneficial to all candidates.

Another common issue that arises from not reading questions carefully enough is answering with fewer responses than the question asks for. For example, if the question states that candidates should give three answers, only giving one response will prevent the candidate from being able to access the other two marks available.

Candidates should also be wary of answering the question they expect rather than the one that is actually being asked. Questions will not always be phrased the same way on different papers, or ask for the exact same things as similar questions in sample 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’, ‘give two’, specific names, which document to look at, particular areas of the document to look at, etc). Not only does this encourage the candidate to consider the question carefully before answering, but it also may help with checking.

2. Selecting the correct source document to answer questions

Questions addressing criterion (a) require the candidate to be able to select the correct source document to answer the question. These questions will therefore not state explicitly which document should be used, but will instead refer to a specific person or document type. While most candidates were able to select the correct document and find the information within it, there were a few candidates who chose the wrong document and therefore gave incorrect answers.

Candidates should practise looking at different types of documents and recognising the ways these might be referred to, such as newspaper articles, magazine articles, webpages, blogs, job adverts, posters, forums, discussions, etc. They should also be ready to recognise when the use of a specific named person in a question is directing them to a particular document, such as the author of that document or a person mentioned within it.

There were a few cases in which candidates gave answers from the wrong source document even when the document was clearly stated in the question. As mentioned above, careful reading of questions should help avoid this issue.

3. Answering questions that require using both source documents

There are questions on every paper that ask candidates to look at both source documents. This will always be clearly stated in the question. While most candidates were able to do this, there were still some who only looked at one of the documents, meaning they were not able to find enough answers to gain full marks.

4. Identifying more than one language technique and giving examples

Most candidates were able to identify at least one language technique in a source document and give an example of it being used in that document. However, some candidates were not able to give more than one technique with accompanying examples, and therefore could not access all the marks available. Some did attempt to provide two techniques but gave one incorrect answer, and some repeated the same technique but with a different example. A few simply stated techniques but did not provide examples from the document.

A few candidates were not able to gain any marks on this question type, instead giving layout features instead of language techniques, or providing quotes from the text without naming language techniques.

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

Some candidates found questions addressing this criterion more challenging. These types of questions often ask candidates to show an understanding of the document rather than simply retrieve information from it. Questions might ask for reasons or opinions found in the document, or for information that shows candidates can follow arguments and understand the overall point a person or document is making. Candidates should be aware that answers might not be explicitly stated in the text but may require some analysis or interpretation of

what the text is saying. For example, an author's use of certain language and vocabulary can indicate whether they approve or disapprove of something, even if they do not explicitly say this.

6. Comparing source documents to find similarities and differences

It was clear that a lot of candidates were prepared for this question type, showing good preparation and learning. However, it was still an area that many candidates found challenging.

The most common error seen was candidates comparing the wrong things. This may have been due to expecting this question type and rushing to answer, without fully considering the question itself. When this happened, even well-prepared candidates were not able to gain marks, as they did not actually address what the question was asking.

These questions will ask candidates about a **specific topic** that appears in both documents. Candidates must look for similarities and differences that are relevant to this specific topic, 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!

Going forward, questions of this type will no longer ask candidates to 'compare' but will instead state how many similarities and how many differences candidates should look for. This change is intended to make the question clearer for candidates to answer. Candidates should be aware of the different ways that a question may ask for similarities, such as (but not limited to) words like 'agree', 'in common', and 'similar', and the ways they may ask for differences, such as (but not limited to) words like 'disagree' and 'differ'.

For example, a question could say:

*Both documents give opinions about what makes the best pet. Identify **one** point that is similar in both documents. Identify **two** different points that the documents disagree about.*

In this case, the candidate can see that they need to answer with one similarity and two differences. Answers must be about what makes the best pet, or candidates will not be able to gain marks even if they answer with other accurate comparisons.

7. 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 the categories of spelling, punctuation and grammar, candidates tended to find accurate use of punctuation the most challenging. Many types of comma errors continued to be seen, most commonly using commas in place of full stops (comma splicing). A few candidates omitted commas altogether, which often impacted clarity and coherence in their answers.

Apostrophes were generally used well in contractions, although a few candidates did continue to struggle with this. Many candidates incorrectly added apostrophes to plurals (e.g. I met my friend's for dinner).

Candidates sometimes struggled with the use of capital letters for proper nouns, especially in addresses, and a few candidates capitalised words at random throughout their answer. Use of a lowercase 'i' when candidates referred to themselves was another common error.

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.

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.

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

Correct and appropriate use of language continued to be a challenging area for many candidates. Common language issues included clumsy expression, incorrect word choice, unnecessary repetition of words like 'and' or 'also', and misusing common words and expressions.

There were still a few candidates who used language that was inappropriate in tone or level of formality for the task set. 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' or contain expressions like 'you guys'.

4. Written 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 candidates 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 pointed 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 sample 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 expected format and structure of:

- letters
- emails
- speeches
- articles.

While the majority of candidates showed excellent preparation for this, there were still a few who made errors. This included articles without titles and speeches without greeting the audience, as well as letters and emails missing closing valedictions or the sender's name.

Most candidates used paragraphs well, but there were still some who did not use them effectively, or who wrote in one big block of text without any paragraph breaks at all.

There were still a few candidates who finished their answers without a clear ending or conclusion to properly wrap up their arguments. 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 sentences 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. Too short responses

Most candidates wrote responses of an appropriate length that met the requirements of the task successfully. 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.

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 (letters, emails, speeches and articles), and should be aware of the type of language, tone and level of formality required for different situations.