

4800-021

**Essential Skills Northern Ireland
Communication Level 2**

Chief Examiner's report – October 2018

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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 September 2017 to September 2018. However, centres are encouraged to review previous Chief Examiner's reports, as the comments and advice still apply.

Many candidates are showing a strong performance in both reading and writing sections. Some candidates are continuing to struggle due to the following main reasons:

In the reading section:

1. Being entered for the exam before sufficient learning has taken place
2. Not reading the questions properly
3. Not providing enough information or responses in the answers
4. Struggling to compare information and points of view in the source documents.

In the writing section:

1. Poor use of spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Not addressing the relevant detail required by the task
3. Struggling to write persuasively when required
4. Spending too much time on the first writing question, resulting in a rushed and much poorer response to the second question.

Areas of good performance

In the reading section:

Successful candidates generally gained marks across all of the assessment criteria (a-e). They demonstrated good preparation and teaching, including a clear familiarity with the questions that might be asked and the types of responses expected. Importantly, successful candidates read questions carefully and noted the number of responses needed.

Successful candidates demonstrated an ability to read source documents carefully. They were able to locate the main points and ideas of a text, and to read the text in depth when more detailed responses were required. They were able to summarise information adequately in order to fully answer the questions asked. Stronger candidates could compare and contrast the messages and points of view within the source documents, and were able to recognise bias.

There was a notable improvement on questions that asked candidates to identify language techniques, with most candidates achieving high marks in this area. Candidates showed familiarity with different language techniques and how they might be used in a text, and a good ability to distinguish between language and layout techniques. When asked to give examples of these techniques used in the source documents, they were able to do this well.

In the writing section:

Candidates continued to respond well to the scenarios and writing tasks, with many showing a particularly strong performance in the writing section.

Successful candidates were able to write clearly and concisely while addressing all the relevant detail required by the task. They demonstrated a familiarity with the structure of different documents, including letters, emails, speeches and articles, and were able to use language appropriate for purpose and audience.

Strong candidates showed an ability to use different persuasive techniques when needed. They wrote in a consistent tone that was appropriate for the task set, understanding when different levels of formality were required.

Successful candidates demonstrated a good command of at least two of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Paragraphs and a range of sentence structures were employed to communicate clearly and effectively.

Overall:

Successful candidates answered most or all of the questions on the paper, demonstrating an ability to allocate the right amount of time to each question and for checking.

Areas for development

In the reading section:

1. Familiarity with question types

It is essential to ensure that candidates are adequately prepared for the exam prior to being entered. Making use of the practice assessments on the City & Guilds website is strongly recommended.

2. Reading the question carefully

Some weaker candidates simply did not read questions properly. Marks are easily lost when candidates do not provide enough responses and/or when they do not provide relevant information in their answer, such as giving layout techniques when asked for language techniques, or explanations when asked for examples. In both cases, careful reading of the question should address this, leading to a better performance.

3. Comparing and contrasting different ideas and points of view

Weaker candidates struggled to identify and to compare and/or contrast different points of view. They often failed to achieve higher marks due to simply listing evidence from one or both sources without attempting a comparison. Other candidates summarised one or both of the arguments or points of view incorrectly, leading to an incorrect comparison.

Teaching and preparation should aim to ensure candidates can identify point of view and summarise ideas and arguments from different sources. Candidates should be able to find similarities and differences in the ideas found in separate documents or within one document.

A good response will make use of certain words that demonstrate an understanding of the requirement to compare or contrast information, such as 'whereas', 'on the one hand', 'in contrast', 'however', 'but', 'neither', 'both', 'similarly', etc.

4. Reading the source documents carefully to obtain and utilise information

Some candidates struggled to select and carefully read source documents to obtain and utilise relevant information. Candidates should be able to choose the relevant source document or section of the source document to answer the question (for example, if they are asked to provide evidence from a specific person), and they should be able to read source documents carefully to show detailed understanding of the points and ideas within.

There may have been an expectation that all answers relating to one question would be contained in one section or within successive sentences of the source material. This is not always the case; answers are often spread throughout the document and may be located in subheadings, tabs, text boxes and other features that are not part of the main text.

Teaching and preparation should ensure that candidates are familiar with the types of source documents they may encounter and the ways in which information is conveyed within them.

In the writing section:

1. Punctuation

Some candidates lost a significant amount of marks due to comma errors. Teaching and preparation should cover when commas are needed in sentences and that they should not be used in place of full stops (comma splicing). Some candidates demonstrated an inability to use apostrophes correctly. Candidates should also be instructed to 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. Conveying relevant information clearly and concisely

Weaker candidates struggled to convey relevant information clearly and concisely to the reader. Some candidates strayed off their point, included too much irrelevant information, repeated words, phrases or arguments excessively, or produced generally confusing responses. Many candidates omitted important information or did not address all the points they were asked to cover in the task.

Candidates should read questions carefully to ensure they are aware of all the information they need to include in their response. They should also consider the purpose of the text they have been asked to produce; for example, if they are writing an article to persuade people to attend a meeting, they will need to provide details such as what the meeting is about and where and when it will take place.

4. Writing persuasively

In one task, candidates will be directed to persuade or convince their intended audience. Weaker candidates were not able to do this effectively, often simply stating information without any attempt to persuade. Teaching and preparation should ensure that candidates know how to employ a variety of persuasive techniques. Candidates should be aware of the intended purpose and audience of their text and be able to use persuasive writing to achieve a desired response or convince readers of their point of view.

5. Format, structure and language that is suitable for intended purpose and audience

This is an area that has seen significant improvement since the previous report, but still represents a problem for weaker candidates. These candidates gave responses that had little or no structure, or that did not use an appropriate format for audience and purpose. Weaker candidates often used paragraphs in a haphazard fashion.

It is important candidates are familiar with the correct format and structure of different documents, including letters, emails, speeches and articles. Candidates should understand how to present their responses in a structured, logical sequence, with a clear beginning, middle and conclusion where appropriate. It is also important that candidates use language that is suitable for purpose and audience; beginning a formal letter with 'Hi Dave', for example, is not appropriate. At least one of the writing questions on every paper will require a formal response.

6. Using complex sentences correctly

Candidates should be able to write using a variety of sentence lengths and structures, including complex sentences. Many weaker candidates did not use any complex sentences in their responses. Some candidates attempted to use complex sentences but either left their sentences unfinished or used punctuation incorrectly.

7. 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 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. Many weaker candidates either did not provide long enough responses to demonstrate an ability to write well, or wrote too much and consequently ran out of time or made a greater number of errors. Very long answers tended to lose conciseness and coherence. Very short answers did not provide adequate detail.

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. 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. It is encouraging to see that more candidates are starting to take this approach when running out of time, as this sometimes means the difference between a pass and a fail.

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, it is recommended that practice and preparation include time management techniques.
4. It is essential that candidates are taught to 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. Marks are easily lost due to not reading questions carefully.
5. Many candidates would strongly benefit from checking their finished responses in both the reading and writing sections.
6. As part of the learning process, candidates should be exposed to all types of source documents, including websites, 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 and contrasting these.

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