4800-021

Essential Skills Northern Ireland Communication Level 2

Chief Examiner's report – October 2017

Contents

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

Many candidates are successful, 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. Not reading the questions properly.
3. 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.
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 showed a clear understanding of the questions being asked and the types of responses expected.

A common ability shown by most successful candidates was a recognition of the number of responses needed for each question, achieved by proper and careful reading of the question and noting the number of marks available.

Stronger 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.

In particular, strong 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. Strong candidates also demonstrated a good understanding of bias and point of view.

In the writing section:

Candidates generally responded well to the scenarios and writing tasks, with stronger candidates clearly demonstrating an ability to suit language, style, format and structure to purpose and audience. Strong candidates were able to write in a consistent tone that was appropriate for the task set, and understood when different levels of formality were required.

Successful candidates showed an ability to write persuasively when needed, presenting information and arguments in a logical order and a clear and coherent style. Paragraphs and a range of sentence structures were employed to communicate clearly and effectively.

Successful candidates 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, demonstrating an ability to allocate the right amount of time to each question and for checking.

Areas for development

In the reading section:

1. Reading the question carefully

Some weaker candidates simply did not read questions properly. They tended to give layout techniques instead of language techniques, or vice versa, or gave explanations of techniques where they were asked to give examples. In addition, candidates who did not read questions fully often missed instructions to provide multiple responses in their answer. Most questions will clearly state the number of responses required; answering every question with only one response can result in a significant loss of marks.

Candidates should be encouraged to read questions carefully and to take note of the number of responses required and the number of marks available.

2. Commenting on how meaning is conveyed

Weaker candidates had difficulty answering questions that asked for language techniques. Teaching and preparation should aim to ensure that candidates can identify examples of language techniques in different types of document, and that they have a clear understanding of the differences between language and layout.

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 listed evidence from one or both sources but failed to actually compare or contrast these. Weaker candidates that did attempt to compare or contrast the documents sometimes summarised one 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. Detecting bias and identifying biased statements

Weaker candidates often struggled to identify biased statements within a text. Candidates should be able to understand when a statement presented as fact is actually only the author's opinion.

In the writing section:

1. Punctuation

Weaker candidates tended to lose 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 weaker 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. 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 match tone and language to their audience. There is always a requirement for formal writing on at least one of the writing tasks, so candidates should be familiar with what this requires.

4. 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.

5. Format and structure

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

6. 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 often lost conciseness and coherence.

7. 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.

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.