

4800-021

**Essential Skills Northern Ireland
Communication Level 2**

Chief Examiner's report – October 2019

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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 April 2019 to October 2019. Reviewing previous Chief Examiner's reports is also recommended, as the comments and advice still apply.

Performance is generally good across the criteria, with candidates still gaining particularly high marks in the writing section, showing good teaching, preparation and practice. However, some candidates do still struggle due to the following main reasons:

In the reading section:

1. Being entered for the exam before sufficient learning has taken place / unfamiliarity with the question types
2. Not reading questions carefully
3. Not providing enough information or responses.

In the writing section:

1. Poor use of spelling, punctuation and grammar
2. Not providing details asked for in the question
3. Not formatting and structuring responses appropriately for the task set
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 showed that they were familiar with the question types and were able to gain marks across all the assessment criteria (a-e). They demonstrated good preparation and teaching, including time management skills, attempting all questions on the paper.

Importantly, successful candidates read questions and source documents carefully and provided relevant answers. They paid attention to the number of responses required. For example, if asked for two facts or pieces of evidence, they did not answer with only one. Some candidates underlined key words in the questions, such as 'who', 'why' and 'how'. It is encouraging to see that candidates who took this approach seemed to interpret questions better and gave an appropriate level of detail/number of responses in their answer.

Successful candidates were able to locate the main points and ideas of a text, and to read the text in depth when more detailed information was required. Strong candidates could explicitly compare and contrast the messages and points of view within the source documents, and they were able to recognise bias.

In the writing section:

In general, candidates continued to perform better in the writing section, demonstrating an ability to write clear, concise and well-structured responses. Successful candidates used paragraphs correctly and structured their answers logically with a clear beginning, middle and

end. They were able to use language appropriate for purpose and audience, including persuasive techniques where appropriate, and they showed a good command of at least two of spelling, punctuation and grammar. Strong candidates were able to employ a variety of sentence structures effectively, including complex sentences.

Notably, successful candidates addressed all the detail in the question and did not leave out important information required to effectively meet the task.

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

Overall:

1. Overall, performance on the writing section was still much stronger than on the reading section. Some candidates appeared to have prepared and practiced for the writing section, achieving high marks in these tasks, but were unprepared for the reading section. They were not familiar with the question types and what was required of them, and in some cases left multiple answers blank. This led to a very poor performance on the reading questions and an overall mark that was too low to pass. It is important to remember that even if full marks are achieved in one section of the paper, a candidate cannot pass without gaining marks in both sections.

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. However, see point 2 below.

2. Reading the question carefully

Many candidates simply did not read questions properly. In some cases, it appeared that candidates were expecting certain questions and answered accordingly, without taking the time to read and consider what that particular question was asking. While it is recommended that candidates become familiar with the question types, it is also important to ensure they do not expect questions to be asked in the exact ways they are presented on the practice papers, or to anticipate what the question will ask before fully reading it.

Not reading the question carefully can also result in marks lost because candidates do not give enough responses or provide relevant information in their answers. For example, they might give layout techniques when asked for language techniques, give one person's opinion when asked for another's, or provide explanations when asked for examples. Many candidates who did not read questions properly also missed key instructions, such as to find their answers in a specific section of the source documents.

3. Identifying language techniques and providing examples from the source document

Candidates are generally performing very well on questions where they are asked to identify language techniques used in the source documents. However, as this is a skill that is tested on every level 2 paper, it still represents an area where borderline and weaker candidates can improve. Language techniques may differ across source documents, so candidates should be familiar with a variety of techniques and how they might be used in different texts, and it is important that they are able to distinguish between language and layout techniques.

Weaker candidates learned certain key techniques and listed them, rather than looking for techniques actually used in the source document they were provided with. They also struggled to give examples from the source document. It is important that candidates are able to find and understand the use of language techniques in the specific document they have been given.

4. Comparing and contrasting different ideas and points of view

On questions that asked candidates to compare points of view or information in the source documents, some candidates only listed evidence from one or both sources. This will not access as many marks as explicitly comparing the sources, using words such as 'whereas', 'on the one hand', 'in contrast', 'but', 'both', 'similarly', 'agree', 'disagree', etc. Other candidates summarised one or both of the arguments incorrectly, leading to an incorrect comparison.

Candidates should be able to identify points of view and summarise ideas and arguments from different sources. Candidates should be able to find similarities and differences in the information and opinions found in separate documents or within one document.

5. 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.

Candidates should be aware that not all answers relating to one question can necessarily be obtained from one section or within successive sentences of the source material. Instead, 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.

6. Answering with information found in the source documents rather than drawing from own knowledge

Some candidates used their own knowledge and experience to answer questions rather than looking for the answers in the source documents. All questions in the reading section are based on the information provided in the source documents. Even accurate knowledge cannot gain marks if it is not found in the provided text.

In the writing section:

1. Including relevant detail

Many candidates did not address all the points they were asked to cover in the task. At level 2, the required detail is not always listed in bullet points but may be contained within the task

itself, so careful reading of the question is essential. For example, a candidate may be asked to explain why they are suited for a specific role and what they will do in this role. Only covering why they feel they are suited for the role would not be addressing this task in full. Writing an application for an entirely different job would also be ignoring the task that has been set. Both of these omissions would not allow the candidate to access the full amount of marks for this writing task.

Candidates should also consider any information they might need to include in order to effectively meet the task set. 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. If they are asking for a reply, they should include contact details for this. N.B. 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 continued to lose a significant amount of marks due to comma errors. They should know when commas are needed in sentences and that they should not be used in place of full stops (comma splicing). Some candidates also struggled to use apostrophes correctly.

It is important to note that correct punctuation (as well as spelling and grammar) is required in all responses, regardless of the task and intended audience, including speeches and informal emails.

Candidates should also be aware that correct use of uppercase and lowercase letters is required at both levels. Those who write their whole answer in capital letters, or who fail to distinguish between capital and lowercase letters with their handwriting, will lose a significant number of punctuation marks.

3. Poor use of language

Some candidates struggled with language use, including unfamiliarity with the meanings of certain words, use of inappropriate slang, excessive use of 'and' and 'also' within one sentence or paragraph, clumsy or confusing phrasing, and general lack of clarity. Some candidates demonstrated an inability to use language appropriate for intended audience. 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 prepared for this and able to use formal language.

4. Common spelling and grammar errors

Certain common errors continued to be seen regularly. These included 'alot', 'writting', 'aswell', '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.

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

5. Format and structure, including use of paragraphs

Format and structure of responses is an area that many unsuccessful candidates could improve on. While some text types were generally formatted well, particularly emails and articles, candidates struggled with others, notably letters and speeches. Some candidates wrote answers with very little formatting or structure, including letters without addresses or opening and closing salutations. A number of candidates continued to give their answer in one block of text with no paragraphs, or they used paragraphs in a haphazard fashion.

Candidates generally structured their answers with a clear beginning and middle, but many unsuccessful candidates ended their responses too abruptly, without any attempt to close or conclude, or to thank their audience for listening.

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 end.

6. Using a variety of sentence structures correctly

Candidates should be able to write using a variety of sentence lengths and structures, including complex sentences. Some unsuccessful candidates only used simple sentences in their responses, which resulted in a stilted feel that lacked flow and coherence. Some candidates attempted to use complex sentences but either left their sentences unfinished or used punctuation and/or conjunctions 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. 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. It is encouraging to see more candidates taking this approach when running out of time, as this can mean 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 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 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, and 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 strongly 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, 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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