



Key skills test

Communication

Level 4

Test specification

Introduction

- 1 The communication key skill qualification will be awarded to candidates who are able to demonstrate that their attainment meets national standards in communication in both their portfolio of evidence and an external assessment (hereafter referred to as a test).
- 2 The test provides the external assessment component for each key skill at each level. The test is externally set and marked. The purpose of the test is to assess the candidate's knowledge, skills and understanding in reading and writing.
- 3 Performance in the test is used to complement and support performance in the internal assessment component, the portfolio of evidence. The portfolio must contain evidence of the candidate's purposeful and effective application of skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening, which meets the full requirements of part B of the key skill qualification specification. The portfolio evidence is internally set, internally assessed and externally moderated. A candidate must satisfy the requirements of both components to be awarded the key skill.
- 4 The purpose of this specification is to inform the development of tests for the communication key skill at level 4 by clarifying those aspects of the qualification specification which may be tested.
- 5 This specification is intended to provide writers, editors and reviewers, and also teachers and candidates, with detailed information about the acceptable content, coverage and demand for questions, together with the range of suitable contexts for questions at level 4.
- 6 This specification should be read in conjunction with:
 - *Level 4 communication key skills standards* (QCA, CCEA, ACCAC, 2004)
 - *The key skills qualifications standards and guidance* (QCA, CCEA, ACCAC, 2004)
- 7 This specification has been designed to support the development and production of tests in English, Welsh and Gaeilge.

Design of tests

Principles

- 8 In creating tests, writers must take the following into account:
- the test will last for 2 hours and 30 minutes
 - the test will consist of a number of short-answer questions and one extended-answer question, worth a total of 50 marks
 - candidates will be supervised while taking the test
 - candidates may not use dictionaries.
- 9 The test specification is complemented by awarding body instructions to centres on the conduct of tests and guidance on arrangements for candidates with special requirements.

Scope and demand of tests

- 10 The test must match the identified requirements of the communication key skill at level 4. This means that the test will focus on part A of the key skill specification, entitled 'What you need to know', as well as drawing on part B 'You must'. The circumstances of the test are such that skills covered by component C4.1 in part B will not be tested ('Develop a strategy for using communication skills over an extended period of time'). Similarly, oral aspects of the qualification specification (ie discussion and presentation skills) will not be tested. For the purpose of this specification, the requirements are organised into two skill areas:
- Evaluating, synthesising and communicating information
 - Organising and presenting written information.

For details of skill areas, see page 4.

Intended pass mark

- 11 The test will be designed to have a pass mark in the range 25–35 marks out of 50. Responsibility for setting the final pass mark resides with the awarding bodies acting jointly.

Structure of tests and form of questions

- 12 The questions in the test will be based on material presented in a source book for candidates. The material will relate to complex subjects and the associated questions will reflect this complexity. The source book will consist of a varied collection of reading matter, some of which will be extended pieces of writing. There will be both factual information and opinion, and at least one image, for example, a picture, graph, chart, plan or diagram. The length of the source book may vary according to the nature and complexity of the source documents. The source book will have a length of no more than 4,000 words.
- 13 The test will begin with a number of relatively short-answer questions, which will focus on skill area 1.
- 14 There will be one extended-answer question. This will focus on skill area 2 and will require the candidate to write for a particular audience and a particular purpose. Candidates may draw from all the material in the source booklet.
- 15 There will be no 'follow-through' between questions. Answering a question correctly will not depend on having answered the previous question correctly.

- 16 All questions must avoid making demands on candidates beyond the scope of the communication skills being assessed. In particular, all language used in the questions and source material should be clear and direct unless there are assessment – related reasons for deviating from this. Only information relevant to the questions should be included. Expectations of knowledge or familiarity with specialist contexts, concepts and terms beyond those associated with the communication topics in this specification must be avoided.

Context

- 17 The tested components of the communication key skill are concerned with evaluating and synthesising information and writing documents. Examples of contexts which provide opportunities to develop suitable questions include:
- health and safety matters
 - journeys, travel, holidays
 - employment and obtaining jobs
 - employment-related matters – income tax, insurance, budgets
 - environmental issues
 - community issues
 - gender and other equality issues
 - organising events
 - advertising and the media
 - education, training schooling
 - social issues.
- 18 Every effort must be made to ensure that source material is free of any form of bias (for example gender, ethnic, age) which might favour or disadvantage any candidate or group of candidates. Consideration should also be given to the way sensitive subject matter and content is used in the source book and associated questions.

Skill areas and mark allocations

The table shows mark allocations against the skill area headings

Skill area 1	Evaluating, synthesising and communicating information	Approx.26 marks
Skill area 2	Organising and presenting written communication	Approx. 24 marks
	Total	50 marks

Skill area 1 Evaluating, synthesising and communicating information

This skill area covers the following skills from the key skills qualification specification.

4.2.1 Evaluate information obtained from....reference material (where appropriate), identifying opinion, possible bias and distortion of information when making judgements (*eg recognise how effects are achieved through linguistics, structure and presentation*)

Synthesise information by identifying the various arguments and presenting your own interpretation in a way that brings together information coherently

(12 –14 marks)

4.2.2 Communicate relevant information about complex subjects (with accuracy) in a form (structure and style) that suits your purpose (*eg to inform, explore, persuade, theorise*)

(12 – 14 marks)

Skill area 2 Organising and presenting written communication

This skill area covers the following skills from the key skills qualification specification.

4.3.1 Organise and clearly present relevant information illustrating what you say by making comparisons (where appropriate), providing examples that (suit the purpose and subject and) relate to the interests of the audience

(11-13 marks)

4.3.2 Vary use of vocabulary and grammatical expression to convey particular effects, enable fine distinctions to be made achieve emphasis and engage your audience.

Write extended documents (*eg extended essays, reports*) structuring the material and presenting arguments and information in a logical sequence, and ensure spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate; proofread and redraft, as necessary.

(11-13 marks)