



NQ Verification 2014–15

Key Messages Round 2

01

Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	Biology
Verification event/visiting information	Event
Date published:	June 2015

National Courses/Units verified:

H20A 74 National 4 Biology Assignment (Added Value Unit)

02

Section 2: Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

All centres used the Biology Assignment (National 4) Added Value Unit assessment, as required for this session.

Many centres implemented this by encouraging their candidates to complete a research log as they undertook the research stage of the Assignment. The evidence contained in each log varied widely in terms of extent and detail, both within centres and between centres; however it was clearly very useful preparation for many candidates. The material contained in candidate logs often provided appropriate evidence to meet specific Assessment Standards, especially Assessment Standards 1.1 and 1.2. There were some instances in which candidates gave an oral presentation and evidence of this was usually provided in the form of a printout of the talk/PowerPoint slides etc.

Assessment judgements

On the whole, centres seemed to be more aware than last year of the detail contained within the judging evidence tables to support them in their assessment judgements for each of the Assessment Standards. Many centres further subdivided the individual requirements for each Assessment Standard into a checklist, detailing the sub-points within each Assessment Standard. This is good practice, assisting candidates and assessors in ensuring that all aspects of the Assessment Standard have been addressed.

In many instances there was also clear evidence of redrafting by candidates, following an initial assessment opportunity. This is also good practice, allowing many candidates to overtake individual Assessment Standards that they had initially failed to meet. As highlighted in the 2014 Key Messages Report, clear annotation by assessors of reports, indicating where aspects of the Assessment Standard have, or have not, been met is very helpful for candidates, other assessors and verifiers. This makes it clear to all what has been achieved and what has yet to be achieved. In some cases this was accompanied by a detailed breakdown commentary on each aspect of the report.

It should be noted that it is not necessary for candidates to redraft their entire report or presentation, should they fail to achieve all Assessment Standards at their first assessment opportunity. All that is required is a redrafting of the relevant part(s), or some supplementary evidence to demonstrate that an appropriate Assessment Standard has been achieved. Some good examples were seen where candidates were given supplementary questions to answer, focussing on areas that were weak in their initial report.

In addition, although not submitted for this round of verification, centres are reminded that evidence does not have to be in a written format. For example it is clear that some candidates with limited literacy skills may have difficulty producing a written report, yet their Biology may be of a high enough standard to achieve the Added Value Unit. Oral responses by a candidate, of a quality in line with national standards, would be perfectly acceptable, provided the centre provides evidence of the candidate's responses. This could be in the form of a recording, a transcript or even a summary report produced by the assessor.

Such supplementary questioning may be particularly appropriate for candidates who produce a poster to communicate the findings of their investigation. Posters can be an excellent medium for engaging candidates; however some examples of posters submitted for verification lacked sufficient detail and development to cover all Assessment Standards. In such cases, additional evidence may be contained in the research log or in the form of additional questions and candidate responses.

The following specific points relate to individual Assessment Standards.

Assessment Standard 1.1 — Choosing, with justification, a relevant issue in biology

This Assessment Standard created fewer difficulties this year. The only common issue concerned the requirement to 'state briefly in what way the issue is relevant to the environment/society'.

Since there is also a requirement to explain the impact of the issue on the environment/society in both Assessment Standards 1.4 and 1.5, it is clearly critical for this to be considered carefully at the outset when candidates are selecting their topics for research.

Assessment Standard 1.2 — Researching the issue

Centres are reminded of the advice provided previously that full URLs should be supplied when candidates are citing their source of reference. A generic reference, such as www.bbc.co.uk does not give enough direction for the source to be retrieved by a third party. It is also strongly recommended that candidates include their raw data in their report where possible, since this makes it clear what they have carried out to achieve Assessment Standard 1.3.

Assessment Standard 1.3 — Presenting appropriate information/data

A common challenge for assessors and verifiers in assessing Assessment Standard 1.3 is in judging what the candidate has done to present some of the information/data in their own way. Clear signposting is essential; for example candidates should clearly identify their source data, and then make it clear how they have presented this in their own way, for example by drawing a graph from a table, creating a flow chart, summarising information.

Assessment Standard 1.4 — Explaining the impact, in terms of the biology involved

A recurrent issue affecting this Assessment Standard was a lack of reference to the candidate's processed data/information. The judging evidence table makes it clear that explaining the impact of the issue should include 'making some reference to the candidate's processed data/information'. As previously stated, clear signposting that identifies source data/information and data/information that has been presented by the candidate in their own way, helps candidates achieve Assessment Standards 1.3 and 1.4.

Assessment Standard 1.5 — Communicating the findings of the investigation

There were few issues relating to this Assessment Standard. Sound assessment judgements were made by most centres.

03

Section 3: General comments

Overall there was a higher quality of Assignments this year than last year, with most centres showing a better understanding of the requirements to achieve the Unit.

However, in some cases, it seemed as if candidates had produced an Assignment that could potentially be submitted for National 4 Biology and National 5 Biology. Such an approach can be adopted at the discretion of the centre; however centres must ensure that in such cases there will inevitably be a different emphasis in the Assignment at each level (for example it is not a requirement for candidates to compare the data from two sources at National 4). Centres must ensure that candidates are not disadvantaged by being expected to complete tasks which are not relevant to their level.