

# NQ Verification 2015–16

## Key Messages Round 1

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### Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	Biology
Verification event/visiting information	Event
Date published:	March 2016

#### National Courses/Units verified:

H207 73/74/75	Cell Biology
H208 73/74/75	Biology: Multicellular Organisms
H209 73/74/75	Biology: Life on Earth
H4KD 76	Biology: DNA and the Genome
H4KE 76	Biology: Metabolism and Survival
H4L8 76	Human Biology: Human Cells
H4L9 76	Human Biology: Physiology and Health
H4LA 76	Human Biology: Neurobiology and Communication
H7W5 77	Biology: Cells and Proteins
H7W6 77	Biology: Organisms and Evolution

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### Section 2: Comments on assessment

#### Assessment approaches

Most centres used the published Unit assessment support packs. However, there were several instances where centres had used older versions of the packs. Centres are reminded to use the most up-to-date Unit assessment support packs and corresponding marking instructions.

The Unit-by-Unit approach was the one most used. Some centres used the portfolio approach. Centres using the portfolio approach had split the Unit assessment support packs into sections covering just one or two of the key areas of the Unit. When using the portfolio approach the re-assessment should include the key areas of the Unit where a candidate has failed to show success. Alternatively, candidates could be re-assessed via a new test that covers all of the key areas of the Unit.

Centres are reminded that they should make use of SQA's prior verification service where significant changes are made to the Unit assessment support packs, or if they choose to use centre-devised assessments.

[Further information on SQA's Prior Verification service](#)

**Outcome 1: The candidate will apply skills of scientific inquiry and draw on knowledge and understanding of the key areas of the Unit to carry out an experiment/practical investigation.**

*Assessment Standard 1.1 Planning an experiment/practical investigation*

Centres are reminded that National 3 candidates are not expected to devise a procedure to meet Assessment Standard 1.1. Centres should provide candidates with the procedures and observe them following these correctly.

At all other levels there was evidence of centres not providing opportunities for candidates to meet the planning aspect of Assessment Standard 1.1. Many Outcome 1 reports suggested that all candidates from a class had been provided with both the protocol and materials to carry out an experiment/practical investigation with no evidence to suggest that they had been individually involved in the planning of the experiment/practical investigation. Centres are reminded that they should ensure that contexts that allow active planning by all candidates are chosen for Outcome 1 experiments/practical investigations to ensure that candidates can meet the planning aspect of Assessment Standard 1.1.

Centres are reminded that it may be possible to reduce the assessment burden on candidates by achieving some aspects of Assessment Standard 2.4 (solving problems) via a carefully designed experiment/practical investigation.

**Outcome 2: The candidate will draw on knowledge and understanding of the key areas of the Unit and apply scientific skills by:**

*Assessment Standard 2.1 Making accurate statements*

Most centres used the published Unit assessment support packs. Centres are reminded to use the most up-to-date versions.

When using the portfolio approach, centres are reminded they should collect evidence as candidates' progress through the Course. When a Unit is complete, centres should decide whether each candidate has achieved 50% or more of all of the questions used to assess Assessment Standard 2.1. There is no need for a candidate to achieve 50% of each key area.

*Assessment Standard 2.2/2.4 Solving problems*

Most centres used the published Unit assessment support packs. Centres are reminded to use the most up-to-date versions.

Some centres failed to assess the problem solving skills independently of each other. Centres are reminded that at least one correct response for each problem solving skill is required to meet Assessment Standard 2.2/2.4

## Assessment judgements

Centres must ensure that their assessment decisions and internal verification decisions are clear.

Centres are reminded that the Unit assessment support packs contain additional information in the judging evidence tables to assist with the judging of evidence of all Assessment Standards. Most centres used and applied these tables. Some centres seemed only to be using summary checklists; for example, candidate assessment records, as exemplified in the appendices of the Unit assessment support packs. Such checklists are useful for administrative purposes; however, they must be used in conjunction with the full list of judging criteria contained in the judging evidence tables.

Many candidates used the terms 'precise', 'accurate', 'valid' and 'reliable' incorrectly. Centres should ensure that candidates are only given credit for using these terms when they do so correctly.

Marking guidance provided in the Unit assessment support packs is not intended to be exhaustive of all possibilities and can be modified. However, centres must ensure that any modifications are of an equivalent standard to the existing guidance. A number of centres applied this rule effectively, annotating their marking guidance, detailing acceptable alternative answers and also unacceptable answers. Where this rule was not applied effectively, centres showed inconsistencies in their assessment judgements. Centres are reminded to discuss the marking guidance prior to the use of an assessment in order to improve consistency in the application of the marking guidance.

Some centres' assessment judgements were not in line with the national standards. The most common issue was leniency in the application of the marking guidance. Centres are reminded that a rigorous, accurate and consistent application of assessment judgements is essential. This can be facilitated by effective internal verification procedures within a centre.

The published Understanding Standards exemplar material contains examples of candidate evidence and commentaries explaining why the evidence does or does not meet national standards for assessment. Further exemplification is provided on the Biology Understanding Standards pages on SQA's secure site: [www.sqa.org.uk/sqasecure](http://www.sqa.org.uk/sqasecure).

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## Section 3: General comments

A number of centres selected for verification failed to provide the required sample of candidates. Guidance on generating the required sample of candidates is provided on the following web page: [Generating the evidence sample](#).

Centres must ensure that accurate details are entered on the verification sample form and candidate evidence flyleaf, and on the centre's candidate assessment record or equivalent. Before submitting evidence for external verification, centres should ensure that they have referred to the guidance documents. Guidance on

evidence required for external verification of Units is provided on our quality assurance web page ([www.sqa.org.uk/cfeqa](http://www.sqa.org.uk/cfeqa)).

Centres are reminded that they can choose which Unit to select for each level of verification. Centres must choose the same Unit for all candidates at any one level. Centres can choose different Units for different levels.

Centre staff are reminded that all centres offering SQA qualifications must have an effective internal quality assurance system that ensures that all candidates are assessed accurately, fairly and consistently to national standards. Centres selected for external verification are expected to provide details of their quality assurance policies and processes.

Most centres provided evidence of their internal verification processes and some of these showed good practice by including notes from the internal verifier and demonstrated how assessment judgements were made. This often included some evidence of internal verification having taken place, specifically cross-marking. However, this did not always lead to consistent, reliable assessment judgements being made. Centres should review their internal verification processes to ensure that they are in fact effective.

Centres are advised to record any decisions taken during their internal verification process with appropriate statements on the candidate's work or an attached pro forma. Some internal verification processes were overly complicated with no information on how the final assessment judgements were made. Centres are advised to refer to the internal verification toolkit for further guidance.

#### [Internal Verification Toolkit](#)

Most centres made good use of assessment records and grids to record Outcomes, track progress and provide feedback to candidates.