

NQ Verification 2016–17

Key Messages Round 1

01

Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	Biology
Verification event/visiting information	Event
Date published:	March 2017

National Courses/Units verified:

H207 73	National 3	Biology: Cell Biology
H207 74	National 4	Biology: Cell Biology
H207 75	National 5	Biology: Cell Biology
H4KD 75	National 5	Biology: DNA and the Genome
H4KE 75	National 5	Biology: Metabolism and Survival
H4L8 75	National 5	Human Biology: Human Cells
H4L9 75	National 5	Human Biology: Physiology and Health
H7W5 77	Advanced Higher	Biology: Cells and Proteins

02

Section 2: Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

Most centres used the published unit assessment support packs (UASPs) which meant that there were generally few problems concerning the approach to assessment.

However, there were some instances where centres used older versions of the UASPs. Centres are reminded to use the most up-to-date UASPs and corresponding marking guidance.

The following guidance relates to individual outcomes and assessment standards.

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

National 3 candidates are not expected to devise a procedure to meet this assessment standard. Centres should provide candidates with the procedures and observe them following these correctly.

At all other levels there is still evidence of centres not providing opportunities for candidates to meet the planning aspect of assessment standard 1.1. Some 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 investigation. This means that they could not meet assessment standard 1.1. Centres are reminded that they are expected to ensure that contexts that allow active planning by all candidates are chosen for investigations.

Outcome 2: Draw on knowledge and understanding of the key areas of this unit and apply scientific skills.

Assessment standard 2.1 Making accurate statements and

Assessment standard 2.2 Solving problems

Centres are reminded that candidates can be assessed by means of a single test that contains marks and a cut-off score. A suitable unit assessment will cover all of the key areas (AS 2.1) **and** assess each of the problem solving skills (AS 2.4). Where a candidate achieves 50% or more of the total marks available in a single unit assessment they will pass outcome 2 for that unit.

When using a portfolio approach candidates should be given the opportunity to make accurate statements for all of the key areas of each unit (AS 2.1). They must also be given opportunities throughout the course to answer questions on each of the three problem solving skills (AS 2.4).

Evidence should be collected as candidates progress through the course. For assessment standard 2.1, candidates must achieve 50% or more of the total KU marks available for **each** unit. For assessment standard 2.4, candidates must achieve 50% or more of the **total** marks available for all three problem solving skills.

Centres should refer to the *Understanding the next steps for session 2016–17* guidance notes, on the Biology subject page of the SQA website, for the most up-to-date information on the approaches to unit assessment, at each level.

[Biology subject pages](#)

Assessment judgements

Centres are reminded that the UASPs contain additional information in the judging evidence tables to assist with the judging of evidence of all assessment standards. These tables were clearly used and applied by many centres. Other centres seemed only to be using summary checklists; for example, candidate assessment records, as exemplified in the appendices of the UASPs. Such checklists are useful for administrative purposes, however as the information in them is necessarily condensed they must be used in conjunction with the full list of judging criteria contained in the judging evidence tables.

Although the marking guidance provided in the UASPs is not intended to be exhaustive and can be modified, 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 unacceptable answers. Where this was not the case, centres showed inconsistencies in their assessment judgements. To improve consistency in the application of the marking guidance centres are reminded to discuss the marking guidance prior to the use of an assessment.

Although some centres' assessment judgements were reliable, several others 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 the agreed marking guidance is essential.

Although there was often evidence of cross-marking, in many instances this simply agreed with the decision made by the original marker even where this was not in line with the marking guidance. This could be improved by having effective internal verification procedures.

03 Section 3: General comments

Most centres provided evidence of their internal verification processes.

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 that internal verification took place, specifically cross-marking. However, this did not always lead to consistent, reliable assessment judgements being made. Centres should review the application of their internal verification processes to ensure that they are in fact effective.

Many centres were making good use of assessment records and grids to record outcomes, track progress and provide feedback to candidates.