



NQ Verification 2015–16 Key Messages Round 1

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Section 1: Verification group information

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

National Courses/Units verified:

H24P	76	Higher	Living Environment
H24R	76	Higher	Earth's Resources
H24P	75	National 5	Living Environment
H24P	74	National 4	Living Environment
H24R	73	National 3	Earth's Resources

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Section 2: Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

Almost all centres verified are using the Unit assessment support packs (UASPs) produced by SQA. Most centres are using the Unit-by-Unit approach with some using the Combined approach.

A few centres had used a centre-devised assessment or had made adaptations to the questions in the UASP. Where centres are devising their own assessment instruments or are making major adaptations to the UASP, it is strongly recommended that these assessments are submitted for prior verification. Centres should also submit a grid to identify which questions are testing which key areas or skills, similar to those contained within the UASPs.

Adding marks to questions is acceptable but must be approached with caution as this can change the balance and demand of the assessment. For example, changing a single response question in the UASP to a question requiring an explanation worth 3 marks could change the balance of the test and may also disadvantage some candidates in that they may be able to give the single required response but not the more extended explanation being sought in a 3 mark question.

Centres are reminded that Unit assessments are set at minimum competence level and are not intended to provide differentiation with, for example, 'A' grade questions.

For guidance on constructing appropriate alternative Unit assessments, centres are advised to use the information provided in package 3 – the Portfolio approach.

Where a candidate requires re-assessment, especially for Assessment Standards 2.1 and 2.2 at National 5 and Higher (2.1 and 2.4 at National 3 and National 4), it is essential that the re-assessment provides the same level of demand. Giving candidates the same question(s) again or simply altering the numbers in a question is not an appropriate re-assessment strategy, since the assessment is no longer unseen.

For re-assessment of Assessment Standard 2.1, there are two possible strategies: either the candidate should be given another test covering all of the key areas in which they should score 50% or more to pass, or the assessor can analyse the candidate's performance in each key area and then give a test covering those key areas in which the candidate did not do well. For example, if a Unit had five key areas and the candidate scored less than 50% in the questions for three of the key areas, then the candidate could be given another test covering those three key areas (guidance on an appropriate number of questions to include for each key area can be found in Package 3 — the Portfolio approach). To pass the candidate would need to score 50% or more in that test.

Centres should not amalgamate original test scores with re-assessment scores as that can make it more difficult to achieve a pass.

For Assessment Standard 2.2 at National 5 and Higher (2.4 at National 3 and National 4), each problem solving skill must be evidenced for a pass. Where a test contains more than one question testing a particular skill, then to achieve a pass for that skill the candidate must get 50% or more of the opportunities correct. For example, if a test contains four questions testing processing, the candidate must get two or more correct to pass.

A small number of centres were adding marks to the problem solving questions and then applying a 50% cut-off overall to say whether a candidate had achieved this Assessment Standard. This is not an appropriate approach to assessment of these skills.

In the case of oral assessment, it is essential that the assessor includes a record of the question or prompts that were used with the candidate and a detailed record of the candidate's response. It is insufficient to simply state 'orally passed' as this does not allow either an internal or external verifier to judge whether the decision made was correct or not.

Assessment judgements

For National 3 to National 5, there was lots of evidence of good practice within centres. Centres were found to be consistently applying the marking guidance in the UASPs to national standard. There was good use of either class or individual student record sheets and centres made both assessor and internal verification decisions clear on their documentation. Where there was a disagreement between the assessor and internal verifier, centres had made the final decision clear on the evidence.

There was good evidence of internal verification taking place, including detailed minutes of meetings between the assessor and verifier and clear application of departmental or centre internal verification policies.

There was one example of very good practice of using photographs with clear and detailed assessor comments for recording evidence for some of the Assessment Standards for Outcome 1.

For Higher, again there was lots of evidence of good practice in the application of marking guidance and the use of candidate or class record sheets. In many centres, there was clear evidence of internal verification taking place and in some centres the final decisions were made clear. However, in some centres the final decision between assessor and verifier was not always clear. In a small number of centres there was no evidence of internal verification. Centres are reminded that internal verification is a requirement.

There was evidence of good practice in many centres in the annotation of marking guidance to add additional correct or incorrect responses, as this ensured consistency of marking. Care should be taken, however, to ensure that answers being accepted are correct, answer the question being asked and are appropriate to the level. For example, where a question asks about the introduction of a species, answers about the reintroduction of a native species should not be accepted.

There were some specific examples that occurred on a number of occasions, in addition to the one highlighted above, these included the definition of an endotherm, where loose answers that would also apply to ectotherms were accepted. Accepting answers related to inter-specific competition where the question asked about intra-specific and accepting answers related to the effect on a single species, eg deer, in a question that asks for an impact on woodlands.

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Section 3: General comments

When a centre is selected for external verification it should only submit one Unit for each level being verified, ie if National 4 and National 5 are being sent then one Unit for each candidate at National 4 and one for the candidates at National 5 should be submitted for verification. It is also important that the centres make it clear which Assessment Standard(s) are to be verified if they send in more evidence than required.

Centres are reminded that the minimum evidence that can be submitted for verification is for one Assessment Standard, eg Assessment Standard 2.1, and not just a test for one or two key areas within a Unit.