



NQ Verification 2017–18

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 2018

National Courses/Units verified:

Unit code	level	Unit titles
H209 73	National 3 Biology	Biology: Life on Earth
H207 74	National 4 Biology	Biology: Cell Biology
H208 74	National 4 Biology	Biology: Multicellular Organisms
H209 74	National 4 Biology	Biology: Life on Earth
H207 75	SCQF level 5 Biology	Biology: Cell Biology
H208 75	SCQF level 5 Biology	Biology: Multicellular Organisms
H209 75	SCQF level 5 Biology	Biology: Life on earth
H4KD 75	Higher Biology	Biology: DNA and the Genome
H7W6 77	Advanced Higher Biology	Biology: Organisms and Evolution

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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 unit assessment support packs. Centres are reminded to use the most up-to-date versions and corresponding marking guidance.

Any centre-devised instruments of assessment must be at a standard and level appropriate to unit assessment, and questions must relate to a key area of the course. Unit assessment support pack questions should not be more demanding

than necessary. The level of demand should be considered if centres are using questions from previously published SQA assessment materials.

Centres should make use of [SQA's prior verification service](#) where significant changes are made to the unit assessment support packs, or for centre-devised assessments.

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.

Centre staff are reminded that at National 3 to Higher, evidence for outcome 1 in a unit is transferable between the other units at the same level. At Advanced Higher Biology, the achievement of outcome 1 in either of the units: *Biology: Cells and Proteins* and *Biology: Organisms and Evolution* cannot be used as evidence of the achievement of outcome 1 in the *Investigative Biology* unit of the course. However, the achievement of outcome 1 in the *Investigative Biology* unit can be used as evidence of the achievement of outcome 1 in the other two units of the course; there is no requirement to match assessment standards.

Assessment standard 1.1: Planning an experiment/practical investigation

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 candidates must be given the opportunity to meet all of the assessment standards for this outcome. Centres are therefore 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 knowledge and understanding 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.

Assessment judgements

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

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 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 page on [SQA's secure site](#).

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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.

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 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 demonstrating 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 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.