

NQ Verification 2017–18

Key Messages Round 1

01

Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	Environmental Science
Verification event/visiting information	Event
Date published:	March 2018

National Courses/Units verified:

Unit code	Level	Unit title
H24P 73	National 3	Living Environment
H24P 74	National 4	Living Environment
H24P 76	Higher	Living Environment
H24R 76	Higher	Earth's Resources

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Section 2: Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

The verification sample was small, so there are limited comments for this round of verification.

All centres had chosen to use the published SQA unit assessment support packs. Some centres made minor adjustments to the marking instructions, which is to be encouraged. These adjustments were annotated onto the marking instructions.

None of the changes made were significant and so did not need to be prior verified. Where a centre makes significant changes to an assessment, they should make use of SQA's prior verification service.

Assessment judgements

Some centres were still using the old method of assessing 2.1 (knowledge and understanding) and 2.2 (problem solving) separately. Centres should be aware that they can now assess 2.1 and 2.2 holistically, with candidates needing a total mark of 50% or more to pass.

Some centres were not consistent in their application of the marking instructions and are reminded that rigorous, accurate, and consistent application of the marking instructions is essential. The marking guidance is not intended to be exhaustive and centres are encouraged to annotate any minor changes they make to the marking instructions. Centres are reminded, however, that any changes made to the marking instructions must be scientifically correct.

Many centres showed a high level of annotation showing that internal verification was rigorous. However, where the internal verifier and the initial assessor do not agree, it is essential that it is clear what the final decision is. It is essential that both the initial assessor and the internal verifier are aware of the level of answer that is expected for each level of qualification. This year, a number of centres showed no evidence of internal verification. Centres are reminded that they are responsible for operating an effective and documented internal quality assurance system. This is an essential requirement for all SQA-approved centres as is specified in *Systems and Qualification Approval Guide for Centres*.

It is important that assessors are familiar with the technical language in the course that may be outside their specialisation. Technical terms must be used correctly. In particular, mistaking intra- and inter-specific competition and mistaking bioaccumulation and biomagnification were errors that were observed at Higher level. One centre had also allowed candidates to use the technical terms predator and prey interchangeably at National 4 level. None of these terms are interchangeable and have specific technical meanings and so should not be accepted when used incorrectly. Assessors must make sure that they are aware of the specific meanings of technical terms and that they use them correctly.

While correct spelling is not critical for a mark to be awarded, care must be taken where a candidate has appeared to have mistaken two technical terms. Where a misspelled word may cause confusion with another technical term, the mark should not be awarded. However, assessors should be aware that so long as the word is recognisable and cannot be mistaken for another technical term it should be accepted.

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Section 3: General comments

Centres are reminded that there is no need to internally verify all evidence; an appropriate sample can be verified. When the internal verifier and assessor disagree, the centre needs to make sure that the final decision can be identified easily. Centres need to send evidence of the internal verification that has taken place and are reminded that internal verification is essential.