



Qualification Verification Summary Report

NQ Verification 2019–20

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Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	Biology
Verification event/visiting information	Event
Date published:	June 2020

National Courses/Units verified:

Unit code	level	Unit title
H207 73	National 3	Cell Biology
H209 73	National 3	Biology: Life on Earth
H207 74	National 4	Cell Biology
H208 74	National 4	Biology: Multicellular Organisms
H209 74	National 4	Biology: Life on Earth

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Section 2: Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

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

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.

Some centres indicated that the candidate evidence submitted was complete but did not provide an outcome 1 report for their candidates. Centres are reminded that complete evidence must include evidence for both outcome 1 and outcome 2 and candidates cannot be awarded a pass for a unit until a pass has been achieved for **both** outcomes. Centre staff are reminded that evidence of outcome 1 is transferable between freestanding units at the same level. Where an outcome 1 has not yet been completed by a candidate, the evidence should be indicated as interim.

SCQF levels 3–4

Assessment standard 1.1

There is some evidence of centres providing opportunities for candidates to meet the planning aspect of assessment standard 1.1. However, 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 must ensure that contexts chosen for investigations allow active planning by all candidates.

Some candidates provided aims that were unclear and therefore were unable to draw suitable conclusions. In addition, some candidates did not include all controlled variables that could affect the results.

Assessment standard 1.2

All centres recorded that candidates had followed safety procedures safely on an observation checklist. Centres are reminded that, although candidates are not required to discuss safety as part of their outcome 1 report, including assessor comments as part of the checklist is good practice.

Assessment standard 1.4

Most candidates presented their raw data in both a table and a graph. Centres are reminded that tables require headings that describe the data. Candidates must also include the units for their data. When presenting the data in a graph, the labels must match those included as table headings. Where the table headings are inadequate, centres can accept labels that are an improvement at this stage.

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

Most centres assessed outcome 2 for SCQF levels 3 and 4 using a single test with marks and a cut-off score. Centres applied the appropriate threshold of 50% or more of the total marks available in a single unit to achieve a pass for this outcome.

Some centres used a portfolio approach to assess outcome 2 for SCQF levels 3 and 4. When using a portfolio approach, candidates must achieve 50% of the marks available for assessment standard 2.1 in each unit and 50% of the total marks available for assessment standard 2.2 across the units.

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 and can be modified. Centres are reminded that all modifications should be clearly identified on the marking guidance and 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 ensure consistency in the application of the marking guidance.

Some centres' assessment judgements were not consistent 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.

Outcome 2

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 (assessment standard 2.1) and assess each of the problem solving skills (assessment standard 2.2). 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.

Some centres showed good practice by discussing and amending the marking guidance before the assessments for outcome 2 were used. However, where this is the case, care should be taken to ensure that alternative answers meet the national standard demonstrated in the original SQA unit assessment support packs. Underlining and/or bracketing words in an answer often changes the level of difficulty and, as a result, these should be used with caution. Some centres showed some degree of leniency in their application of the marking guidance. Centres are advised to apply the agreed marking guidance and use internal verification to ensure that all candidates are assessed accurately, fairly and consistently to national standards.

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Section 3: General comments

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. Centres are reminded that, where the evidence is indicated as being complete on the candidate flyleaf, the sample must include evidence for both outcome 1 and outcome 2. When submitting evidence for only one outcome, the centre must indicate on the candidate flyleaf that the evidence is interim.

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 the National Qualifications quality assurance web page: www.sqa.org.uk/cfeqa.

Centres are required to submit one unit for each level. 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 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 did this by submitting a copy of their internal verification policy document.

Some 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; particularly when the marking guidance was leniently applied.

Centres must ensure that it is clear where candidates have met an assessment standard. Centres should record any decisions taken during their internal verification process with appropriate statements on the candidate's work or an attached pro forma. Clear annotation by assessors on the candidate evidence, indicating where aspects of each assessment standard have, or have not, been met is very helpful for candidates, other assessors and verifiers. This makes clear what has been achieved, and what has yet to be achieved. Assessor comments on particular assessment judgements are useful for clarifying why judgements have been made.

Centres should review their internal verification processes to ensure they are effective. Centres are advised to refer to the Internal Verification Toolkit for further guidance: www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/74670.html.

Centres are reminded that there is an audio presentation for Biology units: assessment and external verification (SCQF level 3 – SCQF level 7) available on the NQ Biology pages of SQA's website. This is a useful source for further guidance.