



NQ Verification 2016–17 Key Messages Round 2

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Section 1: Verification group information

Verification group name:	Biology
Verification event/visiting information	Event/visiting
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National Courses/Units verified:

H20A 74	National 4	Biology Assignment (Added Value Unit)
H7W7 77	Advanced Higher	Investigative Biology Unit

02

Section 2: Comments on assessment

Assessment approaches

H20A 74 National 4 Biology Assignment (Added Value Unit)

All centres used the Biology Assignment (National 4) Added Value Unit assessment.

Much of the evidence submitted for verification was in the form of a written report and in many instances it was clear that this had been produced to meet the requirements of a National 5 coursework assignment. This approach can be adopted at the discretion of the centre; however, centres must realise that in such cases there will inevitably be a different emphasis in the assignment at each level. For example, it is not a requirement for candidates to compare the data from two sources at National 4. Centres must ensure that candidates are not disadvantaged by being expected to complete tasks that are not relevant to their level. It is important that the activity used to generate evidence is at the appropriate level, and care should be taken to ensure that it is not too demanding for unit assessment.

Some centres encouraged their candidates to complete a research log as they undertook the research stage of the assignment. The evidence contained in each log varied widely in terms of extent and detail; however, it was clearly very useful

preparation for many candidates. The material contained in candidate logs often provided appropriate evidence to meet specific assessment standards, especially assessment standards 1.1 and 1.2.

It should be noted that it is not necessary for candidates to redraft their entire report or presentation if they fail to achieve all of the assessment standards in their first assessment opportunity. All that is required is a redrafting of the relevant part(s), or some supplementary evidence to demonstrate that an assessment standard has been achieved. Evidence produced to meet the requirements of a National 5 assignment will not necessarily meet all of the assessment standards for this unit and, in many instances, some redrafting will be required.

H7W7 77 Investigative Biology Unit

All centres used one of the SQA unit assessment support packages for Investigative Biology to assess outcomes 1 and 2 for this unit.

Outcome 1

Centres are reminded that the achievement of outcome 1 in the Biology: Cells and Proteins or the Biology: Organisms and Evolution units cannot be used as evidence of the achievement of outcome 1 in the Investigative Biology unit of the Advanced Higher Biology course.

Most centres used a pilot study to meet the assessment standards for this outcome, whereas others used the initial stages of their Advanced Higher project. This was in the form of either a written report or a daybook. In some instances these were used together as a means of providing the evidence to meet all of the assessment standards.

Outcome 2

There was evidence of unit assessment support packages 1 and 2 being used by centres to meet the assessment standards for this outcome.

Where candidates failed to meet one or more of the assessment standards in their initial assessment, the appropriate questions from the other package were used for re-assessment.

Assessment judgements

H20A 74 National 4 Biology Assignment (Added Value Unit)

Although centres were using the detail contained within the judging evidence tables to support them in their assessment judgements for each of the assessment standards, some were using out of date versions of these. Centres are reminded to use the most up to date judging evidence tables as these show the criteria against which their judgements should be made. Many centres further

subdivided the individual requirements for each assessment standard into a checklist, detailing the sub-points within each assessment standard. This is good practice, assisting candidates and assessors in ensuring that all aspects of the assessment standard have been addressed.

The following specific points relate to issues from the individual assessment standards.

Assessment standard 1.1 — Choosing, with justification, a relevant issue in biology

Almost all candidates were able to make some form of statement regarding the topic they were going to investigate. The most common issue concerned the requirement to 'state briefly in what way the issue is relevant to the environment/society'. The justification for choosing the issue must include a statement explaining the relevance of the issue to the environment/society. Centres are reminded that an impact on an individual is not equivalent to society.

Since there is also a requirement to explain the impact of the issue on the environment/society in assessment standard 1.4, it is critical for this to be considered carefully at the outset when candidates are selecting their topics for research.

Assessment standard 1.2 — Researching the issue

The majority of candidates included relevant information/data from two sources in their evidence.

Some candidates used an experiment/practical activity as one of the two sources of data. If this approach is adopted it is important to ensure that it is clearly linked to an issue that satisfies the criteria for assessment standard 1.1, ie it has an impact on the environment/society.

Several centres were unaware that the sources and the recording of retrievable information are two separate areas of this assessment standard. Candidates who provided two appropriate pieces of data but did not provide a retrievable reference were disadvantaged as the centres did not award the marks independently. Centres should be aware that candidates can be awarded 1 mark for each piece of raw data included to a maximum of two marks. Candidates who then go on to provide two retrievable references can then be awarded a third mark.

Centres are reminded of the advice provided previously that a full URL must be provided when candidates are citing the source of a reference. A generic reference, such as www.bbc.co.uk does not give enough direction for the source to be retrieved by a third party. If one of the sources is an experiment/practical activity the title and aim should be recorded as the reference. The name of a textbook and author is not a fully retrievable reference.

Assessment standard 1.3 — Processing and presenting appropriate information/data

Most candidates provided evidence of presenting one of their pieces of information/data in a different way to that found in the published source. In many instances this was in the form of a graph or table; however, these were not always completed with the accuracy required at this level. Centres are reminded that where a candidate chooses to present information/data in one of these formats, the correct headings, labels, scales and units are required. A summary may appear to be a valid method of presentation for some data; however, it is likely that it will prevent candidates from accessing the marks available for headings/ labels/units and accuracy.

Assessment standard 1.4 — Applying knowledge and understanding of biology involved

In some instances, candidates were awarded marks for underlying biology for simple statements provided. Centres are reminded that the marks for this assessment standard can only be awarded for descriptions or explanations of relevant underlying biology. Centres are also reminded that candidates can only access the third mark if the impact is explained/described using some knowledge of biology. Guidance should be given to candidates in the initial stages of choosing a topic to ensure that this is an assessment standard they can meet. There is no requirement for this to include an application of biology.

Assessment standard 1.5 — Communicating the findings of the investigation

Centres are reminded that candidates are now required to draw a conclusion or to summarise their findings and that this must be backed up by the evidence in the investigation. The evidence also needs to be clear, concise, relevant and appropriately structured to meet this assessment standard.

H7W7 77 Investigative Biology Unit

Overall, centres made good assessment judgements using the detail provided in the judging evidence tables within the SQA unit assessments.

Outcome 1

The following specific points relate to the individual assessment standards.

Assessment standard 1.1 — Designing investigative procedures appropriate to the aim

Most centres indicated that candidates had met this assessment standard despite a lack of evidence for all of the evidence requirements. Centres should note that there are several evidence requirements needed to meet this assessment standard.

Issues arose where candidates devised an inappropriate aim. Centres should help candidates identify suitable topics for investigation and devise an aim that will allow them to meet the other assessment standards. Candidates must also formulate a hypothesis or question based on the aim.

The procedures should be described in enough detail to show that they are appropriate to the aim of the investigation. These should indicate that the candidates have at least considered:

- ◆ the use of suitable controls
- ◆ the control of confounding variables
- ◆ the need for repeated measurements, ie replicate treatments or samples
- ◆ the need for repeated experiments, ie independent replication

It should be clear in the evidence provided that the main confounding variables have been considered. Some candidates chose to list these separately which allowed them, the assessor, and the verifier to see if they had been considered appropriately.

The most common issue in failing to meet this assessment standard was a lack of independent replication. This was often neither carried out nor considered. Candidates must either carry out the entire experiment again, using fresh materials and chemicals or make it clear that they understand that this should be done and explain how they would/will do it. Where candidates are doing an environmental study, eg investigating species diversity in deciduous woodland, they would be required to sample in a different but similar woodland to carry out independent replication; sampling in another area of the same forest would simply be increasing the sample size. Once again, if this has not been done, the candidate must make it clear that they understand that it should be and explain how they would/will do it.

Assessment standard 1.2 — Taking account of ethical considerations

Most candidates met this assessment standard. Where an investigation had particular ethical considerations candidates had addressed these appropriately. However, candidates should be advised that where there are no ethical considerations they should include a statement indicating that they have considered this.

Assessment standard 1.3 — Identifying potential hazards, assessing associated risks and applying appropriate control measures

Most candidates met this assessment standard. Some centres used a risk assessment form which allowed candidates to show that, as well as being aware of the hazards, they had controlled these appropriately when carrying out their investigation. Both of these elements are required to meet this assessment standard.

Assessment standard 1.4 — Collecting data with precision and accuracy

Most centres indicated that candidates had met this assessment standard despite a lack of evidence for all of the evidence requirements. Centres should note that there are several evidence requirements needed to meet this assessment standard.

Most candidates recorded their measurements/observations in a planned and organised way. The most common format used was a table of results which was appropriate for their data; however, these tables were often not completed with the accuracy required at this level. Centres should ensure that candidates use appropriate headings and units in tables.

There should be information within the evidence of the instruments/methods used to make measurements; these should be appropriate to generate data that is within a suitable range and of suitable accuracy and precision. For example, it would be inappropriate to use a measuring cylinder to measure volumes with precision and accuracy.

Centres should advise candidates to consider the results generated from their investigation. Some candidates had results which showed a wide variation yet they failed to consider what this meant, ie was there an issue with their procedure that led to this variation.

Assessment standard 1.5 — Using initial results to develop or confirm procedures in the experimental design

Most candidates met this assessment standard. The focus of this assessment standard is the initial results. Candidates should review these and decide if further steps are needed, eg modifying the procedure. The reasons for any modifications should be explained and described. Where candidates are confirming that a procedure is appropriate for future work they should state what this work will be.

Outcome 2

Some centres showed good practice by discussing and amending the marking guidance before the assessments for this outcome were used. Where this is the case however, care should be taken to ensure that alternative questions/answers are of a similar standard to those 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.

Most 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.

Section 3: General comments

Centres are advised to ensure that it is clear where candidates have met an assessment standard. 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 it clear to all what has been achieved and what has yet to be achieved. Assessor comments on particular assessment judgements are also useful in helping to make it clear why these judgements have been made.