

NextGen: HN unit specification

Designing Gardens and Greenspace (SCQF level 7)

Unit code: J1RU 47

SCQF level: 7 (24 SCQF credit points)

Valid from: August 2026

This unit specification provides detailed information about the unit to ensure consistent and transparent assessment year on year. It is for lecturers and assessors, and contains all the mandatory information you need to deliver and assess the unit.

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Unit purpose

This is a project-based unit, suitable for learners studying HNC Horticulture, or pursuing similar routes to develop their knowledge and skills in the design of gardens and greenspace areas.

While learners would benefit from previous horticultural knowledge or experience, they do not need it to study the unit. Learners with previous practical horticulture experience can reflect on career opportunities, practise new skills, and develop existing skills in design, plant combinations and specification of garden features.

Entry requirements and progression routes

Entry to this unit is at your centre's discretion. While learners would benefit from previous horticultural knowledge or experience, they do not need it to study the unit. Before they start, however, we recommend that learners have completed one or more of the following:

- NC Horticulture at SCQF level 5, ideally to include some level 6 units
- SVQ Horticulture at SCQF level 6
- a relevant City & Guilds qualification at level 6
- a minimum of one Scottish Higher at grade C or above, or one A-level at grade D or above
- other equivalent qualifications
- relevant industry experience

If learners are studying the unit as part of HNC Horticulture, they may be able to progress to HND Horticulture or go directly into employment in the horticulture industry

Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

1. describe garden and planting design principles
2. design a garden or greenspace area
3. carry out planting in a garden or greenspace area

Evidence requirements

Outcome 1

Learners must provide evidence that they can:

- describe a range of garden and planting design principles

Outcome 2

Learners must provide evidence in the form of a basic site survey for an area of garden or greenspace. This must include:

- a client brief
- site measurements
- soil and drainage conditions
- aspect and areas of light and shade
- location of existing features and services, where relevant
- boundaries, site access and surrounding landscape, where relevant

Learners must produce a design at a suitable scale that demonstrates consideration of a client brief and site survey, and constitutes:

- a layout plan, to include:
 - title box, north point and scale
 - appropriate graphics to represent hard and soft landscaping
 - appropriate labelling

- a planting plan, to include:
 - title box, north point and scale
 - an appropriate selection of plants suitable to location and conditions
 - appropriate graphics to represent individual or groups of plants, correctly labelled
 - an accompanying list detailing the botanical name, conditions required and aesthetic and, if relevant, other functions of each plant

Learners can present their design in an oral presentation or in another appropriate format. They must justify their design choices in relation to the client brief, site survey, garden and planting design principles, and plant functions.

Outcome 3

Learners contribute to establishing an area of planting, and must provide evidence that they can:

- plan, cost and source planting materials
- use appropriate ground-preparation techniques
- use appropriate laying-out and planting techniques for a range of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants
- demonstrate consideration of health and safety requirements
- identify plants using their botanical names

Assessment for all three outcomes can be a design project portfolio, including:

- descriptions of design and planting principles
- evidence of the design process, such as:
 - site survey information
 - layout and planting plans
- evidence of practical activities, such as:
 - photographs
 - video footage
 - assessor checklist

Knowledge and skills

Knowledge	Skills
Outcome 1 Learners should understand: • basic garden and planting design principles • the aesthetic functions of a range of plantings • the practical functions of a range of plantings	Outcome 1 Learners can: • describe a range of garden and planting design principles
Outcome 2 Learners should understand: • how to communicate effectively and use appropriate questioning to gather required information for a client brief • how to select and carry out appropriate surveying techniques • how to test soils and determine soil characteristics, such as: ○ type ○ texture ○ structure ○ layers ○ organic matter content ○ pH ○ nutrient content ○ drainage conditions • how to determine the aspect of an area and how this translates to areas of light and shade • how to decide which soft and hard landscaping features should be retained	Outcome 2 Learners can: • communicate effectively and gather appropriate information for a client brief • carry out a range of appropriate surveying techniques • test soils to determine type and conditions • determine the aspect of an area and which areas will be in light and which in shade • decide which soft and hard landscape features should be retained • locate and, if appropriate, retain access to services in garden and greenspace areas • identify and design appropriate boundaries for gardens and greenspaces • plan appropriate views or screening in relation to surrounding landscapes • plan appropriate access for the construction and ongoing use of gardens or greenspaces

Knowledge	Skills
Outcome 2 (continued) Learners should understand: • the importance of locating services in a garden or greenspace area • the importance of boundaries and surrounding landscapes in garden design • the importance of planning appropriate access for the construction and ongoing use of gardens or greenspaces • how to apply a range of garden design principles • how to produce a garden or greenspace design to scale • how to produce a planting plan to scale, and choose appropriate plants based on environment and plant function • how to graphically represent hard and soft landscaping appropriately • how to label drawings appropriately • how to prepare for and present their garden or greenspace plans	Outcome 2 (continued) Learners can: • apply a range of garden design principles to a design and planting plan • produce a garden or greenspace design to scale • produce a planting plan to scale • draw a range of graphics to represent hard and soft landscaping • label a plan appropriately • select a range of plants for a certain situation, soil type and for a range of functions • prepare for and present their garden or greenspace plans

Knowledge	Skills
Outcome 3 Learners should understand: • how to plan, cost and source planting materials • how to justify their choices of planting materials • how to prepare ground for planting • how to lay out plants for planting, considering spacing and aesthetics • how to plant a range of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants using appropriate techniques • how to identify a range of plants by their botanical names • the importance of health and safety considerations when working on a building site	Outcome 3 Learners can: • plan, cost and source planting materials • justify their choices of planting materials • prepare ground for planting • lay out plants for planting with appropriate spacing and consideration of aesthetics • plant a range of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants using appropriate techniques • identify a range of plants by their botanical names • consider health and safety when working on a building site

Meta-skills

You must give learners opportunities to develop their meta-skills throughout this unit. We have suggested how to incorporate the most relevant ones into the unit content, but you may find other opportunities.

Self-management

This includes focusing, integrity, adapting and initiative. The most relevant are:

- focusing:
 - concentrating during surveys and briefs to ensure plans reflect clients' wishes and appropriate plant choices for the chosen space
- integrity:
 - carrying out all tasks honestly and in all parties' best interests
- adapting:
 - changing approaches and design ideas to suit new information or circumstance
- initiative:
 - making confident decisions in the construction of hard and soft landscaping features

Social intelligence

This includes communicating, feeling, collaborating and leading. The most relevant are:

- communicating:
 - interacting with clients during surveys and with team members during construction in effective and appropriate ways
- feeling:
 - being sensitive to the consequences for other people of changes in plans or designs
- collaborating:
 - listening effectively to clients during surveys and briefing meetings, and working with team members to ensure the best project outcome
- leading:
 - exemplifying good practice and helping others from design presentation to garden or greenspace construction

Innovation

This includes curiosity, creativity, sense-making and critical thinking. The most relevant are:

- curiosity:
 - asking questions, and researching and designing garden or greenspace plans
- creativity:
 - selecting appropriate and sometimes original or unusual materials and methods to construct a range of features

- sense-making:
 - applying learning from previous challenges
- critical thinking:
 - using methodical reasoning processes to work through the stages and challenges in a design project

Literacies

This unit provides opportunities to develop the following literacies.

Numeracy

Learners develop their numeracy skills by:

- calculating survey information and drawing to scale
- costing a range of hard and soft landscaping materials
- calculating required amounts of materials and plants

Communication

Learners enhance their communication skills by:

- gathering a client brief and presenting their completed design
- team working to construct garden or greenspace elements

Digital

Learners improve their digital skills and computer literacy by:

- using various software packages — such as spreadsheet, word processing and presentation software — to present information in a variety of ways
- using CAD software, if available at your centre

Learning for Sustainability

Throughout this unit, you should encourage learners to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding of sustainability.

This includes:

- a general understanding of social, economic and environmental sustainability
- a general understanding of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- a deeper understanding of subject-specific sustainability
- the confidence to apply the skills, knowledge, understanding and values they develop in the next stage of their life

Delivery of unit

This is a mandatory unit in HNC Horticulture. You can integrate delivery of this unit with the following units by designing a space that would also be relevant to them:

- Maintaining Gardens and Greenspace
- Ecology and Environment for Horticulture
- Social and Community Horticulture

You can also integrate it with Production Horticulture by using the plants grown in the production project.

If learners study it as part of HNC Horticulture, their planting choices in the unit should be underpinned by knowledge gained in the Plant Biology and Ecology and Environment for Horticulture units.

Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Content and context for this unit

Describe garden and planting design principles (outcome 1)

Learners should describe a range of garden and planting design principles, such as:

- use of shape and interlock
- balance of mass and void
- unity
- emphasis or focal point
- enclosure
- rhythm
- flow
- scale and proportion
- colour
- light and shade
- plant textures
- plants with different forms
- plants with different heights

Learners should be able to recognise that garden design and planting principles are not standardised, and that terminology, classification and the importance of principles varies between designers.

Learners can investigate a range of designers, styles or movements to understand how these different principles can be applied in practice.

Design a garden or greenspace area (outcome 2)

A suitable garden or greenspace may be a private or public garden, a park, a college garden, a commercial area, or anywhere else where a garden can realistically be created.

Learners gather a client brief from an appropriate person. This can take place, for example, on a site visit, at a college garden or at the garden of a friend or relative and should be carried out individually where possible.

During the client brief, the learner should obtain information, such as:

- who is going to use the garden
- what the users need the garden for, such as
 - entertaining
 - storage
 - glasshouse
 - washing line
 - growing vegetables
- client's aesthetic preferences

Learners should seek a real, rather than simulated, design project. A real design project gives learners the best opportunity to develop skills through gathering a real client brief, carrying out a site survey, and making design decisions with real consequences.

Individually, or as part of a group, learners produce a site survey of this garden or greenspace area, and collect measurements using basic surveying techniques, such as:

- linear measurement
- trilateration
- triangulation
- coordinates or bearings
- distance

Learners observe drainage conditions, and hand- or jar-test the soil for:

- texture
- structure
- pH
- organic matter contentions

They can dig a soil pit to determine soil horizons and test for nutrient levels.

Learners' site survey recordings should include notes on:

- aspect and areas of light and shade
- information about retaining existing planting and hard landscaping and services, where relevant
- information about boundaries, site access and the surrounding landscape, where relevant
- other relevant details likely to determine design choices

Learners produce either a hand-drawn or CAD-produced layout plan and planting plan at suitable scales. While the unit does not involve instructing learners in the use of CAD software, you may demonstrate it and learners can use it. The final garden design should draw comprehensively on the client brief and site survey, and apply a range of the garden design principles described in outcome 1.

Learners' plant choices should show consideration of plant functions, developing ideas from the planting analyses in outcome 1. The planting plan may be for the designed garden as a whole, a section of the garden, or for an alternative garden or greenspace area, and should be a large enough area to include a meaningful range of plants. This process can be used to develop plant-identification skills.

While other appropriate formats are acceptable, we recommend learners present their design in an oral presentation where possible, as presentation skills are important in the garden design industry. They should be able to justify their design choices by referring to their client brief and site survey, as well as to garden design principles and plant functions.

Carry out planting in a garden or greenspace area (outcome 3)

Learners contribute to the establishment of an area of planting which can be in any relevant context, such as:

- private garden
- park
- college
- public space
- part of a historical or conservation project (for example, habitat restoration)

Learners should be able to plan, prepare for and safely carry out the planting, on their own or as part of a team, and justify their plant choices based on factors such as:

- aesthetics and other plant functions
- environmental conditions
- cost
- availability

Learners should contribute to ground preparation, such as the clearing of weeds, and amelioration.

Resources

Learners need an area of garden or greenspace to survey and from which to gather site information. Ideally, this area should not be too large; have some existing features, such as plants, trees, hard landscaping or buildings to give the design some context; and be relatively level so as not to require complicated slope surveying.

Learners also need access to suitable surveying equipment for their chosen survey methods, such as

- long tape measures
- GPS equipment or mobile phones or tablets with suitable apps
- dumpy or laser levels

Learners would benefit from seeing how CAD software works or indeed using it, although either hand-drawn or CAD-produced design is appropriate for this unit. Drawing materials, such as set squares, compasses or circle templates, and scale rules, would also be useful. Learners may also find it helpful to have access to appropriate software to help them create a presentation and costing spreadsheets.

To fulfil the soft landscaping requirements of the unit, learners need an accessible area which can be in college grounds, in a private garden, at a public park or garden, or at another project location, such as a conservation site. They also need planting and soil-improvement materials, and hand tools.

Centres delivering this qualification must have suitably qualified staff for each of the subject components. Your centre should already have established processes to ensure staff are appropriately qualified to deliver in this subject area.

Assessors and internal verifiers must hold an industry and/or subject-specific qualification equivalent to the qualification. Centre staff should have relevant industry experience and be able to demonstrate industry-relevant CPD to maintain their subject-specific knowledge and skills.

Approaches to assessment

You can assess learners through a single portfolio, and all three outcomes can be combined into a single project. This could include:

- descriptions of their garden and planting design principles
- client brief and site survey information
- a layout plan and planting plan
- photographic, video or assessor checklist evidence of practical activities

Opportunities for e-assessment

Learners can present their evidence for this unit using online portfolio software.

Equality and inclusion

This unit is designed to be as fair and as accessible as possible with no unnecessary barriers to learning or assessment.

You must consider the needs of individual learners when planning learning experiences, selecting assessment methods or considering alternative evidence.

Guidance on assessment arrangements for disabled learners and those with additional support needs is available on the [assessment arrangements web page](#).

Information for learners

Designing Gardens and Greenspace (SCQF level 7)

This information explains:

- what the unit is about
- what you should know or be able to do before you start
- what you need to do during the unit
- opportunities for further learning and employment

Unit information

In this project-based unit you learn about garden and planting design principles and how to apply them to real-life designs and the design process. You also learn the process of designing a garden or greenspace area, including producing a client brief, a site survey, a layout plan and a planting plan. You develop your understanding about how to prepare ground for planting, and to source, cost, plan, lay out and plant a range of trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants.

When you have completed the unit, you can:

- describe garden design and planting principles
- design a garden or greenspace area
- carry out planting in a garden or greenspace area

Prior knowledge and skills

While some previous horticultural knowledge or experience is beneficial, you do not need it to study this unit.

Before you start, we recommend that you have completed one or more of the following:

- NC Horticulture at SCQF level 5, ideally to include some level 6 units
- SVQ Horticulture at SCQF level 6
- a relevant City & Guilds qualification at SCQF level 6
- a minimum of one Scottish Higher at grade C or above, or one A-level at grade D or above
- other equivalent qualifications
- relevant industry experience

Assessment

You are likely to be assessed through the production of a portfolio, which allows you to demonstrate your understanding of what you have learned, as well as the practical skills you have developed.

Future progression and employment

If you study the unit as part of HNC Horticulture, you may be able to progress to HND Horticulture or related subject, or directly into employment in the horticulture industry.

Meta-skills

Throughout this unit, you develop meta-skills that are useful for the horticulture sector.

Meta-skills are transferable behaviours and abilities that help you adapt and succeed in life, study and work. There are three categories of meta-skills: self-management, social intelligence and innovation.

Self-management

You develop self-management meta-skills as you carry out surveys, produce plans, and construct hard and soft landscaping features.

Social intelligence

You develop social intelligence meta-skills when you work with others to survey gardens or greenspaces, and construct hard and soft landscaping features. You develop communication, feeling and leading skills when you interact with clients to gather a client brief, present your design, and then construct the garden or greenspace features.

Innovation

You develop innovation meta-skills as you go through reasoning processes, research and design garden or greenspace plans, and select appropriate materials and methods to construct a range of features.

Learning for Sustainability

Throughout this unit, you have the opportunity to develop skills, knowledge and understanding of sustainability.

You learn about social, economic and environmental sustainability principles and how they relate to the horticulture sector. You also develop an understanding of the [United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#).

Administrative information

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History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

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