

NextGen: HN unit specification

Botanic and Historic Garden Horticulture (SCQF level 8)

Unit code: JAU8 48

SCQF level: 8 (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.

Published: October 2026 (version 1.0)

Copyright © Qualifications Scotland 2026

Contents

Unit purpose	1
Unit outcomes	2
Knowledge and skills.....	4
Meta-skills.....	5
Literacies	6
Learning for Sustainability	7
Delivery of unit	8
Additional guidance.....	9
Equality and inclusion	14
Information for learners.....	15
Administrative information.....	18

Unit purpose

This unit provides learners with knowledge and experience of the history, current roles, and management of botanic and historic gardens. They use case studies to develop their knowledge of the evolution of the gardens through time. They look at how they are currently used and managed as landscapes, places for research and learning, and visitor attractions.

Learners explore the diversity of botanic and historic gardens, looking at their individual histories and their wider position as part of geopolitical and colonial legacies, as well as their part in the development of horticulture as a discipline. They consider gardens in their contexts as holders of important collections of plants, community spaces, and agencies of change in the face of global biodiversity loss and climate change.

On completing the unit and on achieving the HND, learners may be able to progress to degree programmes in horticulture. Alternatively, they may want to go directly into employment in the horticulture industry or related work placements.

Entry requirements

Entry to this unit is at your centre's discretion. Before starting this unit, we recommend that learners have completed one or more of the following:

- HNC Horticulture
- a horticultural qualification at level 7
- appropriate work experience in horticulture

Unit outcomes

Learners who complete this unit can:

1. analyse the history and development of botanic and historic gardens
2. evaluate the users and roles of botanic and historic gardens
3. evaluate management issues in botanic and historic gardens at supervisory level
4. produce a management plan for plant display or collection in a botanic or historic garden

Evidence requirements

Learners can evidence their knowledge and skills in one or more ways, such as individual assessments for each outcome, or one or more integrated projects. The degree of integration in the project is at your centre's discretion and should be appropriate to learners' resources and access to suitable case studies.

Learners must provide the following evidence:

Outcome 1

Learners must demonstrate that they can:

- compare and contrast two forms of historic garden styles
- analyse the evolution of a garden of historical importance

Learner evidence should include two outputs. Examples could include a:

- presentation
- video
- written report
- poster
- public interpretation piece

Outcome 2

Learners must demonstrate that they can:

- evaluate the roles of botanic and historic gardens
- identify botanic and historic garden user groups and their needs
- conduct an accessibility review of a site, using appropriate legislation, and laws on equality and diversity, and health and safety
- design resources or outline an interpretation plan for an identified user group of a botanic or historic garden

Outcomes 3 and 4

Learners must gather evidence that demonstrates that they can:

- review, research, evaluate, and make recommendations on one or more curatorial, development or management projects for a botanic or historic garden property
- use findings of the user group and roles review project to form part of their management and curatorial review
- produce an implementation plan or management plan for the project

Examples of learner evidence could include:

- curation: reviewing and making recommendations for existing plant collections and heritage national collections
- thematic collection development: research, teaching, conservation, children's area
- display: curating and developing for teaching, research or conservation
- collection: developing a thematic display area for the public or a collection policy for a botanic garden

Knowledge and skills

Knowledge	Skills
Outcome 1 Learners should understand: • how the history of gardens has evolved, and how it influences their roles and purposes today	Outcome 1 Learners can: • assess the importance of a garden's history in informing its management today • competently use a range of historical sources in research
Outcome 2 Learners should understand: • the range and needs of various botanic and historic garden user groups	Outcome 2 Learners can: • assess the needs of botanic and historic garden user groups • devise appropriate policy or interpretation material for these groups
Outcome 3 Learners should understand: • a range of management issues • the opportunities and challenges facing botanic and historic gardens	Outcome 3 Learners can: • evaluate the impact of management issues • suggest approaches and solutions to identify opportunities and challenges facing botanic and historic gardens • characterise the funding and staffing structures of botanic and historic gardens
Outcome 4 Learners should understand: • how to curate and develop a plant collection	Outcome 4 Learners can: • characterise a plant collection, producing a baseline assessment • devise a development plan for the collection

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:
 - reviewing, researching, evaluating, and making recommendations on a curatorial, development or management project
- adapting:
 - making recommendations for existing plant collections and heritage national collections after review
- initiative:
 - identifying botanic and historic garden user groups and their needs

Social intelligence

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

- communicating:
 - receiving and giving information
- collaborating:
 - working in groups with peers

Innovation

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

- curiosity:
 - analysing the evolution of a garden of historical importance
- critical thinking:
 - designing and implementing a management plan

Literacies

This unit provides opportunities to develop the following literacies.

Numeracy

Learners develop their numeracy skills by considering best financial practice in management planning.

Communication

Learners enhance their communication skills by working in groups, developing projects and discussing related topics.

Digital

Learners improve their digital skills and computer literacy by using digital software to design a management plan for a project.

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

We recommend that you deliver the unit according to your centre's facilities and resources. You should make use of industry contacts and, where possible, organise site visits to help learners to contextualise their understanding.

You can integrate the development of a management plan in outcomes 3 and 4 with Horticulture: Professional Practice at SCQF level 8.

The notional design length for the unit is 120 hours. The amount of time you allocate to each outcome is at your discretion.

Additional guidance

The guidance in this section is not mandatory.

Content and context for this unit

Outcome 1

Evolution of a designed landscape

Learners' evidence should have two outputs, such as a presentation, a video, a report, a poster or a public interpretation piece (at your centre's discretion):

- **Element 1:** Compare and contrast two forms of historical garden style. This can be global, in the abstract, or local, using case studies as key examples, particularly if integrated with element 2 below. For example, a local garden planted in the natural style could be the starting point to explore the natural style in greater depth and contrast with formal Japanese gardens.
- **Element 2:** Analyse the evolution of a case-study garden of historical importance. This may be local and accessible, or anywhere globally if resources are available to provide an appropriately thorough appraisal of the garden.

For both elements, learners should address the modern significance of the styles and the chosen sites. They can combine the elements in a single submission, or they can use element 1 as both a summative piece on its own and as part of a formative submission for element 2, the evolution of garden styles.

Outcome 2

Garden roles and users

Learners appraise the roles of botanic and historic gardens, and identify user groups and their needs. They design a resource for an identified user group of a garden, gardens, or garden organisation. The user group could be a volunteer group or professional organisation, and it need not be a physical garden. The resource could be theoretical or a real-world project.

Learners' choice of output would depend on the situation, for example:

- an accessibility review or assessment: user groups would have accessibility challenges or be responsible for accessibility in the garden
- a health and safety review: for staff, students or visitors, depending on the area or areas of focus
- an interpretation piece, such as a leaflet or information sign: user groups could be public visitors and could include particular subgroups, thematic messaging or similar depending on the situation
- a lesson plan: user groups would be teachers, other educators and learners
- marketing literature or a product range: user groups could be customers in the shop or cafe
- a podcast, blog, vlog or other video resource: user groups could be online visitors
- a visitor review: user groups would be management and other staff. This could include a questionnaire or interview element, if appropriate ethical and GDPR support can be provided, and specific focus areas could be chosen depending on the situation

Learners' outputs should incorporate planning and reflection elements to evidence the choices made in its production. Their evidence should include appropriate consideration of ethics, GDPR, accessibility and equality, as well as health and safety considerations.

This project is well-suited to group work, with each group tackling a different management project. It is also well-suited to learners at this level who are supervising learners at SCQF levels 4, 5, 6 and 7.

Learners can combine the evidence for outcomes 1 and 2 to create a comprehensive review and make management recommendations for an appropriate project in a garden context. However, this structure and degree of integration should be standardised across a given cohort to allow for better tracking (even if there are a number of project groups working on different projects).

Outcome 3

Garden management

Learners review a site's operations, strengths and challenges; characterise funding and staffing structures; and discuss recent or forthcoming large projects at the site or sites. In particularly large or complex cases, they can focus on a subsection of a garden or site, such as a glasshouse department.

One part of the process should incorporate a planning element. This might look at a broad calendar of activities for a typical year, incorporating key horticultural elements and, if appropriate, planned public-facing events. The main focus of this planning element should be on the horticultural operations and resources required.

Learners can present their evidence in any appropriate format — a presentation, a poster, a series of participatory discussions, a written report, factsheets or a combination of several of these. It should incorporate the planning element, typically in the form of a calendar (digital or written).

It may be useful to incorporate Gantt charts; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analyses; and similar time-management and planning tools. Learners can gather information from corporate planning documents, online research and, if appropriate ethics procedures are followed, through interviews and discussions with staff.

One other option is for learners to produce a comparative overview of several sites they have visited, with one investigated in greater depth. Learners should, however, be able to produce the outputs for any site, and need not have visited it. A degree of reflection on how easy it is to access sources of information is useful.

It is important for learners to be aware of political and professional sensitivities in this activity.

Outcome 4

Collections management

This involves project development on a specific collection, and can be theoretical or developed as a plan to be implemented by the learner group. They can develop an existing collection or introduce a new one, using similar research skills in both scenarios.

Learners' evidence could be a curatorial review in the form of a document with a current baseline assessment and plans for the development of the project and maintenance once established. It should:

- determine the purpose of the collection
- identify resources and use them to characterise the collections:
 - For existing collections, a 'baseline' survey is necessary. Learners should investigate existing records (if any) to determine what is held in the collections, and/or use ground-truthing or inventorying to establish the baseline. This is an excellent opportunity to hone identification skills using appropriate resources.
 - For both existing and new collections, learners must assess the key challenges, and what resources are necessary and whether they are available, to implement the project. For example, are new plants required and, if so, what is recommended and why, where would they be sourced from, how, and at what cost?
 - Learners should include a maintenance plan for the collection.

This curatorial review could optionally incorporate, or be replaced by, a presentation to stakeholders.

Examples of collections could be:

- horticultural and/or taxonomic: a plant heritage national collection, a garden's woody plant or trees, aquatic plants, or rhododendron collections
- a thematic collection: research, teaching, conservation, a community or children's area; or a thematic display area for the public based around, for example, geography or medicinal plants

Resources

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.

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

Botanic and Historic Garden Horticulture (SCQF level 8)

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

This unit provides you with knowledge and experience of the history, current roles and management of botanic and historic gardens. You use case studies to develop your knowledge of the evolution of the gardens through time and how they are currently used and managed as landscapes, places for research and learning, and visitor attractions.

On completion of the unit, you can:

1. analyse the history and development of botanic and historic gardens
2. evaluate the users and roles of botanic and historic gardens
3. evaluate issues of management in botanic and historic gardens at supervisory level
4. produce a management plan for plant display or collection in a botanic or historic garden

Prior knowledge and skills

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

- HNC Horticulture
- a horticultural qualification at level 7
- appropriate work experience in horticulture

Assessment

Your knowledge and skills can be assessed in various ways, such as individual assessments for each outcome, or one or more integrated projects.

Future progression and employment

On completion of the unit, and on achievement of the HND, you may be able to progress to the BSc in Horticulture. Alternatively, you may be able to go directly into employment in the horticulture industry or related work placements.

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 your self-management skills as you focus on researching, planning and implementing your project; adapt your plant choices on the basis of your research findings; and identify garden user groups and their needs.

Social intelligence

You develop your social intelligence skills as you improve your communication and collaboration in group work.

Innovation

You develop your innovation skills as you analyse an interesting garden's evolution, and design and implement a garden management plan.

Learning for Sustainability

Throughout this unit, you 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

Published: October 2026 (version 1.0)

Superclass: SF

History of changes

Version	Description of change	Date

Please check [our website](#) to ensure you are using the most up-to-date version of this unit.

The information in this unit specification may be reproduced in support of Qualifications Scotland qualifications only on a non-commercial basis. If it is reproduced, Qualifications Scotland must be clearly acknowledged as the source. If it is to be reproduced for any other purpose, written permission must be obtained from permissions@qualifications.gov.scot.