



RHS Qualifications

Examination: RHS Level 2 Certificate in Practical Horticulture

OCA

Examination series: June 2023

1013 candidates sat this assessment on June 28th 2023.

The mean mark achieved by candidates in the OCA was 80.91%.

Candidate results are tabulated below:

Fail	Pass
4.9%	95.1%

General Introductory comments

This is the first examination series for the new RHS Level 2 Certificate in Practical Horticulture. It is not possible to make valid comparisons between candidate achievement within this examination and those of the previous Level 2 Certificate in Practical Horticulture examination series. This is, in part, due to the new qualification recognising candidate achievement at pass, merit and distinction, while the qualification it replaced simply recognised candidate achievement at pass/fail.

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

Online Competence Assessment (OCA)

The first OCA was held in June 2023.

Section A

Plant Identification

Assessment	Candidate pass rate
OCA	96.8% of Candidates achieved a minimum of 70% to pass this section. Of those who passed, 1.5% achieved 70%, 5% achieved 80%, 12.5% achieved 90% and 81% achieved 100%.

Section B of the OCA is considered below:

Candidates were presented with a series of forced answer questions.

The forced answer questions had varying mark values and were clustered around different topics.

100 marks are available.

Questions included in OCA papers are designed to assess candidates' knowledge of the published qualification specification for the RHS Level 2 Certificate in Practical Horticulture.

Some candidates and centres, in a survey conducted after the OCA, expressed concerns that the selection of questions within the OCA did not reflect the published qualification specification, or expressed surprise at the spread of topics included in the OCA.

Candidates and centres are reminded that the two PCAs and the OCA are designed to assess the whole qualification with minimal duplication. Candidates and Centres are also reminded that it is a requirement of all awarding bodies that all assessment outcomes are capable of being assessed and are assessed within a reasonable period of time.

When reviewing the spread of OCA questions against the qualification specification, it is necessary to consider the range of assessment outcomes assessed in the two PCAs.

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

The questions within the OCA were authored to:

- assess candidate knowledge at three levels of demand, low, medium, and high.
 - questions with low demand, require the recall of basic horticultural knowledge and facts
 - questions with a medium demand require the application of knowledge
 - questions with high demand require higher level thinking and reasoning, or the application of basic concepts into new situations.
 - reflect the practical/applied nature of the qualification
-
- assess the Qualification-wide outcomes
 - Health and Safety
 - Best Practice
 - Sustainability
 - Equality and diversity
-
- assess the 8 Topics
 - Plant Identification
 - Plant Establishment
 - Plant Propagation
 - Plant Health
 - Plant Care
 - Plant Pruning
 - Garden Features
 - Grassed Areas

Pre-examination candidate support:

As a result of the candidate feedback received changes will be made to the pre-examination support that is given to candidates. This will include:

- a greater notice period with regard to minimum IT specifications (browser versions) etc.
- the revision of the step by step documentation to assist candidates in the logging in process. This document will also include handy hints, identifying, for example where the online calculator is to be found, the position of the checker to show progress, or missed questions within the examinations etc.
- the opportunity to have a 'practice' examination that uses the same question formats and conventions as the OCA, to allow candidates to familiarise themselves with the style of the examination.

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

Candidate response by question

Candidate responses to questions varied from a pass rate of 61.3% to 91.5%.

Question	Average candidate score	RHS Qualifications feedback to candidates and centres
Propagation by leaf lamina	84%	Questions are authored against the qualification specification, which states in Topic 3, Element 5 Cutting types and techniques to include leaf lamina.
Growing media preparation	98% highest scoring question. 55% lowest scoring question.	<p>The question was made up of 4 parts.</p> <p>The question with the highest candidate score, required candidates to correctly identify the purpose of handling growing media prior to filling pots.</p> <p>The question with the weakest score asked candidates to identify module containers and explain their advantages.</p> <p>These questions related to Topic 3 Element 3 (growing media requirements for named plants) (select growing media to meet requirements) (air filled porosity) Topic 3 Element 4 Factors impacting on seed germination, emergence, and establishment rates – growing media).</p>
Pricking out of seedlings	75%	This question asked candidates to review an image and to state whether a seedling was being handled correctly during pricking out. Candidates were then asked to justify their answer.
Propagation of <i>Salvia rosmarinus</i> with	62.33%	This question was made up of 6 parts.

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

Question	Average candidate score	RHS Qualifications feedback to candidates and centres
associated plant knowledge		<p>The first two parts asked candidates to respond to questions relating to propagation technique.</p> <p>The third part of the question related to the timing for taking semi-ripe cuttings.</p> <p>The final three questions assessed candidates plant knowledge to the standard set in Topic 1, Element 1, AO2.</p> <p>In this case <i>Salvia rosmarinus</i> was selected as it is in the Level 2 specimen list.</p>
Legislation	75.5%	<p>There were two questions on legislation, which were worth a total of two marks.</p> <p>The first related to a risk assessment for spring potting, the second to protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.</p> <p>The Health and Safety Qualification-wide outcome states in bullet point 1, knowledge and compliance of current legislation as it relates to horticulture.</p> <p>The Equality and diversity Qualification-wide outcome states in bullet point 1, knowledge and compliance with all current legislation as it relates to horticulture.</p> <p>These questions therefore directly relate to the published Qualification Specification and are appropriate within the OCA.</p>

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

Question	Average candidate score	RHS Qualifications feedback to candidates and centres
Weed identification, and associated plant knowledge.	81%	<p>The image provided to candidates was of high quality, there was also the ability to use the zoom function built into modern browsers to magnify the image (or text). RHS Qualifications will include details of features such as this in the preparatory document released to centres prior to the next OCA.</p> <p>This question was based on the identification of non-cultivated plants as specified in Topic 1, Element 1, and apply the terms ephemeral, annual, biennial, perennial, shrub and tree.</p>
Hedges	74.88%	<p>This cluster of questions was worth a combined total of 8 marks. This question allowed sub questions with varying levels of demand to be set for candidates.</p> <p>Candidates were first asked to select 4 plants suitable for use as hedges (based on plants included in the Level 2 specimen list).</p> <p>The question went on to show an operative trimming a hedge, with candidates being asked to suggest a time of year when this operation would take place.</p> <p>The cluster of questions continued with two applied questions relating to the Qualification-wide outcome Health and Safety.</p> <p>Candidates expressed concern with regards to the final question in this cluster, which asked candidates to select a hedging species that is not affected by Fireblight.</p> <p>The Qualification Specification specifically includes Fireblight in Topic 6, Element 3, AO3, the role of hedges as hosts for plant diseases e.g. Fireblight.</p>

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

Question	Average candidate score	RHS Qualifications feedback to candidates and centres
		<p>Topic 1, Element 1, AO2 requires candidates to be able to select plants to meet a range of criteria including hedges.</p> <p>This is an example of a higher demand question.</p>
Management of grassed areas	70.86%	<p>This cluster of questions was worth a total of 7 marks.</p> <p>Questions related to a number of areas, with integration into the qualification wide outcomes. Examples include the use of boards when laying turf, the sustainable use of water when establishing turf, types of mowers, user adjustments that can be made to mowing equipment, and a final question, rated as high demand, which required the candidate to consider mowing from a sustainability perspective.</p> <p>This final question attracted comment from candidates, expressing concern that they had not been taught this mowing technique. This was a high demand question which required the candidate to apply and integrate their horticultural knowledge to be able to review 4 possible responses, and through a process of elimination arrive at the correct answer.</p> <p>With regard to the final question, the term forb is included in the Qualification Specification in Topic 1, Element 1, Topic 8, Element 1, and Topic 8, Element 5.</p>
Soils and scented plants	91.5%	This cluster of questions related to soil texture, and plant knowledge with reference to scented plants.
Hanging basket	73%	This was a high demand question, that required candidates to use their horticultural knowledge to respond to a statement determining if the statement was true, or false.

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

Question	Average candidate score	RHS Qualifications feedback to candidates and centres
Fertilisers	80%	The two questions in this cluster integrated a knowledge of fertilisers with sustainability as required within Topic 2, Element 6, and Topic 3 Element 3.
Plant Health Risks	82.7% 98% highest scoring question. 37% lowest scoring question.	Candidates were presented with 10 images within this cluster of questions. Each related to a plant health risk taken from the RHS Level 2 specimen list. The health risk with the lowest score, was capsid damage on apples, and the highest scoring question showed an image of a leaf showing magnesium deficiency.
Natural predators	81.5%	RHS Qualifications would like to reassure candidates and centres that this cluster of questions are entirely based on the requirements of the Qualification specification.

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

Question	Average candidate score	RHS Qualifications feedback to candidates and centres
		<p>The first question required candidates to identify a 7-spot ladybird as a natural predator. The second question required candidates to indicate which plant pest is controlled by the 7-spot ladybird.</p> <p>The third question required candidates to identify a lacewing as a natural predator. The fourth question required candidates to state the lifecycle stage that eats aphids.</p> <p>The fifth question allowed candidates to identify a further common predator of plant pests, the Blue tit, with the final question requiring candidates to state that Blue tits eat insects and caterpillars.</p> <p>Some candidates were concerned that they were being asked to identify a garden bird. Questioning the relevance of this to the Qualification Specification.</p> <p>Topic 4, Element 1 of the Qualification Specification states the requirement that candidates are able to identify natural predators. As Blue tits are well documented as natural predators of garden insect and caterpillar pests this is a fair assessment of this assessment outcome.</p> <p>Some candidates were concerned about the inclusion of lifecycle stages. Topic 4 Element 1 states, Identification of natural predators at key lifecycle stages. It is therefore consistent with the Qualification Specification to assess candidates on the identification of natural predators, and to include key lifecycle stages.</p> <p>With regards to pest knowledge, the Qualification Specification states that a detailed knowledge of pest (rather than predator) lifecycles is not required. Some pests have</p>

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

Question	Average candidate score	RHS Qualifications feedback to candidates and centres
		<p>complex lifecycles, and simplified versions of the lifecycle of these pests are sufficient for Level 2 qualifications.</p> <p>From the comments received it is apparent that candidates and centres would benefit from additional guidance relating to breadth and depth. This will be available to centres in the late summer/early autumn of 2023.</p>
Pruning	84.57%	This was a cluster of questions worth 7 marks related to pruning.
Fences	82.75%	<p>There was a cluster of questions worth 8 marks related to fencing.</p> <p>Candidates were required to answer a series of questions relating to fences and trellis.</p> <p>These questions were directly based on the assessment outcomes published within the Qualification Specification.</p> <p>The Qualification specification states at AO1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'The use of timber features in the garden including fences, pergolas and trellis' ▪ 'The maintenance requirements of timber elements, to include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'Condition checks' <p>AO2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 'Visual inspection of timber elements to inform maintenance/replacement decisions.'

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

Question	Average candidate score	RHS Qualifications feedback to candidates and centres
		<p>The questions on fencing were basic requiring candidates to identify trellis, and fencing types.</p> <p>A basic knowledge of fencing types is required within the use of timber features, and the maintenance of timber features. If, for example a replacement fence panel was to be required as part of maintenance, the type of panel would need to be specified.</p> <p>It is however accepted by RHS Qualifications, as a result of candidate comments, that further guidance is required relating to breadth and depth throughout this Topic. This will be available in late summer/early autumn of 2023.</p>
Obelisk	86.5%	<p>There was a cluster of questions worth 4 marks related to an obelisk, and a range of suitable plants assessing both Plant knowledge (Topic 1) and Garden features (Topic 7).</p>
Paving and PPE	70.2%	<p>Following a careful review of the Qualification Specification RHS Qualifications can confirm that the question relating to cement mixes for pointing was included in error. The syllabus states 'A knowledge of cement and concrete mixes is not required'. An exams officer email was sent to centres once this issue was identified. All candidates were credited with 1 mark regardless of their response, to ensure that no candidate was disadvantaged by this error.</p> <p>The remaining aspects of the question were a fair method of assessing an integration of candidate knowledge from Topic 7, and the Qualification-wide outcomes.</p>
Planting	84.5%	<p>There was a cluster of questions worth 7 marks related to planting operations.</p>

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.

Question	Average candidate score	RHS Qualifications feedback to candidates and centres
Calculations	61.3%	<p>This is a further example of a higher demand question.</p> <p>The online platform used by RHS Qualifications includes a built-in calculator to assist with calculations. RHS Qualifications will issue further guidance and clarification on using the online platform prior to the next OCA.</p> <p>The wording of the question was clearly assessing the candidate's skill in calculating for quantities of hedging in three different scenarios, single row, single row to include additional plants in case of plant failure and a double row.</p>

Further copies of this Report are available from rhs.org.uk

Copyright © 2023. All rights reserved.

RHS Qualifications retains the copyright on all of its publications.

Centres approved to offer RHS Qualifications are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use.