RHS Qualifications
Examiner Comments

Examination:	RHS Level 2
Unit:	Unit 2
Examination date:	February 2026

General Introductory Comments

Examiners' comments are produced by RHS Qualifications following each examination series. They are intended to help students to prepare for RHS examinations by having a better understanding of the requirements of the paper. These comments are also intended to help tutors to understand the challenges that candidates may have in developing their responses to the questions.

There have now been multiple papers for the Level 2 examinations, and all stakeholders are now familiar with the format, structure and demand of the papers.

The RHS Level 2 examination papers are designed to assess the contents of the Qualification Specification according to Ofqual's level descriptors.

At Level 2 these state that candidates should:

- possess a knowledge and understanding of facts, procedures and ideas within the field of horticulture
- be able to complete well defined tasks and address straightforward problems
- be aware of a range of information that is relevant to horticulture and demonstrate an ability to interpret and use relevant information and ideas to inform actions
- be able to apply knowledge, both to unfamiliar situations and by exploring links within and across Topics and Elements.

Overview of Examination

Levels of demand

Questions were set at three levels of demand within this paper.

Questions that require a recall of basic factual knowledge are classified as being low demand.

Questions that require the recall of more technical concepts or the application of knowledge are classified as medium demand.

Questions that require the recall of advanced technical concepts; and which require the application of knowledge, both to unfamiliar situations and by exploring links within and across Topics and Elements are classified as high demand.

General comments

As with previous examination series candidate performance was impacted by two key factors.

The amount of preparation the candidate had undertaken for the examination.
The application of examination technique in each of the three sections of the examination.

Candidates who were well prepared and who applied effective examination technique by tailoring their responses to the specific requirements of the question were able to achieve higher marks. These candidates demonstrated secure horticultural knowledge and were able to state relevant facts and principles, apply these through appropriate examples, and link key factors and influences to show integrated understanding.

Some candidates demonstrated strong horticultural knowledge and were able to state facts and principles, provide examples, and show understanding of key influences. However, these candidates did not sufficiently link their knowledge to the requirements of the question. As a result, responses often demonstrated what candidates knew about the topic, rather than addressing the question directly, which limited the marks that could be awarded.

Other candidates demonstrated gaps in knowledge, either by omitting parts of the question or by providing responses that were brief and undeveloped. Responses that achieved lower marks often lacked the technical depth required for this examination. These responses typically named or described a horticultural concept, but did not demonstrate the knowledge required by a horticultural practitioner. The responses were often vague, lacked detail or evidence of understanding.

In contrast, responses demonstrating advanced technical knowledge explained underlying processes and principles, used accurate subject-specific language, and applied this knowledge directly to the question. Stronger answers showed clear links between facts, examples, and outcomes, demonstrating understanding rather than simple recall.

Some candidates failed to gain the maximum available mark as they did not carefully consider how their responses accurately answer the requirements of the question. Candidates who share all they know about a topic, rather than answer the specific question set gain lower marks.

Qualification Specification and Guidance Document

The Qualification Specification sets out the curriculum content on which candidates will be examined.

To support delivery, the 2025 Guidance Document (Version 5 of which is available from RHS Qualifications and downloadable from Quartz) provides centres with additional clarification on how to interpret the Assessment Outcomes at the breadth and depth appropriate for a Level 2 qualification.

It is important to note that the Guidance Document is not a comprehensive teaching manual. Instead, it highlights examples of key areas within each Assessment Outcome.
For example, if an Assessment Outcome in the Specification lists five areas, the Guidance Document may only expand on one area as an illustration. Centres and candidates are then expected to apply the same level of depth and breadth to the remaining areas.

Section A

Questions 1 – 20

General comments on Section A

Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) are designed to assess candidate's knowledge and understanding of the concepts covered in the 4 Topics and the 4 Qualification-wide outcomes that make up this unit.

Candidate performance varies across the three sections of the examination: with many candidates performing more strongly in Section A, than Section B and C.

In this examination series candidates generally scored strongly in Section A.

Candidates and centres are reminded of good examination technique with regards to MCQs Candidates should:

- Carefully read the question
- Underline any key or important words in the stem of the question
- Score through inappropriate answers
- Select the correct answer to be recorded on the response grid.

Section B

Each question is considered separately.

Question 1

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding relating to the three pillars of sustainability.

The first part of the question required candidates to explain one way in which a horticultural business can support economic sustainability.

Stronger responses:

- referred to the provision of employment for local people
- referred to indirect support to the local economy, for example through local procurement of goods and services
- referred to careful financial management, including cost control and efficient resource use, to ensure long-term business viability

Weaker responses:

- discussed unrelated topics, for example 'right plant, right place' without linking to economic outcomes
- misinterpreted economic sustainability as environmental sustainability
- provided vague or undeveloped responses lacking clear explanation

The second part of the question required candidates to explain one way a horticultural business can support social equity.

Stronger responses:

- linked improvements in local landscapes to enhanced wellbeing and access to green space
- referred to engaging local communities through volunteering opportunities, for example in community gardens
- identified the provision of apprenticeships or training opportunities for young people and underrepresented groups

Weaker responses:

- provided vague and undeveloped responses
- did not clearly relate their answer to the concept of social equity

The final part of the question required candidates to explain one way in which a horticultural business can support environmental protection.

Stronger responses:

- referred to recycling green waste into compost to reduce landfill
- identified supporting biodiversity through habitat creation, such as ponds, or protecting rare species
- referred to the use of peat-free growing media to reduce negative environmental impacts

Weaker responses:

- were less common in this section, but where present, lacked clarity or did not clearly link actions to environmental outcomes

Summary

Overall, performance was variable. While many candidates were able to provide valid examples for environmental protection, fewer demonstrated a secure understanding of economic sustainability and social equity. Some candidates struggled to distinguish clearly between the three pillars, resulting in misdirected or incomplete responses.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a clear understanding of the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social, and environmental
- practise applying each pillar to realistic horticultural contexts
- ensure responses are clearly linked to the specific pillar identified in the question
- provide developed explanations rather than simple statements to meet the command word 'explain'

Question 2

This question assessed candidates' knowledge of plant adaptations.

The first part of the question reminded candidates that the leaves of some plants are adapted to produce oils, before requiring candidates to explain the benefits that these oils provide to the plant.

Stronger responses:

- correctly stated that oils released from leaves can deter pests
- referred to bitter-tasting oils reducing herbivory
- explained that some oils can provide protection from ultraviolet light, reducing the risk of leaf scorch

Weaker responses:

- provided vague and undeveloped responses
- confused oils stored in seeds as energy reserves with oils produced and released by leaves
- confused floral scent with leaf oil production, demonstrating insecure understanding of plant adaptations

The second part of the question required candidates to explain one reason, in addition to those given, why a horticulturist would select a plant that produces oils.

Stronger responses:

- referred to the use of oils for flavour, particularly in culinary herbs
- identified the commercial production of essential oils as a horticultural crop
- referred to the use of aromatic plants in companion planting to deter pests

Weaker responses:

- provided vague and undeveloped responses
- failed to link the presence of oils to a clear horticultural use or benefit

Summary

Overall, performance on this question was mixed. While many candidates demonstrated some awareness of the protective role of leaf oils, a significant number showed confusion between different plant structures and functions. The second part of the question was occasionally limited by a lack of applied horticultural knowledge.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a clear understanding of plant adaptations
- distinguish between different plant structures and their roles, for example leaves, seeds, and flowers
- practise applying Plant Science II knowledge to horticultural contexts
- provide clear, developed explanations to meet the requirements of the command verb 'explain'

Question 3

This question assessed candidates' further applied knowledge and understanding of sustainability.

Candidates were required to describe three distinct changes to horticultural practice that could reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Stronger responses:

- described the transition from internal combustion engine (ICE) powered equipment to manual or battery/electricity-powered alternatives
- explained the benefits of propagating plants on site to reduce transport distances and associated carbon emissions
- described reducing reliance on short-term bedding plants produced under heated protection, replacing these with longer-term plantings such as hardy herbaceous perennials to reduce the emissions associated with plant production practices
- referred to adaptations in cultivation systems, such as minimal cultivation or no-dig practices, to retain soil carbon and reduce emissions

Weaker responses:

- were vague, incomplete or incorrect
- did not clearly link the suggested changes to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions
- provided responses that were environmentally relevant but not directly linked to greenhouse gas reduction, for example avoiding microplastics

Summary

High-scoring candidates provided precise, relevant, and well-developed answers that clearly linked horticultural practices to reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Weaker responses often lacked this clarity or failed to make the required connection between action and outcome.

Future candidates are advised to:

- ensure they can apply sustainability principles to practical horticultural scenarios
- focus specifically on greenhouse gas emissions when required, rather than broader environmental issues
- provide clear explanations linking the practice described to its impact on emissions
- revise a range of sustainable horticultural practices and understand their environmental benefits

Question 4

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of community horticulture, with a specific focus on the role of community kitchens in addressing social and economic challenges.

The first part of the question required candidates to describe one way that a community kitchen can help to reduce poverty or food insecurity.

Stronger responses:

- provided clear and relevant examples, such as providing free or low-cost meals
- identified opportunities for volunteering within the kitchen, linking this to pathways into employment and income generation

Weaker responses:

- focused on food production in community gardens rather than the role of community kitchens
- did not clearly link their response to reducing poverty or food insecurity, for example suggesting recipe exchanges without context
- discussed general social benefits without addressing the economic or food access focus of the question

The second part of the question required candidates to explain one way that a community kitchen can help people to learn new skills.

Stronger responses:

- explained how community kitchens can offer structured cookery classes
- referred to training in food hygiene and safe food handling practices
- identified support with meal planning and budgeting, linking these to practical life skills

Weaker responses:

- described the outcomes of learning new skills, such as increased confidence or employability, without explaining how the kitchen facilitates this learning
- referred to skills associated with community gardening, such as plant propagation, which were outside the scope of the question

The final part of the question required candidates to explain one way that a community kitchen can build social connection within the community.

Stronger responses:

- explained how shared meals bring people together and encourage interaction
- referred to the use of volunteers from diverse backgrounds to promote inclusion and cohesion
- identified the role of community kitchens as spaces for events, workshops, and informal social interaction

Weaker responses:

- focused on community gardening activities rather than community kitchen-based provision
- restricted responses to general benefits of community horticulture without linking specifically to social connection within a community kitchen setting

Summary

High scoring candidates provided clear, relevant examples that were consistently linked to the specific role of community kitchens. Responses were focused, avoided drift into broader community horticulture, and addressed the command verbs appropriately.

Future candidates are advised to:

- read the question carefully to ensure responses are specific to the context given (e.g. community kitchens rather than community gardens)
- address the command verbs directly, ensuring that “describe” and “explain” are applied appropriately
- make clear links between the activity described and the intended outcome (e.g. reducing food insecurity or building social connection)
- avoid generalised responses and ensure examples are precise and relevant to the question set

Question 5

This question was designed to assess candidates' integrated knowledge of soils and biodiversity, requiring them to apply understanding across both below-ground and above-ground habitats.

The first part of the question required candidates to state two ways in which soil acts as an important habitat in a garden setting.

Stronger responses:

- identified key attributes of soil as a habitat, including:
  - the provision of shelter
  - a food source
  - relatively stable temperature conditions
- referred to soil as a living environment supporting a range of organisms, including micro-organisms and soil fauna

Weaker responses:

- provided vague, inaccurate or poorly expressed responses
- made simplistic or unclear statements, for example suggesting soil is important "because it is out of the way" which lacks the technical language and development required at Level 2.

The second part of the question required candidates to explain one way in which a horticulturist could maintain a garden to encourage soil-dwelling wildlife.

Stronger responses:

- explained how reduced cultivation (e.g. no-dig approaches) protects soil structure and prevents damage to soil macro-organisms
- explained how the addition of organic matter, such as mulches, increases food availability for soil micro-organisms
- referred to reducing or avoiding synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, linking this to improved conditions for soil biodiversity

Weaker responses:

- focused on plant-based habitats above ground rather than soil as a habitat
- provided limited or underdeveloped responses that did not meet the requirement for explanation, often lacking a clear link between the action and its benefit to soil organisms

The final part of the question required candidates to describe one feature that could be included in a garden design to create or enhance habitats for wildlife above ground.

Stronger responses:

- suggested appropriate and relevant features, such as hedgerows acting as wildlife corridors, or providing shelter and food
- referred to the inclusion of wildlife ponds to support a range of species
- identified meadow planting to provide habitat for insects, or small mammals
- suggested log piles as habitats for invertebrates and small animals

Weaker responses:

- in some cases, responses lacked sufficient detail to meet the requirements of the command verb "describe"
- a minority of candidates did not clearly distinguish between above-ground and below-ground habitats, for example by referring to the habitat provided by trees

Summary

This question was generally well answered, with many candidates demonstrating a sound understanding of both soil as a habitat and how gardens benefit wildlife. However, some candidates failed to read the question carefully, leading to a loss of focus, while others did not provide sufficient development in their responses to access all available marks.

Future candidates are advised to:

- read each part of the question carefully to ensure responses are clearly focused on the context given (e.g. soil vs above-ground habitats)
- develop responses fully where explanation is required, ensuring a clear link between action and outcome
- use precise technical horticultural language where appropriate to strengthen responses
- avoid vague or generalised statements and instead provide clear, relevant detail

Question 6

This question was designed to assess candidates' knowledge and application of plant adaptations that favour wildlife, requiring both accurate plant identification and an understanding of functional plant adaptations and the wildlife they benefit.

The first part of the question required candidates to name one plant that has a distinct adaptation that favours wildlife.

Stronger responses:

- correctly named an appropriate plant using its scientific name
- selected suitable plant examples with clearly identifiable adaptations to support wildlife

Weaker responses:

- used common plant names and therefore did not gain the full mark allocation
- named plants that did not have a clear or relevant adaptation that favours wildlife

The second part of the question required candidates to name the specific adaptation of the chosen plant that benefits wildlife.

Stronger responses:

- correctly identified specific adaptations of the named plant, such as thorns, prickles, berries, or leaf hairs (trichomes)
- demonstrated secure botanical knowledge, in some cases exceeding the requirements of the qualification specification, which was fully credited

Weaker responses:

- suggested adaptations that were not present in the named plant, for example incorrectly stating that the named plant had thorns
- described general plant characteristics rather than naming a specific adaptation from Topic 1, Plant Science II

Candidates were then required to state how the named adaptation benefits wildlife.

Stronger responses:

- clearly linked the adaptation to its function, for example stating that:
    - thorns or prickles provide protection for nesting birds
    - berries act as a food source, particularly in winter
    - trichomes trap moisture, providing water for small organisms

Weaker responses:

- failed to clearly state the benefit to wildlife
- provided vague or incomplete explanations without linking adaptation to function

The final part of the question required candidates to name the type of wildlife that benefits from the adaptation.

Stronger responses:

- correctly identified relevant wildlife, such as:
    - songbirds benefiting from protective thorny structures
    - small mammals, such as field mice, feeding on berries
    - insects (e.g. bees) benefiting from water retained by trichomes

Weaker responses:

- provided vague or overly general responses, for example 'animals' or 'insects', without specificity
- selected wildlife that did not logically relate to the adaptation described

The question then required candidates to repeat this process, allowing them to demonstrate depth and breadth of knowledge.

Summary

High scoring candidates demonstrated accurate plant knowledge, used scientific names correctly, and provided clear, logical links between plant adaptations and their benefits to specific types of wildlife. Weaker responses often lacked precision, particularly in plant naming and in linking adaptations to the wildlife they benefit.

Future candidates are advised to:

- use scientific plant names wherever required to access full marks
- ensure that the named plant and adaptation are correctly matched
- revise key plant adaptations from the specification and understand their positive impacts on biodiversity, and their role in promoting food webs in the garden
- provide clear, specific links between adaptation, benefit, and the type of wildlife supported
- avoid vague or generalised responses and instead use precise, relevant examples

Question 7

This question was designed to assess candidates' knowledge and application of the use of plants within a garden.

The first part of the question required candidates to name one plant that is suitable for use as a hedge.

The majority of candidates were able to name a suitable plant for use as a garden hedge.

Stronger responses used accurate scientific plant names, while weaker responses relied on common names.

The second part of the question required candidates to explain how the named plant is adapted to make it a suitable hedging plant.

Stronger responses:

- stated that the plant produces rapid growth, allowing for quicker establishment
- referred to evergreen foliage providing a permanent screen throughout the year
- explained that small leaves allow for tight clipping and a neat appearance
- referred to resilience and the ability to tolerate repeated pruning or trimming

Weaker responses:

- were vague and undeveloped
- made general descriptive comments about hedges, rather than explaining specific plant adaptations
- failed to relate the adaptation directly to the suitability of the plant for hedging purposes

The third and final part of the question required candidates to state three reasons why hedges are used as garden boundaries.

Stronger responses:

- referred to the biodiversity benefits of hedges, including the provision of habitat, nesting and roosting sites, and food sources for wildlife
- explained the role of hedges in forming wildlife corridors
- referred to sustainability benefits, noting that hedges are natural living boundaries that may require fewer manufactured materials than fences that rely on metal, plastics or wood
- explained practical and horticultural advantages, such as hedges acting as permeable windbreaks in exposed sites
- referred to the aesthetic value of hedges and their contribution to garden style and visual appeal

Weaker responses:

- were vague and lacked development
- provided general descriptions of hedges without clearly stating why they are used as garden boundaries
- repeated earlier points without adding distinct reasons

Summary

This question was generally well answered. Most candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of suitable hedging plants and the practical uses of hedges within gardens. Higher-scoring responses were

characterised by accurate plant knowledge, clear application of horticultural principles, and secure explanations linked directly to the question.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a secure knowledge of suitable garden plants, including the use of scientific plant names
- revision should focus not only on naming plants, but also understanding how plant adaptations relate to horticultural use
- avoid low-level descriptive responses by developing more technical and applied horticultural knowledge
- read command words carefully and ensure explanations are fully developed and linked directly to the question asked.

Question 8

This question was designed to assess candidates' integrated knowledge of Arts and Crafts gardens, and the use of plant support structures to reinforce the design characteristics of the wider garden or landscape.

The question required candidates to state two distinct types of plant support suitable for use within an Arts and Crafts garden.

Stronger responses included:

- the use of trellis
- the use of pergolas
- the use of obelisks
- the use of rope swags
- the use of woven willow or hazel structures

Weaker responses:

- tended to be vague, descriptive, and undeveloped
- suggested structures that were more appropriate to formal gardens or unrelated garden styles
- failed to identify plant support structures that reflected the Arts and Crafts aesthetic

Candidates were then required to justify their choice of plant support structure by explaining how it would support the design characteristics of an Arts and Crafts garden.

Stronger responses included justifying:

- the use of trellis through its artisan appearance and the use of locally sourced timber
- the use of pergolas constructed from local materials, for example stone pillars or hand-forged metalwork produced by local craftspeople, with proportions linked to surrounding buildings
- the use of obelisks constructed from timber grown within the garden, often incorporating hand-crafted or rustic detailing
- the use of rope swags, with supports made from local timber and rope materials that reflected natural or maritime themes, including reclaimed rope or natural fibres such as jute
- the use of woven willow or hazel structures, hand-crafted from materials grown within the garden, celebrating craftsmanship and natural imperfections

Weaker responses:

- lacked detail and development
- demonstrated limited understanding of Arts and Crafts garden principles
- failed to apply knowledge of garden style appropriately, often referring to structures better suited to alternative garden styles

Summary

Many candidates struggled to provide fully developed and applied responses capable of accessing higher marks. While some candidates were able to identify suitable plant support structures, fewer were able to justify their choices through secure reference to the design principles of Arts and Crafts gardens.
Future candidates are advised to:

- develop the ability to integrate and apply knowledge from different areas of the qualification specification within a single response

- gain a secure understanding of historic and contemporary garden styles, including the features that define them
- practise linking garden features and structures to wider design concepts
- ensure responses are fully developed and clearly justified, rather than descriptive.

Section C

Candidate responses in Section C are graded against the assessment ladder, shown on the following page. Centres and candidates are advised to review this carefully, as it illustrates how assessment decisions are made when grading long-form responses.

To further support understanding of the assessment process, this report includes examples of candidate responses accompanied by examiner commentary explaining how decisions were reached.

Performance in Section C ranged from stronger candidates who:

provided detailed responses
demonstrated a strong level of technical horticultural knowledge
produced concise, logical, and well-structured responses
integrated knowledge from different relevant topic areas to provide holistic answers
fully met the requirements of the question without including irrelevant material or omitting essential points.

By contrast, weaker responses often:

provided responses based on their knowledge of the topic rather than the requirement of the question
provided undeveloped, vague or inaccurate responses

In addition to horticultural knowledge, responses are reviewed against the following criteria:

Indicative content
Strength of response
Integration

Strength of response

Stronger responses:
developed a logical argument directly addressing the question
drew upon reliable information sources
remained consistently relevant
expressed clarity of thought
demonstrated sound knowledge of horticultural practices.

Assessment ladder (for information)

Band	Mark range	Summary	Description
4	12 - 15	Fully developed (Total)	**A highly detailed, comprehensive, fully relevant response, addressing all aspects of the question** ☐ No irrelevant or incorrect material or observations at the top end of the mark range: otherwise only very minor errors/omissions (which do not detract from an otherwise strong response) ☐ Full integration/clear links demonstrated with other appropriate topics as required: a holistic approach ☐ Advanced current professional horticultural knowledge/principles demonstrated (and evidence of advanced material beyond the specification at the top end of mark range) ☐ Consistent use of correct and appropriate technical language.
3	9 -11	Mainly developed (Solid)	**A reasonably detailed and fairly comprehensive response, with mostly relevant observations, addressing most of the key elements of the question** ☐ Some minor evidence of irrelevant or incorrect material or observations (in what is otherwise a good response), with occasional lack of detail/omissions at times ☐ Secure evidence of some appropriate integration with other topics but some linked topic areas are occasionally overlooked or incorrect associations are made: a partially holistic approach ☐ Current professional horticultural knowledge/principles demonstrated most of the time, with occasional errors, but largely appropriate explanations and application ☐ Correct and appropriate technical language demonstrated most of the time, with some minor errors.
2	6 - 8	Rudimentary (Basic)	**A largely basic response with some relevant observations, addressing some key elements of the question** ☐ Some significant evidence of irrelevant or incorrect material and frequent lack of detail, with some key areas overlooked ☐ Occasional evidence of correct integration with other topics, but many areas are overlooked and incorrect associations made: little evidence of a holistic approach ☐ Current professional horticultural knowledge/principles demonstrated some of the time, but with frequent errors, and only basic explanations or application ☐ Correct and appropriate technical language only partially demonstrated but limited. Some key errors.
1	0 - 5	Undeveloped (Unsatisfactory)	**A largely poor response with few relevant observations, addressing few of the key elements of the question** ☐ Material is largely irrelevant or incorrect and lacking in any detail, with many key areas overlooked ☐ No, or very little evidence of correct integration with other topics, with many areas overlooked and incorrect associations made: no evidence of a holistic approach ☐ No or little evidence of current professional horticultural knowledge/principles demonstrated, with poor or incorrect explanations or application ☐ Little (if any) technical language demonstrated. Often incorrect. Key errors.

Question 1

This question required candidates to respond to two requirements.

Candidates were first instructed to discuss the adaptations that named plants use to climb.

Candidates were then required to explain the horticultural benefits that these plants can bring to a garden.

Many candidates scored marks in the higher bands in this question.

Stronger responses:

- named specific plant adaptations that enable plants to climb, including:
  - twining stems
  - stem tendrils
  - leaf tendrils
  - adventitious roots
  - prickles
- provided named plant examples for each adaptation, using accurate scientific plant names
- explained key horticultural benefits of climbing plants, including:
  - softening walls, fences, and built structures
  - providing vertical interest within small gardens where ground space is limited
  - increasing biodiversity through the provision of nectar, pollen, berries, shelter, and nesting habitats for wildlife on vertical planes
  - screening unattractive views or creating privacy
  - providing shade and cooling effects to buildings and outdoor spaces
  - reducing the visual impact of hard landscaping and helping structures blend into the garden

Weaker responses:

- provided vague or descriptive responses lacking technical detail
- confused different climbing adaptations, for example confusing tendrils with twining stems
- failed to provide named plant examples, or relied only on common names
- described general characteristics of climbing plants without discussing specific adaptations
- provided undeveloped explanations of horticultural benefits

Summary

This question was generally well answered, with many candidates demonstrating secure knowledge of climbing plant adaptations and their horticultural uses. Higher-scoring responses were characterised by accurate technical terminology, the use of appropriate plant examples, and well-developed explanations linking plant adaptations to practical garden benefits.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a secure understanding of the different adaptations plants use to climb
- revise named plant examples that demonstrate specific climbing adaptations
- use technical horticultural terminology detailed in the Qualification Specification accurately
- ensure responses are fully developed and directly linked to the requirements of the question

Question 2

This question required candidates to discuss the value of ornamental horticulture.

This was a less popular question.

Stronger candidate responses:

- demonstrated a broad understanding of the contribution ornamental horticulture makes to individuals, communities, the environment, and the economy
- stated that garden tourism generated £6.6 billion towards the national Gross Domestic Product
- discussed the aesthetic value of ornamental horticulture, including the enhancement of gardens, parks, streetscapes, and public spaces
- referred to the wellbeing benefits associated with ornamental plants and gardens, including relaxation, stress reduction, and mental health benefits
- explained the social value of ornamental horticulture through community gardens, public green spaces, and opportunities for social interaction and volunteering
- referred to environmental benefits, including supporting biodiversity, improving air quality, moderating urban temperatures, intercepting rainfall, and contributing to climate resilience
- discussed economic value, including employment within horticulture, garden tourism, retail sales, landscaping, and the wider supply chain
- referred to the role of ornamental horticulture in the preservation of historic gardens and landscapes
- provided balanced and developed responses that demonstrated mastery of the topic

Weaker candidate responses:

- provided narrow or undeveloped responses
- listed points without discussion, explanation or development
- confused the value of ornamental horticulture with that of productive horticulture
- focused solely on personal perspective without applying knowledge from the Qualification Specification
- provided vague statements such as “plants are good for the environment” without further development
- failed to consider the wider economic, environmental, or social contributions of ornamental horticulture, for example national income derived from garden tourism

Summary

Performance on this question was mixed. Stronger candidates demonstrated an ability to discuss ornamental horticulture in a holistic and applied manner, recognising its environmental, social, economic, and cultural importance.

Weaker responses were often limited by a limited understanding of the topic and a lack of developed discussion.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a broad understanding of the role and value of ornamental horticulture within society
- revise the environmental, social, economic, and cultural contributions of horticulture
- practise developing extended responses rather than providing undeveloped lists of points
- use relevant horticultural examples to support discussion points and demonstrate applied understanding

Question 3

This question required candidates to discuss the environmental and biodiversity impacts of short-term plantings.

This was a popular question

Stronger responses:

- demonstrated an understanding that short-term plantings, such as seasonal bedding displays, annual meadows and the cultivation of hardy annuals can have both positive and negative environmental impacts
- discussed the environmental costs associated with the production of short-term plants, including the use of heated glasshouses, growing media use, artificial lighting, irrigation, fertilisers, plastics, and transportation
- referred to the high resource input and carbon footprint associated with repeated seasonal replacement of plants
- recognised the problems associated with the disposal of waste generated by from discarded plants, plastic trays, pots, and packaging materials
- discussed the potential negative impacts of peat use in growing media, where applicable considered biodiversity impacts, including the limited habitat value provided by some highly managed short-term displays
- explained that frequent soil disturbance and regular replacement of planting can reduce habitat stability for wildlife
- added balance to these points by recognising that some short-term plantings can provide valuable nectar and pollen resources for pollinating insects, particularly where species-rich or pollinator-friendly schemes are used
- referred to the importance of plant selection in supporting biodiversity, for example through the inclusion of nectar-rich annuals

Weaker responses:

- provided one-sided responses considering only negative impacts
- provided vague statements to define the term short term planting, often using incorrect examples, for example relating the cultivation of vegetable crops to being short term plantings as they are not perennials
- provided vague environmental statements without explanation or application to short-term planting systems
- focused only on aesthetics without discussing environmental or biodiversity implications
- did not distinguish between environmental impacts and biodiversity impacts

Summary

Performance on this question was variable. Stronger candidates demonstrated balanced discussion skills and an ability to consider both environmental sustainability and biodiversity outcomes in relation to short-term planting schemes. Weaker responses were often descriptive, lacked development, or failed to address both aspects of the question fully.
Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a balanced understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of short-term plantings

- revise the environmental impacts associated with plant production, transport, maintenance, and disposal
- ensure they can distinguish between environmental sustainability and biodiversity considerations
- practise developing responses that consider multiple perspectives and applied horticultural examples

Question 4

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of the impact of climate change on existing garden plantings, with specific reference to changes in temperature and humidity.

Stronger responses:

- demonstrated an understanding that increasing temperatures may extend the growing season and increase rates of plant growth
- referred to increased drought stress and water demand during hotter periods, particularly on shallow-rooted, or establishing plants
- explained that higher temperatures may result in heat scorch, sunscald, or stress-related decline in some species not adapted to warmer conditions
- explained the impact of provenance on the factors mentioned above
- discussed the potential for having to replant garden areas, as some traditional garden plants may struggle.
- stronger responses also discussed that more drought-tolerant or Mediterranean species offer limited replacement suitability due to longer and wetter winter conditions
- referred to warmer winters reducing chilling periods required for dormancy, flowering, or fruit production in some plants, for example apples
- explained that increased humidity can raise the incidence and spread of fungal diseases, such as powdery mildews, botrytis, and leaf spot diseases
- referred to higher humidity levels reducing transpiration rates and increasing the likelihood of prolonged leaf wetness
- discussed the possibility of increased pest survival and overwintering due to milder conditions

Weaker responses:

- provided vague or generic statements about climate change without relating them to garden plantings
- related their responses to new, rather than existing garden plantings
- focused only on temperature or only on humidity, rather than addressing both elements of the question
- confused weather events with long-term climatic trends

Summary

Performance on this question was variable. Stronger candidates demonstrated an ability to apply Plant Science II and sustainability knowledge to realistic horticultural scenarios and considered both positive and negative impacts of changing climatic conditions. Weaker responses often lacked detail, failed to address both temperature and humidity, or relied on generalised statements about climate change.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a secure understanding of how environmental factors influence plant growth and health
- practise applying Plant Science II knowledge to current horticultural challenges such as climate change
- consider both direct and indirect impacts of changing environmental conditions on gardens
- ensure their responses are balanced, developed, and address all aspects of the question