RHS Qualifications
Examiner Comments

Examination:	RHS Level 2
Unit:	Unit 2
Examination date:	June 2025

General Introductory Comments

Examiner's 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

Performance in the examination varied depending on both preparation and examination technique.

- **Well-prepared candidates who applied good examination technique** were able to achieve high marks.
- **Well-prepared candidates with weaker technique** (e.g., giving answers that did not address the specific question) tended to score lower marks.
- **Unprepared candidates** often showed limited knowledge of the Assessment Outcomes and weak examination technique, resulting in lower marks.

A key factor in examination success is a clear understanding of the **command words.** Candidates and centres are strongly advised to fully familiarise themselves with these terms, as they indicate the type and depth of response required.

For example:

- *State*: provide a brief descriptive point.
- *Explain*: give a clear, short, reasoned statement, often outlining a process or factor.
- *Justify*: support an answer with evidence.

The full table of command words for RHS Level 2 qualifications is provided below.

Command word	Definition
Annotate	Learners should be able to apply labels and supporting information on diagrams
Assess	Learners are required to give a statement relating to the overall quality of the issue being considered. This could include an argument about an issue (for and against). The statement should provide evidence, with appropriate use of examples, and express an opinion about the merits of each side considered
Calculate	Learners should be able to carry out basic calculations, or estimate quantities of materials
Choose	Learners should be able to select from a range of alternatives

Command word	Definition
Compare	Provide a response that identifies similarities between things
Compare and contrast	Provide a response that both identifies similarities and identifies and evaluates differences between things
Complete	Learners should be able to provide short responses, or complete statements and tables
Deduce	Come to a decision based on information provided in the question
Define	Learners should be able to state formal definitions
Describe	Learners should be able to recall facts or applied processes in an accurate way
Discuss	Identify key points, explore all aspects, provide a conclusion
Evaluate	Learners should be able to use information supplied, as well as their own knowledge and understanding, to consider evidence for and against when making basic decisions
Estimate	Roughly calculate or judge the value, number, quantity, or extent of
Explain	Learners should be able to make clear, short, reasoned statement to explain a process or similar factor
Explain how and why	Learners should be able to make clear, short, reasoned statement to explain a process or similar factor The 'how' asks about the procedure or process The 'why' asks about the purpose of something
Give (a reason)	Learners should be able to clearly state reasons (facts) as directed
Identify	Name or characterise, for example the identification of type of plant tissue, or floral part of a plant
Justify	Learners should be able to provide evidence to support an answer
Label	Apply information to diagrams
List	Learners provide single word, or short phrase answers
Name	Learners should be able to provide a single word or short phrase answer
Outline	Learners should be able to provide short descriptions, for example the stages that make up a task
Predict	State what you think will happen, based on a given scenario and your own knowledge
Show that	Prove the statement in the question is correct
State	Learners should be able to provide brief descriptive points
State and explain	Make a point, and then explain or justify key aspects
Suggest	Learners should be able to apply their knowledge and understanding to make recommendations for actions
Summarise	Learners should be able to provide a brief account of the main points with regards to a topic, focussing their response on the most essential ideas.
Use	Learners should be able to use information provided within the question, sometimes in conjunction with their own knowledge, to carry out a task
Write	Learners should be able to provide a short answer as directed

Centres have requested guidance with regards to the following terminology used within questions, and so clarification is provided below:

Term	Explanation
Horticultural situation	Candidates may be required to state a horticultural situation, for example the planting of whips, the pruning of fruit trees*. This allows the candidate to focus their response to the situation and allows the examiner to calibrate their thinking.
Horticultural setting	Candidates may be required to state a horticultural setting, this would include garden areas, for example a productive garden, or an herbaceous border. This allows the candidate to focus their response to the setting and allows the examiner to calibrate their thinking.
Growing system	Candidates may be required to state different growing systems to add context to their responses. Growing systems can be traditional, raised beds, container growing, organic, biodynamic as appropriate.

*This example relates to edible landscapes.

Qualification Specification and Guidance Document

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

To support delivery, the 2025 ***Theory Centre Guidance Document*** (Version 5 of which is available – for Centres only) 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 should utilise this document when teaching to ensure their learners are suitably prepared throughout the course and ahead of all assessments.

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.

Many candidates were able to score high marks in Section A, indicating a sound grasp of horticultural knowledge, along with the application of good examination technique.

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 of **flower adaptations and cross-pollination.**

Candidates were required to name **three flower adaptations** that encourage cross-pollination over self-pollination. Candidates were further required to provide a **relevant plant example** for each adaptation.

Stronger responses correctly stated flower adaptations that favour cross-pollination, including:

- Protandry
- Heterostyly
- Dioecy
- Protogyny
- Flowers maturing at different times
- Self-incompatibility

Weaker responses incorrectly stated adaptations or features that do not specifically promote cross-pollination, such as:

- Cleistogamy
- Large open petals
- Prominent stigmas
- Single flowerheads
- Open daisy-like flowers
- Brightly coloured petals
- Monoecy
- Strong scent
- Single blooms
- Wind pollination
- Blooming during the night

Stronger responses also correctly named plant examples using scientific names (e.g., *Primula vulgaris* for heterostyly).

Weaker responses often relied on common names, gave only a genus or species, or matched incorrect adaptations with plant examples, which could not be awarded credit.

Closing comments

Overall, stronger candidates were able to name floral adaptations that encourage cross-pollination. Accurate use of scientific terminology and plant nomenclature was a consistent feature of high-scoring responses. Weaker responses often confused general floral traits that attract pollinators (e.g., colour, scent) with mechanisms specifically designed to encourage cross-pollination.

For future candidates, closer attention to the distinction between general **pollinator attraction** and **cross-pollination mechanisms**, alongside consistent use of scientific names, will improve performance.

Question 2

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of **seed adaptations**.

Candidates were required to state two characteristics displayed by orthodox seeds that allow them to be stored.

Stronger responses correctly identified the ability of orthodox seeds to:

- tolerate drying (desiccation)
- tolerate storage at low temperatures.

Weaker responses were either vague or incorrect. These included:

- potential for long periods of dormancy
- a requirement for alternating cold and warm cycles
- generalised advantages of seed dormancy
- references to lipid content (high or low)
- confusing orthodox with recalcitrant seeds (e.g., stating they do not contain oils)
- ability to enter embryonic dormancy
- impermeable seed casings as the key adaptation.

Candidates were then required to explain why horticulturists might wash orthodox seeds prior to storage.

Stronger responses correctly explained that washing:

- removes fleshy material that may harbour chemical inhibitors
- removes fleshy material that may harbour pests and diseases.

Weaker responses included misconceptions such as:

- softening seed coats and releasing gases
- generally, removing things that inhibit germination
- claiming washing seeds increases their long-term viability
- removing hormones that trigger germination.

Finally, candidates were required to name one plant that produces orthodox seeds that require washing.

Stronger responses correctly named appropriate plant examples using full scientific names, for example, *Solanum lycopersicum*.

Weaker responses tended to:

- use common names
- name only the genus
- incorrectly name recalcitrant seed species.

Closing comments

Overall, stronger candidates demonstrated a clear knowledge of the characteristics of orthodox seeds, and the relevance of these characteristics to storage and propagation. Weaker responses often confused orthodox with recalcitrant seeds, or focused too heavily on dormancy rather than storage adaptations.

Comments for future candidates

Candidates should ensure they understand the difference between orthodox and recalcitrant seeds. Candidates should ensure they always use scientific names when providing plant examples. Candidates are further advised to practice producing responses with a range of horticultural examples. Developing the ability to link theory with horticultural practice can strengthen answers, improve clarity and increase the mark awarded.

Question 3

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of **edible landscapes**.

Candidates were required to name four distinct herbs that could be included within a culinary herb garden for a local school.

Stronger responses:

- correctly named four distinct herbs using scientific names, showing accuracy and clarity in plant identification
- examples included, *Coriandrum sativum, Salvia rosmarinus, Ocimum basilicum, and Chamaemelum nobile.*

Weaker responses:

- named herbs that were too closely related to be considered distinct, for example different cultivars of *Mentha* spp.
- used only the genus name or a common name, which did not demonstrate the plant knowledge required at Level 2.

Candidates were then required to state the site requirements for the cultivation of one of the herbs named in the first part of the question.

- the majority of candidates correctly identified the herb they were discussing and provided appropriate site requirements
- most answers referred to a sunny, well-drained site, which applies broadly to many culinary herbs, although some herbs (e.g., *Mentha* spp., *Coriandrum sativum*) have more specific requirements that were less frequently mentioned.

Closing comments

This question differentiated effectively between candidates who demonstrated accurate plant knowledge and those who relied on less precise terminology. Stronger candidates showed the ability to name plants scientifically and provide site requirements specific to the chosen herb, while weaker candidates relied on generalised answers or repeated similar plants. Future candidates should be encouraged to develop confidence in **using scientific names consistently**, and to appreciate that site requirements vary between species, even within the same genus.

Many candidates demonstrated only partial understanding by relying on common names or generalised site requirements. Greater emphasis should be placed on the correct use of scientific names and on exploring **species-specific cultural needs** within the context of edible landscapes.

Question 4

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of the professional use of plant species in a garden setting, along with plant adaptations.

Candidates were provided with a scenario of a garden with a north-facing border with existing deciduous trees.

Candidates were first required to name two distinct shrubs suitable for this site.

Stronger responses:
- correctly named two distinct shrubs using scientific names, showing accuracy and clarity in plant identification
- examples included *Camellia japonica*, *Choisya ternata*, and *Mahonia japonica*.

Weaker responses:
- named shrubs that were too closely related to be considered distinct, for example naming two *Camellia* spp.
- used only the genus name or a common name, which did not demonstrate the plant knowledge required at Level 2.

Candidates were then required to name two distinct herbaceous perennials suitable for this site.

Stronger responses:
- correctly named two distinct herbaceous perennials using scientific names, again showing accuracy and clarity
- examples included *Alchemilla mollis*, *Hosta sieboldii*, and *Rudbeckia fulgida*.

Weaker responses:
- named herbaceous perennials that were too closely related to be considered distinct, for example naming two *Hosta* spp.
- relied on genus-only or common names.

Finally, candidates were required to apply their knowledge of plant adaptations to provide two justifications for their plant selection.

Stronger responses:
- identified relevant adaptations such as:
  - evergreen growth
  - dark green foliage containing higher levels of chlorophyll
  - large leaf surface areas to maximise photosynthesis
  - early spring growth before the canopy develops, as in bulbs.

Weaker responses:
- provided vague or undeveloped justifications, for example:
  - Hostas thrive in shade
  - *Brunnera macrophylla* has big leaves
  - these plants are adapted to grow in low light
  - the leaves are waxy to reduce water loss
  - plants would need to be tough and hardy.

Closing comments

This question allowed stronger candidates to demonstrate accurate plant knowledge and apply it to a realistic scenario. The use of correct scientific names and thoughtful justifications of plant adaptations clearly distinguished higher-level responses. Weaker responses often relied on generic statements or failed to provide adaptations directly linked to the plants selected.

Future candidates should be encouraged to:

- use **scientific names consistently** when identifying plants
- avoid repetition of closely related taxa
- provide **specific, evidence-based justifications** for plant adaptations, linking features directly to the environmental conditions described in the scenario.

Candidates are reminded that Level 2 assessment requires precise plant knowledge, with a focus on scientific names. Candidates are also advised that they should be able to explain how plant adaptations contribute to plant survival and performance in particular garden settings.

Question 5

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of plant adaptations and the impact of climate change on horticulture.

In the first part of the question, candidates were required to name one plant that cools its immediate environment.

Stronger responses:

- correctly named a suitable plant using scientific names, showing accuracy and clarity
- accepted examples included *Stachys byzantina* (trichomes cooling the immediate area around the leaf), *Stellaria media* (leaves casting shade to cool the soil), and larger species such as *Fraxinus excelsior* (providing shade through canopy).

Weaker responses:

- named plants not documented to cool their environment
- relied on genus-only or common names, which did not demonstrate sufficient plant knowledge.

Candidates were then required to explain the characteristic that enables cooling to occur.

Stronger responses:

- gave clear and accurate explanations, including:
  - leaves casting shade
  - trichomes casting shade or trapping humid air from transpiration
  - transpiration cooling the leaf and releasing cooler, moist air
  - pale-coloured leaves reflecting sunlight.

Weaker responses:

- demonstrated an incorrect and undeveloped knowledge in plant science, for example:
  - suggesting plants cool their environment by increasing respiration
  - claiming oxygen release from stomata cools the air
  - offering vague ideas such as leaf shape creates a microclimate.

In the second part of the question, candidates were required to name one plant that can tolerate waterlogged soils.

Stronger responses:

- correctly named suitable plants using scientific names
- included *Taxodium distichum*, which was a common correct choice.

Weaker responses:

- named plants not documented to tolerate waterlogging
- relied on genus-only or common names.

Candidates were then required to explain the characteristic that enables tolerance of waterlogged soils.

Stronger responses:

- identified accurate characteristics, including:
  - aerenchyma tissue in roots or stems enabling oxygen movement
  - pneumatophores providing aerial roots for gaseous exchange.

Weaker responses:

- provided incorrect or undeveloped reasoning, for example:
  - suggesting raised roots or extra spaces in parenchyma, without reference to aerenchyma or that these plants have open stomata to allow continuous transpiration
  - stating only where the plants grow (e.g., riverbanks, wetlands) without linking to adaptations
  - suggesting deep root foraging provides oxygen.

Closing comments

This question allowed stronger candidates to demonstrate both accurate plant identification and a clear understanding of plant adaptation. Stronger responses linked plant adaptations directly to plant function, showing an ability to apply scientific principles to applied horticultural scenarios. Weaker responses revealed an incorrect and undeveloped knowledge of plant science and an over-reliance on vague or habitat-based explanations, rather than identifying and explaining adaptations.

Future candidates should be encouraged to:

- use scientific names consistently when naming plants
- develop a precise understanding of plant physiological processes such as transpiration, shading, and gas exchange
- focus on specific adaptations rather than generalised statements about plant hardiness or habitat.

Candidates at Level 2 should be able to demonstrate accurate recall of plant adaptations and apply them to relevant areas such as climate resilience. Candidates should understand the importance of linking adaptation to function, avoiding vague habitat-based reasoning.

Question 6

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of citizen science projects.

In the first part of the question, candidates were required to name two distinct citizen science projects.

Stronger responses: correctly named well-established projects, including:

- *Big Butterfly Count* (Butterfly Conservation International)
- *Garden BirdWatch* (British Trust for Ornithology)
- *Big Garden Birdwatch* (RSPB)
- *UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme* (UK PoMS).

Weaker responses: contained vague or inaccurate references. Examples included:

- Birdwatch campaigns (too general)
- The preservation of Salt Marshes up the Mersey coast (not a recognised national citizen science project)
- Counting butterflies (lacking specificity)
- Wildlife Trust (naming an organisation rather than a defined project).

Candidates were then asked to state one type of information that each project provides.

Stronger responses correctly noted that:

- the *Big Garden Birdwatch* collects data on the number and species of birds that land in a location during a one-hour period
- the *Big Butterfly Count* records the maximum number of individual butterflies of each species observed together within a 15-minute period, in sunny weather conditions.

Weaker responses gave incomplete or vague information, such as: count the number of butterflies in a garden, or shifted focus to how data is used, rather than the information collected.

Candidates were then required to explain two impacts that citizen science projects can have on the management of gardens.

Stronger responses demonstrated clear application, for example:

- linking data on butterfly abundance to changes in management practices, such as tolerating *Urtica dioica* (stinging nettle) as a larval food plant for the Red Admiral butterfly
- highlighting the provision of food, shelter, and habitats for species in decline, informed by monitoring results.

Weaker responses tended to remain generalised, for example:

- referring vaguely to illustrating biodiversity or managing gardens in a healthy and sustainable way, without showing how citizen science findings influence specific garden management choices.

Closing comments

Stronger candidates demonstrated accurate knowledge of nationally recognised citizen science projects, understood the type of data collected, and were able to link these findings to the development of practical garden management decisions. Weaker responses often lacked specificity, confused organisations with projects, or offered general statements on biodiversity rather than applied examples.

Future candidates should ensure they are able to:

- be able to use the **names of specific citizen science projects,** general statements such as bird counts will not be credited
- focus on meeting the **exact requirement** of the question
- in application questions, ensure the ability to **connect the findings from citizen science projects to actual changes in garden management**
- use **scientific names for plant examples** (e.g., *Urtica dioica*) to demonstrate precision and accuracy at this level
- stronger responses will combine **accurate knowledge, specific examples, and clear application to professional horticultural practice**.

Question 7

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of horticulture and society, with specific reference to parks and public green spaces.

Candidates were required to outline three social benefits of a pocket park.

Stronger responses correctly outlined three distinct social benefits, including:

- gaining a sense of community
- reduced loneliness and isolation
- improved community links
- an increased sense of social belonging
- access to a calming green space to promote mental health
- the reduction of crime and antisocial behaviour
- providing visibility and safe spaces for minority groups, such as the LGBT community, which enriches cohesion and inclusivity.

Weaker responses tended to identify non-social benefits, or made vague, undeveloped statements. Examples included:

- bringing flora and fauna into the city (an environmental rather than social benefit)
- stating that the park benefits the community without explaining how
- referencing carbon sequestration (an ecological rather than social benefit).

Candidates were then required to explain how a pocket park can support equality and diversity.

Stronger responses gave clear, applied examples, such as:

- designing paths wide enough for wheelchair access, ensuring inclusivity for people with mobility impairments
- providing hand and grab rails to support healthy ageing and safe access
- organising a diverse range of events or exhibitions to attract a wide demographic
- encouraging volunteering opportunities open to people of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds.

Weaker responses often failed to link directly to equality and diversity, or gave unrealistic or irrelevant examples. These included:

- generic statements about wellbeing benefits without reference to equality or diversity
- suggesting employment opportunities (more suited to larger-scale public parks than pocket parks)
- asserting that pocket parks support equality and diversity without explaining how.

Closing comments

This question was generally well attempted, with stronger candidates able to distinguish between social and environmental benefits, and to link their answers directly to the role of pocket parks in urban communities. Weaker candidates frequently confused ecological benefits with social ones, or provided underdeveloped, generalised statements.

The second part of the question highlighted the importance of applying knowledge to context. Stronger responses demonstrated an awareness of how the pocket park could support equality and diversity. Weaker responses either overlooked equality and diversity entirely, or made broad, unsupported claims.

Future candidates should be able to:

- clearly differentiate between **social, environmental, and ecological benefits**. Marks will only be awarded for responses that directly address the type of benefit asked for
- focus on applied examples that are directly relevant when discussing **equality and diversity** in questions like this
- avoid using vague or generalised statements in questions asking for an *explanation*. Comments such as, it benefits the community, or it supports equality, do not explain *how* or *why* and so do not demonstrate knowledge and understanding.
- demonstrate understanding through **specific examples** (e.g., accessible pathways, targeted events, inclusive volunteering opportunities) to gain marks for developed points
- integrate their knowledge of horticulture and society with an awareness of **current social inclusion practices** in green space management.

Question 8

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of horticulture and society, with specific reference to the scale and value of ornamental horticulture.

Candidates were required to explain three ways that trees contribute to a local economy.

Stronger responses recognised the breadth of economic contributions and included examples such as:

- timber production in rural areas, providing valuable employment
- the purchase of trees from local garden centres, supporting retail employment
- the creation of professional roles in arboriculture, such as tree surgeons
- fruit production, with sales generating wholesale and retail opportunities
- ecosystem services reducing wider economic costs, e.g., air quality improvement lowering NHS expenditure
- flood mitigation, protecting property and infrastructure
- shading and cooling from tree canopies creating more attractive retail and leisure spaces, encouraging footfall and spend in street cafés
- carbon sequestration, with references to Treeconomics highlighting that trees are the only pieces of street furniture that become more valuable over time
- tourism value, for example, visitors travelling to Japan to view *Prunus serrulata* (Sakura).

Weaker responses often made vague, underdeveloped, or factually incorrect points, such as:

- referring to bamboo as a tree and discussing bamboo-based products
- stating that trees provide food without specifying which foods or explaining the economic pathway
- noting that trees provide habitat for wildlife without linking this to measurable economic benefits
- mentioning carbon sequestration without demonstrating how this contributes to the local economy.

Closing comments

Overall, stronger candidates were able to demonstrate the contribution trees can make to the local economy, ranging from direct commercial products to indirect ecosystem services and cultural benefits. Weaker responses tended to remain descriptive, lacking the link between the presence of trees and the resulting economic contribution.

Future candidates should be able to:

- fully explain their responses. Stating that trees provide timber does not fully answer the question. Stating that trees provide timber which provides employment within the local economy would gain the full mark allocation
- avoid vague references such as trees provide food, or trees sequester carbon, without explaining the relevance of these statements to the local economy
- provide factually accurate responses to avoid errors such as suggesting bamboo (which is a grass) as an example of a tree
- integrate their knowledge of horticulture, ecosystem services, and economic impacts.

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.

Performance in Section C ranged from stronger candidates who:

- carefully read and addressed the key requirements of the question
- produced concise, logical, and well-structured responses
- demonstrated advanced and current understanding of the subject matter
- integrated knowledge from different 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 very short answers lacking the required depth and breadth
- focused narrowly on isolated words from the question rather than answering it as a whole
- produced basic or vague responses with limited technical content.

In addition to the assessment ladder, responses are reviewed against the following criteria:

Indicative content

- Strength of response
- Integration
- Horticultural knowledge

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.

Integration

Candidate responses should integrate knowledge from across the syllabus, showing connections between topics to strengthen analysis and evaluation.

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 assessed candidate's integrated knowledge and understanding of plant adaptations and Health and Safety.

The question required candidates to use *named plant examples*, to *describe* the risks that plant adaptations can pose to horticulturists, and finally to *explain* how these risks can be mitigated when carrying out horticultural tasks.

Performance overview

Stronger responses demonstrated breadth and depth of knowledge, using correct scientific names, grouping adaptations by function, and explicitly linking adaptations to risks and corresponding mitigations. These answers displayed both scientific accuracy and an applied awareness of Health & Safety.

Examples of strong candidate responses included:

- defence adaptations (thorns, prickles, spines): candidates cited *Rosa rugosa* (thorns), *Urtica dioica* (stinging hairs), or *Berberis darwinii* (spines). Risks were correctly identified as cuts, puncture injuries, and abrasions. Mitigations included the use of goggles, protective jackets, puncture-resistant gloves, and boots, particularly when handling arisings from pruning
- irritant sap: for example, *Euphorbia pulcherrima* or *Euphorbia characias*, with candidates noting skin and eye irritation. Mitigations included gloves, goggles, and effective handwashing protocols
- trichomes: candidates recognised that detached hairs from species such as *Borago officinalis* or *Cynoglossum officinale* can cause respiratory irritation. Mitigations included goggles and appropriate face masks
- poisonous plants: species such as *Taxus baccata* (yew) and *Nerium oleander* were cited as posing risk through skin contact or ingestion. Stronger candidates noted the importance of careful plant placement (e.g., avoiding children's play areas), alongside PPE and hygiene practices
- climbing adaptations: for example, thorns in *Rosa* spp. or adhesive pads in *Parthenocissus tricuspidata*. Candidates noted additional risk when pruning or maintaining such plants at height, requiring safe working practices and secure equipment.

Weaker responses often displayed one or more of the following limitations:

- reliance on common names rather than scientific names
- omission of named plant examples, despite the requirement
- confusion between botanical terms
- listing adaptations without relating them to Health & Safety risks
- consideration of a very narrow range of adaptations, demonstrating limited knowledge.

Closing comments

This question required candidates to demonstrate **integrated knowledge** by connecting their plant science II understanding of plant adaptations with **applied Health & Safety measures**. Stronger candidates were able to make these links clearly and confidently, using accurate scientific names and contextually appropriate examples of mitigation.

Weaker candidates frequently lost marks by omitting scientific plant names, failing to link adaptations to health and safety implications, or providing overly narrow or generalised responses.

Future candidates should be able to:

- provide **scientific names** when plant examples are requested. Use of common names limits credit at this level
- use the correct **botanical terminology** (e.g., spines, thorns, prickles, trichomes) when describing adaptations
- fully meet the requirements of the question, in this case it is not sufficient to simply list adaptations. The link between **the adaptation → the risk → the mitigation** is required
- consider a **wide range of adaptations** (structural, chemical, mechanical, climbing, etc.) to demonstrate depth of knowledge
- demonstrate an applied awareness of Health & Safety contexts by referring to specific mitigation measures, including specific PPE, work practices, and plant selection

Question 2

This question assessed candidate's knowledge and understanding of **planting styles, their characteristics and how they influence gardening today.**

Performance overview

Stronger responses typically:

- discussed the design approach of **Gertrude Jekyll**, often within the context of the Arts & Crafts movement
- discussed the design approach of **Piet Oudolf**, focusing on naturalistic planting
- provided **named examples of relevant gardens**, such as Jekyll's planting at Hestercombe or Oudolf's work at the High Line, New York
- drew out comparisons and contrasts between their styles, including:
    - **use of colour**: both designers used colour in drifts, but Jekyll's schemes were carefully orchestrated with painterly precision, whereas Oudolf's work relies on broader tonal effects
    - **formality**: Jekyll's planting was framed within formal structures, such as mixed borders in Arts & Crafts gardens; Oudolf's schemes are looser, often blending seamlessly into the surrounding landscape
    - **seasonality**: Jekyll's traditional mixed borders were cut back at the end of the season, whereas Oudolf work embraces seasonality, using mass perennial plantings that age gracefully, retaining decorative seed heads into winter
    - **contemporary influence**: both designers have created distinctive styles that shifted planting practice in their time, influencing generations of designers after them.

Weaker responses often:

- confused Gertrude Jekyll with other designers such as William Robinson
- incorrectly suggested collaboration between Jekyll and Oudolf, overlooking the century between their active periods
- failed to provide direct comparison, offering only brief or disconnected notes on each designer without analysing similarities or differences.

Closing comments

This question effectively distinguished candidates who could move beyond descriptive accounts to offer genuine comparison and evaluation. Stronger responses demonstrated a good knowledge of both Jekyll and Oudolf, and were able to articulate how each designer's approach to planting reflected broader design philosophies. Weaker responses often relied on fragmented knowledge, lacked supporting examples, or showed inaccuracies in design history.

Future candidates should be able to:

- place designers in their correct **historical and stylistic context**
- use **named garden examples**
- **evaluate similarities and differences**, rather than just describing approaches.

At this level, candidates are expected to be able to not only recall factual knowledge, they should be able to explain how planting styles developed and how they continue to shape practice today. Candidates should be able to discuss key design characteristics, style, context, and influence.

Question 3

This question assessed candidate's knowledge and understanding of **how heritage gardens can foster community engagement.**

Performance overview

Stronger responses:

- defined the term heritage garden
- defined the term community engagement
- suggested a range of techniques that heritage gardens use to engage with communities to include:
  - researching and understanding the demographic of the local community
  - researching and understanding the interests of people in different communities
  - engaging communities through appropriate events
  - offering volunteering opportunities to suit a wide range of skills
  - developing bespoke engagement for schools linked to the national curriculum
  - fostering intergenerational connection to build engagement
  - discussing case studies and examples of best practice.

Weaker responses:

- often contained anecdote, vague, or incorrect assumptions in relation to models of community engagement
- incorrectly discussed the advantages of nature, biodiversity, and being outdoors as examples of community engagement
- failed to make reference to formal engagement models.

Closing comments

This question allowed stronger candidates to demonstrate not only an understanding of heritage gardens and community engagement, but also the ability to apply knowledge of engagement strategies used within a heritage garden context. Stronger answers were logically structured and often supported their points with case studies, while weaker responses relied on anecdotal commentary or confused community engagement with general well-being benefits of gardens.

Future candidates should be able to:

- understand **key definitions** such as heritage garden and community engagement
- explore **formal frameworks and models** of engagement and apply them to heritage contexts
- make effective use of **case studies and examples of best practice** to illustrate their points.

Candidates are encouraged to move beyond general statements about gardens being beneficial, and instead focus on **specific, structured methods of engagement**. Candidates would benefit from being able to make reference to case studies, heritage sector reports, and frameworks such as the **Heritage Lottery Fund's community engagement guidance**, to support deeper, evidence-based responses.

Question 4

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of **plants, biodiversity and the creation of habitat.**

Candidates were set a scenario relating to the maintenance of grass verges with the aim of boosting biodiversity. Candidates were instructed to:

- explain how the approach to maintenance should change
- evaluate the benefits to wildlife and to the local community.

Performance overview

Stronger responses

- identified the mowing strategies shown in the two provided images
- understood changes in mowing regimes such as:
    - the adoption of a more hands-off approach to maintenance
    - a reduction in mowing frequency
    - a move to mowing at the end of the season
    - a reduction in the use of herbicides
    - sowing seeds/overseeding with wildflower species
    - sowing *Rhinanthus minor* (Yellow Rattle) to control the growth of grass species.
- discussed the benefits to wildlife to include:
    - the creation of habitat and cover for small mammals
    - the supply of nectar and pollen for invertebrates
    - the positive impact of the above on food webs
    - the creation of wildlife corridors
- discussed the benefits to the local community, noting that:
    - funding allocated to mowing can be reallocated to other projects
    - studies show proximity to nature and greenspace enhance wellbeing
    - increased visual appeal can add value to housing in an area.

Weaker responses

- discussed mowing regimes making vague, incorrect, or irrelevant comments such as:
    - suggesting volunteer labour be used to maintain the verges
    - suggesting volunteers scythe the verges
    - suggesting children should weed the verges
    - stating that all maintenance would be withdrawn
    - failing to provide named plant examples, or relying only on common names
    - discussing reduced irrigation and fertiliser regimes to save labour
    - failing to consider the context and implication of roadside sites.
- discussed benefits to wildlife with vague, incorrect, or irrelevant comments such as:
    - not applying knowledge from the Biodiversity Topic to this context
    - failing to discuss or identify habitat creation from revised management strategies
    - discussing hedgehog tunnels under the road
    - identifying the potential role of the site for citizen science projects.

- discussed benefits to the local community with vague, incorrect, or irrelevant comments such as:
    - proposing volunteering or the use of verges as outdoor classrooms to engage children without integrating health and safety considerations
    - focusing on negative impacts, for example the potential increase in hay fever.

Closing comments

This question gave stronger candidates the opportunity to demonstrate an applied knowledge of biodiversity. It offered the opportunity to link practical changes in maintenance regimes with outcomes for the enhancement of biodiversity along with community benefits. Stronger answers provided detailed, context-specific responses, supported with named plant examples and integration with Qualification-wide outcomes. Weaker responses often lacked focus, misapplied knowledge, or failed to consider the specific context of roadside verges.

Future candidates should be able to:

- integrate their knowledge of **biodiversity** into practical horticultural management scenarios
- use **scientific plant names** wherever possible
- ground their evaluation of wildlife and community benefits in **facts**, avoiding anecdotal or irrelevant comments.

Candidates should approach Section C questions in a **structured way**. In this instance candidates should concentrate on linking horticultural management practices directly to biodiversity outcomes and then to wider community benefits. Emphasis should be placed on the use of **named plant species**, the demonstration of applied knowledge in **fundamental biodiversity principles**, along with an awareness of **Health and Safety considerations** and **Best Practice**.