



# **RHS Qualifications**

**RHS Level 3 Award in Horticultural Investigation**

**Qualification Specification**

**For first teaching September 2025**

Qualification number: 610/3773/4

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## **1. RHS Qualifications Contact Details**

RHS Qualifications is the Awarding Organisation of the Royal Horticultural Society.

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RHS Website: [rhs.org.uk/qualifications](https://rhs.org.uk/qualifications)

## **2. Equality and Diversity Policy Statement**

RHS Qualifications is committed to policies that will promote equal opportunities in all its operations, regardless of age, disability, ethnic origin, gender, marital status, religion, sexual orientation, or any other factor.

RHS Qualifications is committed to ensuring that there is no unfair discrimination in any of its operations and will consider all current legislation in relation to the equality of opportunity.

RHS Qualifications will constantly monitor and review its policies and practices pertaining to equal opportunities, to ensure that they remain consistent with its equal opportunities objectives and continue to comply with all relevant legislation. RHS Qualifications will strive to make awareness of and respect for equality and diversity, an integral part of the culture of the organisation. A copy of the RHS Qualifications Equality and Diversity Policy is available on the RHS website.

The privacy, and security of personal data is extremely important to us. Personal information that centres provide is used for the purposes of furthering our legal obligations as an awarding body for creating qualifications and issuing of certificates. For further information and a detailed explanation, please refer to our Privacy Policy on the RHS website ([rhs.org.uk/privacy](https://rhs.org.uk/privacy)).

## **3. RHS Level 3 Award in Horticultural Investigation**

### **3.1 Introduction and Context**

The horticultural industries are broad based and diverse. These industries range from the production of fruit and vegetables to the production of trees to tackle climate change, the development of urban green spaces to safeguard and enhance mental health, through to the management of heritage assets.

While the horticultural industries might be diverse, those who are engaged within them are united in ensuring that decisions are made based on facts and reference to reliable and

trusted information sources. Operational decisions are informed by best practice protocols. Knowledge and information is shared within communities of practice.

This qualification provides the opportunity for learners to investigate areas of personal or professional interest which provide opportunities to apply their knowledge and skills. These can be acquired through the study of the RHS Level 3 Certificate in Practical Horticulture and/or the RHS Level 3 Certificate in Plant Growth, Garden Planning and Applied Propagation.

Consequently, this qualification is likely to be undertaken in parallel or after completion of these qualifications. However, it is available as an individual award and can provide a unique CPD opportunity for learners to apply skills and knowledge acquired through experience as a horticultural professional.

### **3.2 Audience**

The purpose and content of RHS Level 3 Qualifications supports specialist/industry-specific pathways informed by the findings of the Ornamental Horticultural Round Table Group (OHRG). It is aimed at those progressing in horticultural roles or having a specialist personal interest in the supervision and development of gardens and landscapes, thus meeting the needs of the amateur gardener and professional horticulturist alike.

It also provides learners the opportunity of personal development, including the changing of careers and engagement in their learning and offers an opportunity to develop transferable skills such as problem solving, implementing management plans/programmes, and communication as part of their applied learning.

### **3.3 Guided Learning Hours (GLH) and Total Qualification Time (TQT)**

The Guided Learning Hours (GLH) represent the time that the learner spends learning under the immediate guidance and supervision of a tutor and includes tutorials and individual support. Guided Learning Hours are always less than total qualification time, as learners are expected to complete a certain amount of study in their own time. The Guided Learning Hours for this qualification is 40.

Total Qualification Time (TQT) includes the Guided Learning Hours and represents the notional time that an average learner could reasonably expect to take to complete the learning outcomes of the topics to the standard determined by the assessment criteria and gain the qualification. It includes all face-to-face contact with tutors as well as the time taken to undertake reading, researching, and writing up the project. The Total Qualification Time for this qualification is 90.

### **3.4 Teaching Pattern**

The qualification is designed to be studied on a part-time basis. No particular teaching pattern is specified, and centres offering courses leading to the qualification are free to define their own teaching structure and teaching hours.

### 3.5 The role of the Project Supervisor

Since learners are required to undertake a unique piece of research, it follows that each learner is to be allocated a project supervisor. Their role is to guide the creation of the Initial Project Proposal (IPP - Topic 1) and to oversee the development of the final research report.

Specifically, their role is to:

- explain the requirements of the project to learners
- ensure that each topic, title, and research questions meet RHS Qualifications' requirements
- advise on the submission of the initial project proposal (IPP) to the approved training centre
- discuss any feedback on the IPP with the learner
- provide appropriate guidance to learners to support them in the development of their project
- monitor the progress of the project
- advise on the submission of the project and learner submission form to the approved training centre
- sign a declaration that the Project is the work of the learner, and confirm that no inappropriate use of Artificial Intelligence has been used by the student in their report
- inform their centre where there are concerns about malpractice, such as plagiarism or the submission of work that is not that of the learner.

### 3.6 Qualification Structure

This qualification certificate is made up of one unit, which contains four topics. Each topic is broken down into a specific range of elements, as follows:

Topic		Elements
1	Initial project proposal	1. Project proposal 2. Plan
2	Investigation and research	1. Methodology 2. Sources of information 3. Analysis
3	Project skills	1. Project management 2. Developing arguments 3. Decision making 4. Creative thinking
4	Content and presentation	1. Format 2. Content 3. Presentation

## 4. Assessment

### 4.1. Assessment Outcomes

In line with the approach taken in all other RHS Qualifications, learners will be expected to be able to demonstrate they meet a range of 'Assessment Outcomes' (AOs).

Assessment Outcomes define the way in which learners demonstrate their abilities in the production of an individual piece of work. The AOs use a 'progressive mastery' model for each topic area. This qualification has three broad categories of assessment outcomes, which are:

***AO1 – knowledge recall of scientific ideas, processes, techniques, procedures, and making correct use of terms, symbols and units of measurement***

***AO2 – application of knowledge and understanding of concepts, theories, facts to different situations and contexts through presentation of reasoned explanations and analysis and interpretation of information and ideas***

***AO3 – application of knowledge and understanding in an integrated and holistic way in order to reach conclusions and make judgements and recommendations.***

Unlike other RHS Qualifications, where these outcomes are mapped against specific content in the Qualification Specification, learners will be required to demonstrate that they can meet these specifically against the content they have chosen for their project. Learners will therefore be expected to demonstrate Knowledge Recall (AO1), Application of Knowledge to situations (AO2), and be able to make connections with other relevant topic areas i.e. a holistic approach (AO3).

The aim is that those learners who successfully meet all these progressive demands will be able to demonstrate a wide range of skills, and especially the ability to apply what they have learned in the production of an investigative project.

### 4.2 Assessment Methods

This qualification will be entirely assessed by the submission of an Initial Project Proposal (IPP) to reflect the work undertaken in Topic 1, a final written project to reflect the work undertaken in Topics 2, 3 and 4, and a separate professional discussion with the candidate to discuss the approach and content of the written project. Successful completion of both the Initial Project Proposal, submission of the final written project and professional discussion are mandatory for the award of this qualification.

Topic 1 should be considered as a gateway module which learners must successfully pass in order to commence work on Topics 2-4. To meet the requirements of Topic 1, the learner will be required to complete the RHS IPP form which must be discussed and agreed with their project supervisor at the centre prior to submission to the approved training centre assessor for assessment and formal approval of the project.

To meet the requirements of Topic 2, 3 and 4, the learner will be required to complete their final written project, with support and guidance from their project supervisor at the centre, prior to submission to the centre assessor for assessment and participate in a professional discussion with an assessor from the approved training centre.

The final written project must be reviewed by the project supervisor to ensure that it meets the following criteria before submission to the centre assessor. The project supervisor will confirm to the approved training centre that the final written project:

- is independently researched and written by the learner
- is presented in the form of a piece of extended writing of 4,000-4,500 words
- is based on the learner's reading and their research, using a range of reliable and horticulturally appropriate sources of information which relate to the topic chosen
- is not based on any inappropriate use of Artificial Intelligence by the student.

An External Quality Assurer (EQA) appointed by RHS Qualifications will sample learners' assessments to quality assure the assessment process. This ensures that qualification certification is reliable by checking the consistency of assessments made by the centre assessors.

### 4.3 Grading

An 'assessment ladder' will be used to allocate marks to the final project. The centre assessors will use band descriptors based on the grid below to determine the appropriate band, mark and ultimate grade achieved by learners across all four topics:

Band	Mark range	Summary	Description
4	16 – 20	<b>Distinction</b> Fully developed (Total)	<b>A highly detailed, comprehensive, written project, that fully reflects all key elements and ethos of the IPP.</b>
3	13 – 15	<b>Merit</b> Mainly developed (Solid)	<b>A reasonably detailed, mainly comprehensive, written project, that mostly reflects the key elements of the IPP.</b>
2	10 – 12	<b>Pass</b> Rudimentary (Basic)	<b>A largely basic written project, that reflects some key elements of the IPP.</b>
1	0 – 9	<b>Fail</b> Undeveloped (Unsatisfactory)	<b>A poorly written project, that does not sufficiently reflect the key elements of the IPP.</b>

Learners will be awarded the following grades for the complete qualification:

0-49% Fail  
 50-64% Pass  
 65-79% Merit  
 80%+ Distinction.

## **5. Learning Resources**

There is a wide range of books, online material and other learning resources published which support the studies of those learning horticulture. Learners are encouraged to seek guidance from their project supervisor on which learning resources will best support their studies. RHS Qualifications does not recommend or endorse any specific learning resources as meeting the needs of learners studying for RHS qualifications.

## **6. Approved Centres**

RHS Qualifications can only be delivered by approved centres. Further information regarding the approval process can be found at: [rhs.org.uk/qualifications](https://rhs.org.uk/qualifications).

## **7. Learner Registration**

All learners must be registered with RHS Qualifications at the commencement of this qualification through the RHS Qualifications Web Portal. More information about the registration process is available from RHS Qualifications.

## **8. Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration**

RHS Qualifications is committed to ensuring fair assessment for all learners and will facilitate access to its qualifications through reasonable adjustments to assessment arrangements for learners with an identified specific need. In this context, RHS Qualifications is happy to be approached by a centre where they can demonstrate that a learner needs some adjustment to ensure fair access to assessment.

Full guidance is provided in the documents 'Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments Policy for Approved Centres and Special Consideration Policy for Approved Centres'. The documents are available on the RHS Qualifications Approved Centre web portal, can be obtained from RHS Qualifications, or can be accessed on the RHS website.

Applications for reasonable adjustments or special consideration must be made by the Approved Centre on behalf of the learner. Application must be made within specified timescales.

## **9. Fees**

For a full list of fees please see the RHS Qualifications Fees Notice, this document is available on the Qualifications page on the RHS website and on the RHS web portal. All fees are payable prior to confirmation of entry for any assessment.

## **10. Re-mark & Feedback**

If a remark and/or feedback is required this is to be directed to the approved training centre.

## **11. Appeals Procedure**

The learner must first follow the Centre's appeals procedure, and if all stages are completed without a favourable outcome, they may then escalate the appeal to RHS Qualifications.



## **12. Replacement Certificate (if lost, damaged or destroyed)**

The fee for a replacement certificate can be found on the RHS Qualifications Fees Notice. Requests for a replacement certificate must be sent to the Qualifications Department.

## **13. Policy on Malpractice**

Malpractice consists of those deliberate acts which undermine the integrity and validity of any assessment, the certification of qualifications and/or damage the authority of those responsible for conducting the assessment and certification.

RHS Qualifications does not tolerate actions or attempted actions of malpractice by learners or centres in connection with RHS qualifications. RHS Qualifications may impose penalties and/or sanctions on learners or centres where incidents, or attempted incidents, of malpractice have been proven.

A copy of the full policy is available on the RHS Qualifications web portal and on the RHS website.

# RHS Level 3 Award in Horticultural Investigation

## Syllabus Specification

The specific detailed content of the syllabus now follows on the following pages. However, learners should have regard to four overarching qualification-wide outcomes:

Qualification-wide outcomes
<p><b><u>Health and Safety</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledge of, and compliance with, current legislation as it relates to horticulture</li><li>• The management of risk within horticulture</li><li>• The storage, care and maintenance of PPE, tools and equipment in horticultural settings.</li></ul> <p><b><u>Sustainability</u></b></p> <p>The impact of horticulture on the wider environment, with specific reference to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reduction of the negative impacts of horticultural practices</li><li>• The contribution of horticulture to the three pillars of sustainability (economic viability, social equity and environmental protection)</li><li>• The concept that horticulture should be net-positive, benefitting the wider environment</li><li>• The impact of horticulture on climate change</li><li>• The impact of climate change on horticulture.</li></ul> <p><b><u>Best Practice</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Professional approaches and techniques</li><li>• Professional use of named plant species in a wide range of horticultural settings</li><li>• Horticultural practices which are professional, current, effective and sustainable</li><li>• The adoption of trials results, research and development findings.</li></ul> <p><b><u>Equality and diversity</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Knowledge and compliance with all current legislation as it relates to horticulture</li><li>• The concepts of respect, fairness and dignity</li><li>• Negative impacts of poor practice to include discrimination, victimisation and harassment</li><li>• The advantages of inclusive cultures.</li></ul>

# RHS Level 3 Award in Horticultural Investigation

Topic		Elements
1	Initial project proposal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Project proposal</li> <li>2. Project plan</li> </ol>
2	Investigation and research	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Methodology</li> <li>2. Sources of information</li> <li>3. Analysis</li> </ol>
3	Project skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Project management</li> <li>2. Developing arguments</li> <li>3. Decision making</li> <li>4. Creative thinking</li> </ol>
4	Content and presentation	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Format</li> <li>2. Content</li> <li>3. Presentation</li> </ol>

<b>Topic:</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Initial project proposal</b>

### Topic overview

Horticulture is a fact-based discipline and horticulturists are frequently tasked with carrying out research. This could be researching the history of a garden, ascertaining the most appropriate technique to be able to complete a task, the presentation of information to a particular audience, or research into the cultivation of a genus of plants.

Research projects such as this start with the project proposal. This allows the writer the opportunity to develop a question or series of questions that the project seeks to answer. It essentially lays out what the writer plans to do. Once these questions are identified, the aims and objectives of a project can be decided upon to ensure that the project is focused and answers the original question.

Careful planning is essential to ensure that all the stages of the project are scheduled and that there is a logical development of ideas and concepts. The success of the project depends on organisational skills; these ensure each stage of the work is completed diligently and to schedule.

#### Element 1 Project proposal

- Identification of topic and working project title
- Purpose and statements of intent
- Outcomes to be achieved
- Audience.

#### Element 2 Project plan

- Background and rationale
- Initial activity plan and time schedule to include goals, achievement, and review of deadlines
- Initial approach to information management
- Overview of type of research to be undertaken and outline questions/objectives
- Initial literature review/bibliography
- Identification and justification of final presentation format (see Topic 4).

**NB: Candidates must gain approval from the approved training centre to progress from this gateway topic, before undertaking Topics 2 – 4.**

<b>Topic:</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Investigation and research</b>

### Topic overview

Research within horticulture at this level of study involves the collection of information. This may be from a wide variety of reliable sources (e.g. from lived experience to published works) and the research may be carried out using different methods.

The horticulturist then considers (analyses) the information and applies the findings of the research.

The culmination of this activity is that the horticulturist can demonstrate an understanding of the topic being researched to their audience.

#### Element 1 Methodology

- Identification and justification of appropriate methodology to satisfy breadth and depth of research as applicable to the project
- Consideration of relevant theories/practitioners, including new and emerging thinking/practices
- Reflective of multiple perspectives to ensure balance and objectivity.

#### Element 2 Sources of information

- Identification of reliable sources of information, including technical websites and historic documents
- Identification of relevant primary sources, including visits to gardens, or reviewing published work from established figures
- Identification of relevant secondary sources, including professional books/trade magazine articles, published reports and conference papers.

#### Element 3 Analysis

- Criteria that can be used to arrive at conclusions
- Identification of key points and their significance.

<b>Topic:</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Project skills</b>

### Topic overview

The delivery of the project requires a range of skills. Core to the requirement are the acquisition and demonstration of project management skills including appropriate use of resources, time, and budget. The learner will also be required to develop concepts and arguments.

These essential skills are used by horticulturists in a wide range of settings, including, for example the production of cases for the investment in new equipment, or in the development of gardens and garden areas.

These skills include the ability to present and argue a case, the solution of a number of routine and non-routine problems, the ability to apply creative thought and the achievement of the planned outcomes.

### Element 1 Project skills

- Time management skills including collection and review of information and achieving deadlines
- Project management skills including use of resources, time, and budget
- Developing logical arguments, testing of key ideas and concepts, reaching fact-based conclusions
- Decision making, reflective practice, resolving issues, identification of barriers/unforeseen issues, rationale, and evidence for adjusting plans and outcomes
- Demonstration of creative thinking i.e. options and their evaluation, innovation, and fresh perspectives.

<b>Topic:</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Content and presentation</b>

### Topic overview

Horticulturists, as part of their professional activities are required to produce formal, well written documents that convey their referenced information and arguments to the reader. Conventions on layout, structure and approach reflect the style of document being produced within the project.

As the reader may use the documents produced to inform maintenance and management plans, or buying decisions, the documents produced are required to be factual, with an appropriate level of detail and technical language for the audience and to contain well-reasoned arguments, Horticulturists authoring such documents are required to ensure that their findings are produced to a high professional standard.

#### Element 1 Format

Writing style to include:

- selection of appropriate format
- adherence to academic writing conventions
- use of technical language.

#### Element 2 Content

- Presentation of information appropriate to audience, to include:
  - presentation of facts
  - presentation of findings
  - logical arguments.
- Methods to reference and cite source material
- Concepts of relevance, accuracy, and bias.

#### Element 3 Presentation

- Development of well-written professional language, to include spelling and grammar
- Formal methods of presentation to include, illustrations, graphs, tables, and other figures.