RHS Qualifications
Examiner Comments

Examination:	RHS Level 3
Unit:	Unit 1
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.
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 3 examinations, and all stakeholders are now familiar with the format, structure and demand of the papers.

The RHS Level 3 examination papers are designed to assess the contents of the Qualification Specification according to Ofqual's level descriptors.

At Level 3 these state that candidate responses should:

- accurately apply horticultural terminology
- make reference to scientific plant names
- clearly define key principles
- demonstrate technical knowledge
- be able to interpret, evaluate, and apply information and ideas
- be able to discuss a range of perspectives and approaches
- demonstrate the ability to resolve complex and non-routine problems

These Level 3 descriptors are embedded in the Qualification Specification as shown below:

- demonstrate factual, procedural, and theoretical knowledge (AO1)
- interpret, evaluate, and apply information and ideas (AO2)
- discuss a range of perspectives and approaches (AO2)
- resolve complex and non-routine problems (AO2/AO3)
- demonstrate and apply holistic/integrated knowledge of the four Qualification-wide outcomes and the four Topic areas considered in Unit 1.

To gain higher marks candidates should be able to demonstrate mastery in the above areas.

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, procedural and theoretical knowledge are classified as being low demand.

Questions that require the interpretation, evaluation and application of knowledge are classified as medium demand.

Questions that require integrated thinking across topics, the resolution of complex and non-routine problems, and discussions on differing perspectives or approaches are classified as high demand.

General comments

Candidate performance in the examination varied depending on the level of preparation for the examination, along with applied examination technique.

- Well-prepared candidates who had a thorough knowledge of the Topics and Qualification-wide outcomes were able to achieve high marks in the examination.
- Well-prepared candidates who applied good examination technique were also able to achieve high marks.
- Candidates who demonstrated with weaker technique, tended to score lower marks as their responses often did not match the requirements of the question.
- 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 command words.

Candidates and centres are strongly advised to fully familiarise themselves with the command words commonly used in Level 3 examinations, as their purpose is to indicate the type and depth of response required.

Command word	Definition
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
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

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Command word	Definition
Complete	Learners should be able to provide short responses, or complete statements and tables
Critically	This word is often used before a command word, for example 'Evaluate' inviting an examination of an issue from the point of view of a critic with a particular focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the points of view being expressed
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
Examine	Carefully consider a topic, and provide a detailed account
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
Interpret	Explain the meaning of information that has been provided
Justify	Learners should be able to provide evidence to support an answer
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
Suggest	Learners should be able to apply their knowledge and understanding to make recommendations for actions
Summarise	Reduce an argument to provide a brief account of the relevant information
To what extent	Examine the evidence available to include different sides of an argument, then express a view as to the merit or validity of a view or statement
Use	Learners should be able to use information provided within the question, sometimes in conjunction with their own knowledge, to carry out a task

Command word	Definition
Write	Learners should be able to provide a short answer as directed

Candidate responses to examination questions should relate to UK horticulture.
It is appropriate for candidates to bring their own knowledge to questions; however, the core knowledge being assessed in this qualification relates to the cultivation of gardens and designed landscapes within the UK.

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 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 3 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.

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Section A

Questions 1 – 20

General comments on Section A

Forced answer questions are designed to test candidate's knowledge and understanding of the concepts covered in the four Topics and the four Qualification-wide outcomes that make up this unit.

At Level 3, these questions particularly relate to:

- the assessment of theoretical knowledge
- the ability to read and interpret information
- the ability to recall factual information
- the ability to apply knowledge to a range of simple scenarios
- the demonstration of procedural knowledge.

This section was well attempted by the majority of candidates, with a secure level of knowledge being displayed.

Candidates and centres are reminded of good examination technique with regards to forced answer questions:

- carefully read the question
- underline any key or important words
- score through inappropriate answers
- select the correct answer to be recorded on the response grid.

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Section B

Each question is considered separately.

Question 1

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of the key influences in the development of horticultural space.

Candidates were required to explain three ways in which political or cultural influences have shaped horticultural styles in Britain since the 17th century.

Stronger responses correctly explained that:

- the Victorian expansion of the British Empire and colonialism created wealthy garden owners with an appetite for exotic plant introductions, supported by global trade routes and plant hunting expeditions
- the Arts and Crafts movement developed as a reaction against industrialisation and mass production, celebrating craftsmanship, local materials, and artisan construction techniques within gardens
- the current political and societal focus on climate change has influenced the development of climate-resilient planting schemes, sustainable landscapes, and biodiversity-focused garden design
- the repeal of the window tax in the mid-19th century encouraged the wider use of glass in architecture, contributing to the development of elaborate glasshouses and conservatories used to cultivate and display plant collections
- post-war social changes and urban expansion influenced the rise of suburban gardening and the increased importance of domestic outdoor spaces

Weaker responses:

- discussed periods outside of the timeframe stated in the question, for example Mediaeval gardens
- referred to the Columbian Exchange of 1492 which again was outside of the timeframe of the question
- repeated the same core point three times using slightly different examples
- provided descriptive historical narratives without explaining how the political or cultural factor shaped horticultural style
- lacked clear linkage between wider social change and resulting garden characteristics

Closing comments:

Many candidates demonstrated a broad awareness of horticultural heritage, however higher-scoring responses were characterised by the ability to apply historical knowledge directly to the development of horticultural styles and garden spaces. Stronger candidates selected distinct examples from appropriate historic periods and developed their explanations clearly.

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Future candidates are advised to:

- develop secure timelines relating to horticultural heritage and the evolution of garden styles
- practise linking political, economic, and cultural change directly to developments in horticulture and garden design
- ensure that points made in 'explain' questions are fully developed
- avoid repetition by selecting clearly distinct examples
- read questions carefully to ensure responses relate to the specified historic timeframe

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Question 2

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of the impact of horticultural heritage on garden management.

Candidates were required to discuss three ways that conservation management plans guide decision making in historic gardens.

Stronger responses:

- explained that conservation management plans identify the historical significance of garden features, helping managers determine which elements should be preserved, restored, or adapted
- discussed how conservation management plans guide decisions relating to planting schemes, ensuring that plant selections are historically appropriate to the period and character of the garden
- referred to the use of conservation management plans in prioritising restoration works and allocating funds effectively
- explained that conservation management plans help balance public access with the protection of sensitive historic landscapes and features
- referred to the role of conservation management plans in supporting compliance with heritage legislation, listing requirements, and organisational policies

Weaker responses:

- provided general descriptions of historic gardens without discussing the role of conservation management plans
- confused conservation management plans with routine maintenance schedules or general garden design plans
- focused solely on restoration without considering wider management decision making
- provided vague or undeveloped responses lacking applied examples
- repeated similar points rather than discussing three distinct ways plans influence management

Closing comments:

Higher-scoring responses demonstrated an understanding that conservation management plans are important documents that inform a wide range of management decisions within historic gardens. Stronger candidates were able to apply knowledge of horticultural heritage to practical conservation and management contexts.

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Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a secure understanding of the purpose of conservation management plans
- practise applying heritage knowledge to practical garden management situations
- ensure responses address the command word 'discuss' through the development of clear and applied explanations
- avoid repetition by selecting distinct management functions or decision-making processes
- understand how historic significance, conservation priorities and ongoing garden management practices can be informed by a conservation management plan

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Question 3

This question assessed candidates' understanding plant information sources.

Candidates were required to describe four key features that make plant information sources reliable to the professional horticulturist.

Stronger responses:

- referred to the use of authoritative or recognised sources, for example professional bodies, academic institutions, botanic gardens, or peer-reviewed publications
- explained the importance of information being scientifically accurate and evidence-based
- referred to the importance of information being current and regularly updated to reflect changes in nomenclature, legislation, pest and disease status, or best practice
- discussed the value of sources that reference research findings, trials, or cited evidence
- referred to the importance of authorship, identifying that reliable sources are often written or reviewed by qualified horticultural professionals or subject specialists
- explained the need for information to be objective and unbiased, rather than from promotional sales literature

Weaker responses:

- went off at tangents and discussed unrelated horticultural topics
- focused on a publication or resource, without explaining the criteria that made it reliable
- provided vague statements such as "trustworthy websites" without further development
- repeated similar points rather than providing four distinct features

Closing comments:

This question was generally answered poorly. Many candidates lacked understanding of how professional horticulturists evaluate the reliability and authority of information sources. Stronger responses focused on evidence, authorship, accuracy, and currency, while weaker responses often simply named sources of information with no development.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop an understanding of how professional horticultural information is produced, reviewed, and validated
- revise the characteristics of authoritative and evidence-based information sources
- read questions carefully to ensure responses remain focused on the topic being assessed
- avoid vague statements and ensure points are fully developed
- practise providing distinct points rather than repeating the same idea in different ways

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Question 4

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of selecting plants for a purpose.

Candidates were required to explain three factors that should be considered when selecting plants for climate resilience.

Stronger responses:

- explained the importance of drought tolerance, referring to plant adaptations such as reduced leaf area, waxy cuticles, deep roots, or silver/hairy foliage
- discussed tolerance to temperature extremes, including the ability of plants to withstand heat stress, while also surviving winter frosts
- referred to the need for plant tolerance of free-draining soils and seasonally waterlogged soils
- explained the importance of selecting plants with resistance or resilience to pests and diseases likely to increase under changing climatic conditions
- discussed the suitability of plants to local microclimates, including exposure, aspect, urban heat island effects, and wind
- referred to the importance of biodiversity and ecological resilience through the selection of a diverse planting palette rather than reliance on a limited range of species
- explained the role of provenance and climatic ranges, which were at the top end of the requirements of the Qualification Specification.

Weaker responses:

- provided vague, undeveloped or descriptive statements without explaining how the factor related to climate resilience
- focused solely on general plant cultivation or plant attributes rather than plant selection criteria
- repeated similar points in different ways rather than providing three distinct factors
- provided examples of plant names without explaining why those plants may be climate resilient

Closing comments:

Many candidates demonstrated a general awareness of climate-related challenges in horticulture.

Higher-scoring candidates explained three specific, distinct factors, temperature, drought, soil type, pest and disease resilience etc. when selecting plants for climate resilience.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a secure understanding of the environmental factors associated with climate change and their impact on planting design
- ensure that responses to 'explain' questions are fully developed and linked clearly to the question asked
- avoid repetition by selecting clearly distinct factors
- use technical horticultural terminology appropriately and accurately

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Question 5

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of the facilities and equipment required within a plant propagation unit.

Candidates were required to explain four factors that must be considered when selecting environmental monitoring and control equipment for a plant propagation unit.

This question was poorly answered with the majority of candidates failing to answer the question as expected, demonstrating significant gaps in knowledge.

Anticipated responses within the mark schemes:

- explained the importance of accuracy and reliability in monitoring equipment, particularly for controlling temperature, humidity, light, and ventilation
- referred to the suitability of equipment for the type of propagation being undertaken, for example seed propagation, mist propagation, or propagation of specialist crops requiring precise environmental control
- discussed the scale and size of the propagation unit, linking this to equipment capacity and the ability to maintain uniform environmental conditions
- referred to energy efficiency and running costs, particularly where heating, lighting, or automated systems are used continuously
- explained the importance of automation and programmable controls to maintain stable growing conditions
- discussed maintenance requirements, durability, and the availability of technical support or replacement parts
- considered integration between monitoring and control systems, for example linking sensors to automated heating, shading, misting, or ventilation systems

The majority of candidates:

- provided lists of equipment without explaining the factors influencing equipment selection
- provided vague responses such as 'putting up netting' without further explanation
- suggested applying shading to the glasshouse
- repeated similar points rather than identifying four distinct considerations

Closing comments:

Performance on this question was poor.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a secure understanding of the typical environmental control systems used within plant propagation
- understand the factors that inform the selection of environmental monitoring equipment
- understand the factors that inform the selection of environmental control equipment
- ensure that responses to 'explain' questions are developed fully and supported with appropriate horticultural context
- revise the relationship between propagation techniques and environmental control requirements

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Question 6

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of terminology used when selecting plants.

Candidates were required to explain how the type of tree supplied (bare-root, rootballed, and container-grown) affects ordering decisions.

Stronger responses:

- explained that bare-root trees are generally only available during the dormant season
- referred to the lower cost of bare-root trees when compared to container-grown or rootballed stock, making them suitable for large-scale planting schemes
- explained that bare-root trees are lighter and easier to transport and handle, but are more vulnerable to their roots drying out if not planted or heeled in promptly
- discussed that rootballed trees are often selected for larger or more valuable specimens where retaining an intact root system improves establishment success
- referred to the increased weight, transport requirements, and handling costs associated with rootballed trees
- explained that container-grown trees can be planted over a longer season, providing greater flexibility in project scheduling and ordering

Weaker responses:

- provided vague, undeveloped statements
- described tree types without explaining how they influence ordering decisions
- confused rootballed and container-grown trees
- focused solely on planting methods rather than plant procurement and selection considerations
- repeated similar points without providing distinct considerations relating to cost, seasonality, transport, handling, or establishment

Closing comments:

Many candidates demonstrated a basic awareness of the differences between bare-root, rootballed, and container-grown trees. However, stronger responses applied this knowledge directly to practical ordering and procurement decisions, considering factors such as seasonality, transport, establishment success, and project management.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a secure understanding of horticultural terminology relating to Hardy Ornamental Nursery Stock (HONS)
- practise applying theoretical knowledge to practical procurement and planting situations
- consider the operational implications of plant type selection, including cost, logistics, and planting windows
- ensure responses to 'explain' questions are fully developed and linked directly to professional horticultural practice
- avoid providing descriptive definitions

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Question 7

This question assessed candidates' knowledge and understanding of the role of professional horticultural bodies, and how they share factual information and promote best practice within the horticultural industry.

This question was generally answered poorly, with many candidates failing to address all aspects of the question. Responses often demonstrated either significant gaps in knowledge, or weak examination technique.

The majority of candidates were able to correctly name a professional horticultural body, with many selecting the Royal Horticultural Society. Other valid examples included the Professional Gardeners' Guild, the Landscape Institute, and the Chartered Institute of Horticulture.

Candidates were required to outline the role of professional horticultural bodies.

Stronger responses:

- explained that professional bodies promote standards and professionalism within the horticultural industry
- referred to the role of professional bodies in education, training, offering qualifications, and continuing professional development
- discussed the role of these organisations in conducting or supporting research, plant trials, and the dissemination of technical knowledge
- referred to networking, career development, and industry representation
- explained the role of professional bodies in promoting best practice, sustainability, and evidence-based horticulture

Weaker responses:

- failed to outline the role of the organisations named
- provided lists of organisations without further development
- provided lists of publications without further development
- provided vague or generic statements lacking factual detail

The question also required candidates to explain how factual information and best practice are shared.

Stronger responses:

- referred to publications such as Royal Horticultural Society publications including 'Plant Finder', 'The Garden', and 'The Plant Review'
- discussed the role of RHS Plant Trials in generating and sharing evidence-based horticultural information
- referred to online forums, meetings, and networking opportunities provided by organisations such as the Professional Gardeners' Guild
- explained the role of conferences, symposia, lectures, demonstrations, and educational activities in sharing current horticultural knowledge

- referred to professional journals, technical guidance documents, webinars, and training courses

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- discussed face-to-face meetings and collaborative learning opportunities between horticultural professionals
- discussed the use of podcasts and video to disseminate information

Weaker responses:

- provided simple lists of information sources without explanation
- failed to link the information source to the sharing of factual information or best practice
- did not address the second part of the question

Closing comments:

This question was generally answered at a basic level. Many responses lacked sufficient factual depth and did not fully address all components of the question. Higher-scoring responses demonstrated both secure knowledge and strong examination technique, with clear explanation and application throughout.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a secure understanding of the role and function of professional horticultural organisations
- revise the different ways factual horticultural information and best practice are communicated within the industry
- practise developing extended responses supported by accurate factual information
- read questions carefully to ensure all aspects of the question are addressed
- develop examination technique so that responses are matched clearly to the command words and requirements of the question

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Section C

Section C responses are graded using the **assessment ladder**, shown on the following page of this report. This is the same assessment ladder used for Level 2 examinations. Candidates and centres are advised to familiarise themselves with the ladder, as it explains how grading decisions are made when assessing long-form responses.

Candidate performance in Section C ranged from those who:

- demonstrated secure factual, procedural and theoretical knowledge
- were able to interpret, evaluate and apply relevant information and ideas
- were well prepared and able to produce developed long-form responses
- discussed relevant points from a range of perspectives
- considered a range of approaches
- structured their responses logically
- demonstrated a full and holistic understanding of the topic areas and Qualification-wide outcomes
- showed mastery of the areas being assessed

to those who:

- produced responses with little relevance to the question
- produced brief responses lacking the required level of detail
- submitted unplanned or poorly structured answers
- provided a basic framework without sufficient development
- focused on individual words from the question and wrote broadly about these, rather than addressing the question set

In addition to the assessment ladder, candidate responses are also reviewed against the criteria outlined below:

Indicative content

- strength of response
- integration
- horticultural knowledge

Strength of response

Strong candidate responses:

- developed a clear and logical argument in direct response to the question
- drew on reliable and appropriate sources of information
- remained focused and relevant throughout
- demonstrated clarity of thought
- showed sound knowledge of horticultural practice

Integration

Candidate responses should demonstrate appropriate integration with other relevant areas of the syllabus.

Assessment ladder (for information)

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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 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 candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of horticultural heritage.

Candidates were required to produce a long-form response to the following question:
Discuss how horticultural heritage influences garden management decisions today.

Stronger responses achieved higher marks and included discussion of:

- the concept of horticultural heritage, demonstrating an understanding that historic styles, philosophies, planting traditions, and management practices continue to shape modern horticulture
- how the Arts and Crafts movement continues to influence contemporary garden management decisions through the use of naturalistic planting, locally sourced materials, craftsmanship, and sympathetic hard landscaping
- the balance between maintaining authenticity to heritage and meeting contemporary requirements, including sustainability, biodiversity enhancement, accessibility, and climate resilience
- plant replacement strategies within historic gardens, particularly where climate change has reduced the suitability of original planting palettes, requiring informed selection of alternative species that remain sympathetic to the original design intent
- the continuing influence of the Wild Garden movement associated with William Robinson, particularly through naturalistic planting schemes and less formal management approaches
- the influence of more recent horticultural heritage, including the work of Beth Chatto and Christopher Lloyd, on planting design, and drought-tolerant gardening, along with discussion as to how the management practices at sites such as Beth Chatto Gardens and Great Dixter can develop to reflect both heritage and current Best Practice
- how historic design features, such as formal avenues, terraces, topiary, and walled gardens, require specialised maintenance techniques that balance heritage conservation with modern pressures, including soil compaction, visitor numbers, parked vehicles, severe weather events associated with climate change, and increasing pressure to reduce staff hours
- the influence of legislation and legal protections, including Tree Preservation Orders and heritage conservation requirements, on management decisions within historic landscapes
- the management of heritage kitchen gardens using traditional horticultural approaches while integrating contemporary tools, machinery, and resource-efficient working practices

Weaker responses:

- were brief, descriptive, and lacked development
- provided few creditworthy points or lacked clear linkage to modern garden management decisions
- discussed topics outside the scope of the question, for example focusing primarily on visitor engagement, events, or community activities within heritage gardens
- discussed the documentation or recording of historic gardens without linking this to practical management decision making
- focused heavily on garden history without applying this knowledge to current horticultural practice

Closing comments:

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This question differentiated effectively between candidates with a broad factual knowledge of horticultural heritage and those able to apply that knowledge to contemporary garden management. Higher-scoring responses demonstrated an ability to integrate historic, practical, environmental, and legal considerations into well-developed discussions.
Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a broad understanding of both historic and contemporary horticultural heritage influences
- practise applying heritage knowledge to practical garden management scenarios
  develop extended discussion responses that integrate multiple factors and viewpoints
- ensure responses remain focused on the question asked, particularly where application to current management practice is required
- revise significant individuals, movements, and historic garden styles that continue to influence professional horticulture today

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Question 2

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of horticultural heritage.

Candidates were required to produce a long-form response to the following question:
Evaluate the role of both plant exploration and introduction in shaping the diversity of plants found in British gardens today.

Stronger responses achieved higher marks and included discussion of:

- the purpose of plant exploration in increasing the diversity of plants available for cultivation within Britain
- early introductions during the Tudor and Renaissance periods, including both ornamental plants such as tulips and tomatoes as edible crops
- the role of named plant collectors and explorers, together with examples of important introductions, for example Ernest Henry Wilson introducing plants such as *Lilium regale* and *Acer griseum*
- the influence of George Forrest and the introduction of Rhododendron species to Scottish estates, helping shape woodland and shrubbery planting styles that remain influential today
- the contribution of plant introduction to the wide range of ornamental, edible, woodland, alpine, and specialist plants now found in British gardens
- the positive impacts of increased plant diversity, including greater horticultural choice, extended seasonal interest, and opportunities for plant breeding and cultivar development
- the negative consequences of some introductions, including the establishment of invasive non-native species and associated ecological impacts
- the ethical and environmental implications of wild collecting, including habitat damage and biodiversity loss, together with reference to modern regulation and conservation frameworks
- the continuing role of plant exploration today, including the search for plants with drought tolerance, pest resistance, or resilience to climate change for use in breeding programmes and future garden plantings
- balancing the benefits of plant introductions against environmental, ecological, and ethical concerns

Weaker responses:

- were brief and undeveloped
- addressed only limited aspects of the question
- focused heavily on botanical gardens or plant conservation without relating these clearly to plant diversity within British gardens
- discussed seed banks and ex situ conservation without linking these to plant exploration or introduction
- described the work of plant hunters without explaining how their introductions shaped garden diversity today
- provided historical narrative without evaluation or application to contemporary horticulture

Closing comments:

Higher-scoring responses demonstrated broad factual knowledge combined with the ability to evaluate both the positive and negative impacts of plant exploration and introduction. Stronger candidates integrated historical examples, named plant introductions, environmental considerations, and contemporary relevance into balanced long-form discussions.

Future candidates are advised to:

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- develop a secure understanding of the history and purpose of plant exploration and introduction
- revise significant plant collectors and their introductions, together with their influence on British horticulture
- practise evaluative writing that considers both benefits and drawbacks
- use named plant examples and historical references to support extended responses
- ensure responses remain focused on the diversity of plants found in British gardens today, rather than broader conservation themes alone

Question 3

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of horticultural sustainability, plant selection, and cultivation.

Candidates were required to produce a long-form response to the following question:
To what extent do sustainability principles influence plant selection and cultivation practices within gardens?

Stronger responses achieved higher marks and included discussion of:

- the principles of sustainability within horticulture, including environmental protection, efficient resource use, and the enhancement of biodiversity
- the selection of plants suited to local soil conditions, climate, and aspect in accordance with the principle of 'right plant, right place'
- the increased use of drought-tolerant and climate-resilient planting in response to climate change and sustainable water management practices
- the use of long-lived herbaceous perennials, shrubs, and trees in preference to short-term seasonal bedding displays requiring high resource inputs
- the selection of peat-free growing systems (for example raised beds) and sustainable growing media
- the influence of sustainability on reducing inputs such as irrigation, fertilisers, pesticides, and the source of energy, for example battery power, and green energy tariffs
- the use of cultivation techniques such as mulching, composting, no-dig systems, rainwater harvesting, and integrated pest management
- the importance of biodiversity within sustainable gardens, including pollinator-friendly planting, wildlife habitats, species diversity, and ecological connectivity
- the consideration of provenance, biosecurity, and the sourcing of locally grown plants to reduce transport footprints and minimise the risk of pest and disease introduction
- the balance between sustainability objectives and other horticultural or aesthetic considerations, for example heritage planting schemes, customer expectations, or formal bedding traditions
- discussions that considered the extent to which sustainability principles influence decisions, recognising that economic, cultural, practical, and aesthetic factors may also shape plant selection and cultivation practices

Weaker candidate responses:

- were descriptive and lacked development
- focused only on environmental sustainability without considering plant selection and cultivation practices
- provided general statements about "being green" without applied horticultural detail
- provided narrow responses focused on a single issue, such as local plant procurement
- lacked balance and did not consider the 'to what extent' command
- Did not consider the impact of competing influences on decision making

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Closing comments:

Higher-scoring responses demonstrated an ability to integrate sustainability principles with practical horticultural decision making. Stronger candidates produced balanced discussions that linked plant selection, cultivation practices, environmental considerations, and current horticultural challenges.

Weaker responses were often limited by a lack of applied knowledge and a lack of focus on the requirement of the question.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a broad understanding of the impact of sustainability principles on professional horticulture
- practise applying sustainability concepts to garden management and planting scenarios
- ensure long-form responses are detailed, rather than descriptive
- revise both plant selection and cultivation practices, ensuring both aspects of the question are addressed
- use relevant horticultural examples to support discussion and demonstrate applied understanding

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Question 4

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of plant propagation and sustainable horticultural practice.

Candidates were required to produce a long-form response to the following question:
Discuss the importance of propagation protocols in ensuring successful and sustainable plant propagation.

Stronger responses achieved higher marks and included discussion of:

- the role of propagation protocols in ensuring consistency and reliability within propagation systems
- the importance of hygiene and biosecurity protocols, including sterilisation of tools, use of horticulturally sterile growing media, and disease prevention measures to reduce losses from pests and pathogens
- the role of environmental control protocols, including the monitoring and management of temperature, humidity, ventilation, light, and irrigation to optimise propagation success
- the importance of timing protocols, for example taking cuttings at the correct stage of growth to maximise rooting success
- the use of accurate labelling, record keeping, and traceability systems to maintain plant identity and support quality assurance
- the role of propagation protocols in reducing waste through improved success rates and efficient use of resources
- the importance of sustainable resource use, including peat-free growing media, water conservation, energy efficiency, and minimising chemical inputs
- the role of protocols in ensuring true-to-type propagation, particularly when using vegetative propagation techniques
- the importance of propagation protocols to maintain plant quality
- reference to the allocation of plant passports as part of the propagation process
- discussion considering how well-designed protocols improve both propagation success and long-term environmental sustainability

Weaker responses:

- were vague and undeveloped
- went off topic, considering peripheral concepts
- were descriptive and lacked discussion of protocols
- described methods of propagation rather than systems and procedures
- provided vague statements about "best practice" without detail or development
- confused propagation protocols with annual propagation plans
- failed to link practice to sustainability

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Closing comments:

Higher-scoring responses demonstrated an ability to integrate their mastery of technical propagation knowledge with wider sustainability considerations. Stronger candidates recognised that propagation protocols underpin successful, efficient, and sustainable horticultural production systems.

Weaker responses often lacked focus on propagation protocols, confused these with annual propagation plans and more frequently failed to develop sufficiently detailed discussion.

Future candidates are advised to:

- develop a secure understanding of propagation protocols
- practise integrating their knowledge of propagation protocols with their knowledge of sustainability
- ensure responses remain focused on the specific wording of the question
- use horticultural examples to support extended responses

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