RHS Qualifications
Examiner Comments

Examination:	RHS Level 3
Unit:	Unit 1
Examination date:	June 25

General Introductory Comments

Examiners' comments are produced by RHS Qualifications following each examination series.

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

There have now been multiple papers for the Level 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 candidates should:

- demonstrate factual, procedural, and theoretical 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
- review how effective methods and actions have been
- demonstrate responsibility for supervising or guiding others.

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.

For instance, where a question instructs candidates to *explain two factors*, the mark scheme requires examiners to accept only the first two responses given. Each valid point is awarded one mark, with a further mark available for appropriate explanation or development, giving a maximum of four marks overall.

If a candidate lists four factors but the first two are incorrect, no marks are awarded, even if subsequent responses would have earned credit.

It is also important to note that simply listing a factor is not sufficient. To gain full credit, candidates must provide a clear and concise explanation—offering a reasoned statement that demonstrates understanding of the process or factor identified.

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
Annotate	Learners should be able to apply labels and supporting information on diagrams

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
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

Command word	Definition
Interpret	Explain the meaning of information that has been provided
Justify	Learners should be able to provide evidence to support an answer
Label	Apply information to diagrams
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
Write	Learners should be able to provide a short answer as directed

Terminology used within questions:

Term	Explanation
Horticultural situation	Candidates may be required to state a horticultural situation. 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.

Additional guidance is provided with regard to the wider geographic location of candidates.

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 ***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

Forced answer questions are designed to test candidates' 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.

Section B

Each question is considered separately.

Question 1

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of **Health and Safety relating to the planning of plant maintenance**.

Candidates were required to name one maintenance task.

The most frequent choice was either hedge trimming or the use of a pedestrian rotary lawn mower.

Candidates were then required to state two hazards associated with the chosen task.

Stronger responses correctly identified hazards, such as:

- sharp blades
- flying debris
- noise
- vibration.

Weaker responses often confused hazards with risks, giving answers such as:

- cuts and abrasions
- eye injuries
- falls from heights when cutting higher hedges.

Candidates were then asked to state two risks associated with the same task.

Stronger responses correctly identified risks, including:

- cuts and abrasions
- eye injuries
- falls from heights when cutting higher hedges.

Weaker responses again confused risks with hazards, providing answers such as:

- sharp blades
- flying debris
- noise
- vibration.

In the final part of the question, candidates were required to suggest an action to control each risk.

Stronger responses provided specific and appropriate controls, for example:

- protecting hands from cuts and abrasions by wearing leather gloves
- protecting eyes from flying debris by wearing goggles
- protecting ears from noise by wearing ear defenders
- ensuring operators are fully trained to prevent injury.

Weaker responses tended to give vague, undeveloped, or incorrect controls. Some suggested actions that did not relate directly to the risks identified, for example listing toxic fumes as a risk and suggesting gloves as the control. Other weaker responses included:

- the risk of damage to plants
- checking the equipment before use, without specifying the checks required.

Closing comments

Future candidates should be encouraged to develop a clear understanding of the difference between hazards and risks, and to practice applying Health and Safety principles across a range of horticultural tasks.

Candidate responses should demonstrate the ability to provide specific and practical control measures that are directly linked to the risks identified, rather than offering vague or generic suggestions.

The use of clear and accurate terminology relating to hazards, risks, and controls will help candidates achieve higher marks.

Question 2

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of **plant propagation protocols.**

General comments

Many candidate responses to this question were generally poor, undeveloped, and did not demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge for Level 3. Some responses would have scored low marks at Level 2.

Many responses lacked the required technical accuracy, failed to use professional terminology appropriate to Level 3 study, and did not meet the depth indicated in the Qualification Specification and the Guidance Document.

Question focus

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of plant propagation protocols.

The first part of the question required candidates to name a plant that requires scarification to enable seed germination.

Stronger responses**:**

- correctly named a plant that requires scarification, such as *Laburnum anagyroides* or *Lathyrus odoratus*
- used accurate scientific plant names.

Weaker responses**:**

- suggested plants that do not require scarification
- relied on common rather than scientific plant names.

The second part of the question required candidates to develop a propagation protocol for the plant named in the first part, structured under three headings.

Very few responses demonstrated sufficient technical knowledge, with many showing a considerable lack of familiarity with the required specification.

Growing media specifications

Stronger responses correctly specified:

- John Innes seed compost
- a desirable pH of approximately 6.5
- an AFP (air-filled porosity) of 20–30% to ensure adequate oxygen availability during rooting.

Weaker responses were vague, undeveloped, or incorrect, for example:

- stating that soil should be well drained, when soil is not used in propagation
- suggesting that once rooted, the plant should be potted into soil
- referring to AFP in general terms without defining an acceptable AFP specification for growing media
- recommending organic compost or adding perlite without definition, or reference to AFP or pH requirements.
- citing peat-free compost without specifying the type
- offering generic statements such as seeds will need an appropriate medium without defining characteristics or providing a specification
- focusing on the type of container rather than the growing media
- stating propagation methods (e.g. grafting, layering) instead of growing media specification.

Hygiene considerations

Stronger responses correctly stated:

- all materials should be horticulturally sterile
- positive air movement should be maintained to reduce disease risk
- horticultural sterilant should be used between batches of plants
- daily monitoring of propagules for fungal infection is required.

Weaker responses were vague, undeveloped, or incorrect, for example:

- confusing hygiene with rooting temperatures
- stating gloves should be worn without a wider hygiene context
- describing container type rather than hygiene practices
- offering health and safety considerations unrelated to hygiene.

Water management

Stronger responses correctly stated:

- water should be sourced from the mains to minimise disease introduction
- water management should maintain AFP at 20–30%
- free drainage must be ensured across all benches.

Weaker responses were vague, undeveloped, or incorrect, for example:

- making generic statements such as keep the plant moist but not waterlogged
- describing application methods (e.g. use a light spray) instead of developing a water management protocol
- stating, watch for soil drying out, which is undeveloped at level 3 as the response should link to the development of a protocol, for example, specifying measures for water content in growing media
- focusing on mist units as irrigation methods
- suggesting soil should be maintained with 80% moisture, which is incorrect.

Closing comments

Overall, this question exposed significant gaps in candidate knowledge of basic plant propagation protocols. Many responses relied on vague, generic statements, lacked technical precision, and did not apply the required level of knowledge or understanding. Candidates are encouraged to strengthen their understanding of propagation protocols, growing media specifications, hygiene standards, and water management, making use of accurate professional horticultural terminology.

Question 3

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

Candidates were required to explain four influences on the development of Renaissance gardens.

Stronger responses correctly stated that Renaissance gardens were:

- the reinterpretation of classical gardens, with geometric approaches taking precedence
- the belief that magnificent gardens served to enhance the prestige and status of monarchs, princes, and wealthy patrons
- accurate depictions of gardens in western art during this period allowed key attributes—such as ornaments celebrating antiquity—to be widely copied
- where fantasy and reality were closely linked, with Italy seen as the centre for theatrical and inspiring new effects for example, the gardens of the Villa d'Este at Tivoli featured dramatic water displays, grottoes, and automata designed to surprise and delight visitors, blurring the boundary between natural landscape and human invention
- developed at a time when fashion strongly influenced design, with innovations such as water mazes, elaborate topiary, and obelisks being incorporated.

Weaker responses were vague, undeveloped, or incorrect, for example:

- claiming that Fibonacci and the golden ratio were developed and applied in these gardens
- suggesting travellers and explorers influenced design, without specifying how, or by providing examples
- incorrectly stating that Henry VII promoted Renaissance gardens, when it was Henry VIII and especially Elizabeth I's court where Renaissance influences became more evident
- incorrectly linking the development of Renaissance gardens (15th century Italy) with later historical contexts, such as the Stuarts' naval hegemony (17th–18th century), Dutch tulipomania (1630s), or the Enlightenment (17th–18th century)
- incorrectly attributing sustainability aims, such as encouraging wildlife and biodiversity, to the Renaissance style.

Closing comments

Candidates are further advised that precision in historical context is essential. Renaissance gardens developed in Italy during the 15th and 16th centuries were shaped by classical revival, status, fashion, and the theatrical arts. Accurate chronology and clear, well-developed examples are required for higher marks, while anachronistic or vague references weaken responses significantly. Candidates should also ensure they distinguish between Renaissance influences and those of later garden styles.

Future candidates should ensure they can place Renaissance gardens accurately in their historical and cultural context. The Renaissance period began in Italy during the 15th century, and its garden style was shaped by classical revival, geometry, status, theatricality, and fashion. Learners are advised to:

- practise distinguishing Renaissance influences from those of later movements
- support points with accurate examples or explanations
- avoid vague or anachronistic statements, for example linking Renaissance gardens to biodiversity aims or tulipomania
- use precise, subject-specific vocabulary (e.g. geometric layout, grotto, automata, topiary, obelisk)
- develop responses that go beyond description by explaining how and why design features reflected cultural values, patronage, or fashion at the time.

Clear, well-structured answers that combine accurate chronology, detailed examples, and reasoned explanation will achieve higher marks.

Question 4

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of **managing plants in botanic and other gardens.**

The first part of the question required candidates to define the term living collection.

Stronger responses provided an accurate and formal definition, for example: *a group of plants grown for reference, research, or conservation.* Other acceptable definitions included: *the curated and actively managed collection of living plants that are grown, displayed, documented, and maintained for specific purposes such as education, conservation, or research.*

Weaker responses incorrectly defined the term *living collection*.
Common errors included:

- a group of plants that are still functioning (living)
- a group of plants that are all of the same species
- a collection grown for propagation only
- a collection of plants (too vague)
- a collection of plants true to the original plant
- a collection of rare plants or trees
- plants and living material stored and catalogued
- a collection where crosses are made to create new species or cultivars
- a collection exhibited in situ in a natural setting, left to grow and evolve.

It was disappointing that many candidates were unable to provide an accurate definition.

Where a definition is requested, candidates should provide a concise, formal definition rather than a description, explanation, or commentary.

Candidates were then required to state three purposes that living collections fulfil in botanical gardens**.**

Stronger responses included:

- education
- research
- conservation
- ex situ propagation.

Weaker responses incorrectly stated purposes such as:

- a source of expertise
- ornamental display
- creating new colours, shapes, and forms
- recording diversity
- genetic security (too vague and imprecise)
- providing nectar for pollinating insects.

Closing comments

Future candidates should ensure they learn and practice accurate definitions of key terms.

Responses should focus on concise, formal definitions rather than broad descriptions.

In addition, candidates should be able to distinguish between the recognised purposes of living collections—education, research, conservation, and ex situ propagation—and other horticultural benefits that, while valuable, do not form part of the formal purpose of a living collection.

Developing precision in terminology and a deeper understanding of the role of botanic gardens consistent with the Qualification Specification and the Guidance Document, will help candidates achieve higher marks.

Question 5

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of **both Equality and Diversity and horticultural heritage.**

Candidates were required to state five ways in which knowledge of Equality and Diversity has impacted the interpretation of heritage plant collections.

Stronger responses correctly stated that:

- plant collections are increasingly interpreted from the perspective of original peoples
- the fairness of historic plant collection practices is communicated
- interpretation is being made more accessible to people with disabilities
- stories about individuals who challenged societal norms are included
- hidden histories relating to women and ethnic minorities are acknowledged
- exploitation and dispossession resulting from plant hunting are recognised.

Weaker responses often suggested impacts that were unrelated to the question, for example:

- climate change
- the running of cultural events
- fair pay and working conditions
- gardens as calm and peaceful places
- developing plant growth to enhance food supplies.

Closing comments

Some candidates did not attempt this question, while many others appeared have significant gaps in their knowledge, or were unable to demonstrate the ability to think on their feet, integrating their knowledge of Equality and Diversity with interpretation.

Candidates should ensure they are familiar with how concepts of Equality and Diversity influence the interpretation of heritage collections. This includes recognising the voices of marginalised groups, acknowledging contested histories, along with understanding the ethical dimensions of plant collecting.

Candidates should also practice applying broad Equality and Diversity principles to a range of specific horticultural heritage contexts, using formal examples and principles, rather than relying on generic or unrelated statements.

Question 6

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of **annual propagation plans.**

Candidates were required to demonstrate their knowledge of annual propagation plans by explaining three components.

Stronger responses explained that:

- annual propagation plans review the resources required, including stock plants and bench space in the propagation unit
- labour requirements are considered, ensuring propagation staff are neither under- nor over-occupied
- budgets can be developed to secure the necessary materials
- the quantities of different plants required are specified
- germination and rooting times are factored in to determine the number of propagules required (along with bench space and other resources) to meet production targets.

Weaker responses tended to confuse annual propagation plans with planting plans and other documents or protocols. Candidates often:

- described propagation techniques, which are part of propagation protocols rather than annual propagation plans
- outlined techniques to judge when plants are ready for harvest
- listed methods of propagating a range of plant species
- provided specifications for growing media
- described irrigation and fertiliser regimes
- presented plans of the propagation unit or flow diagrams
- focused on plant hygiene protocols
- confused propagation plans with planting plans, referring to colour themes and numbers of plants required for display.

Closing comments

Many candidates confused annual propagation plans with propagation protocols, leading to poor-quality, vague, and undeveloped responses that did not reflect the academic level expected for this qualification.

Future candidates should ensure they understand the distinction between *propagation plans* (strategic planning documents concerned with resources, labour, timing, and production targets) and *propagation protocols* (technical instructions on how propagation is carried out).

Successful responses will demonstrate not only awareness of the key components of annual propagation plans but also the ability to apply this knowledge to realistic plant propagation contexts.

Question 7

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

Candidates were required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding by discussing in detail one impact of a changing climate on the management of heritage gardens.

Stronger responses successfully identified one specific impact of a changing climate and explored it in detail. These included:

- recognising the trend towards warmer and drier spring and summer conditions
- suggesting appropriate mitigations such as the use of drought-resistant plants or favouring autumn over spring planting
- considering increases in pest populations encouraged by warmer conditions
- identifying the prevalence of new pest species better adapted to changing climates
- noting that irrigation regimes will be affected by higher demand for water
- recognising that water shortages and sustainability considerations may necessitate rainwater harvesting or improved water storage systems.

Weaker responses often failed to identify one clear impact of climate change. Instead, they offered vague or tangential comments, for example:

- stating a general need for more biodiverse planting without linking this to climate change
- suggesting only that the garden will need extra care and attention
- claiming that climate change will take away from its heritage without explanation
- making inaccurate statements about species adaptation, such as plants growing adjacent to rivers being used to low oxygen levels.

Examiner comments

Future candidates should ensure that they identify *one clear impact* of climate change and then discuss this in detail, providing both the implications for heritage garden management and possible mitigation strategies.

Vague, generic statements will not attract high marks. Candidates should also recognise the importance of balancing the conservation of heritage character with the adoption of sustainable management practices in response to climate pressures. Accurate use of horticultural terminology and reference to specific Best Practice approaches are expected at this level.

Question 8

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of **plant procurement.**

Candidates were required to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding by discussing how British Standards impact the specification and planting of plant material.

Stronger responses**:**

- defined the term *British Standards*
- discussed their role in plant specification, in particular the definition of height and girth
- referred to specific standards, for example *BS 3936: Nursery Stock Specification*
- explained that British Standards allow landscape architects to accurately specify plant sizes, ensuring clear understanding between supplier and client
- highlighted that standards provide information necessary to select the right size of hardy nursery stock for any use, e.g. choosing a standard or heavy standard tree as a specimen for parkland.

Weaker responses:

- confused British Standards with plant passports
- discussed the concept of "right plant, right place" instead of procurement standards
- confused British Standards with plant naming conventions
- referred incorrectly to phytosanitary certificates
- confused British Standards with calculations of plant numbers
- described them as unnecessary restrictions or regulations
- suggested they relate to herbicide and fertiliser use
- discussed legislation on invasive plants
- described CITES regulations
- referred inappropriately to apple rootstocks.

Closing comments

A large number of weaker responses demonstrated significant misconceptions, confusing British Standards with unrelated legislation, certification schemes, or cultivation principles.

These responses were very poor, revealed clear gaps in knowledge, and did not reflect the academic level expected at Level 3. Basic concepts such as plant passports, CITES, or naming conventions were incorrectly substituted for British Standards.

Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should ensure they are familiar with the purpose and scope of British Standards as they relate to plant material. This includes:

- knowing the relevant standards (e.g. BS 3936) and what they cover
- understanding how standards provide clarity in plant specification, particularly in relation to size, quality, and condition
- recognising their role in ensuring consistency between supplier and client
- avoiding confusion with other legal or regulatory frameworks such as plant passports, phytosanitary certification, or invasive plant legislation.

Section C

Section C candidate responses are graded against the assessment ladder, which is on the next page of this report. (This is the same ladder that is used in the Level 2 examinations.) Candidates and centres are advised to review the ladder as this indicates how the assessment decisions are made, when grading long form responses.

Candidate performance in Section C ranges from those candidates who:

- demonstrated their factual, procedural and theoretical knowledge
- were able to interpret, evaluate and apply relevant information and ideas
- were well prepared and able to produce long form responses
- could discuss relevant points from a range of perspectives
- could discuss a range of approaches
- approached the question logically
- demonstrated a full and holistic knowledge of the topic areas and Qualification-wide outcomes
- demonstrated mastery of the areas being assessed.

through to candidates who:

- produced brief responses which lacked the required level of detail
- provided responses which were unplanned and unstructured
- provided responses that gave a framework, but which did not provide the required level of detail
- picked up on certain words in the question, and wrote all they knew about these words, rather than answering the question.

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

Indicative content

- Strength of response
- Integration
- Horticultural knowledge.

Strength of response

Strong candidate responses:

- developed a logical argument to answer the question
- drew on reliable information sources
- were relevant to the question
- expressed clarity of thought
- demonstrated knowledge of horticultural practices.

Integration

Candidate responses should integrate with other relevant areas of the syllabus.

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 candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of **the impact of horticultural heritage on garden management.**

Candidates were asked: *How should the core principles of conservation theory be applied to the management of horticultural heritage?*

Stronger responses**:**

- defined the term *conservation theory*
- discussed the concept of heritage values as being both tangible and intangible
- identified the four key concepts of conservation theory:
    - significance
    - prioritisation of works
    - spirit of place
    - legislative framework
- explained how these four concepts can be applied to the management of horticultural heritage
- identified the three key aspects of conservation management plans:
    - assessment
    - planning
    - action
- related these aspects directly to the management of horticultural heritage.

Weaker responses**:**

- referred to the four key concepts of conservation theory only in anecdotal or vague ways
- discussed garden management practices without linking them to conservation theory
- focused on the importance of plant records without linking them to conservation theory
- described horticultural techniques linked to historical garden styles rather than conservation principles
- offered unrelated commentary, such as plant production for famine relief or the role of plants in medicine.

Closing comments

This was not a popular question, and many candidates who attempted it demonstrated limited knowledge of conservation theory and its application to horticultural heritage.

Future candidates should ensure they are confident in defining conservation theory and in identifying its four key concepts: significance, prioritisation of works, spirit of place, and legislative framework. Candidates should practice being able to apply these principles to heritage horticultural settings.

Question 2

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of **plant knowledge.**

Candidates were required to discuss how biodiversity ratings are used in horticulture.

Stronger responses**:**

- defined the term *biodiversity rating*
- explained the importance of biodiversity ratings in garden management
- provided simple exemplar calculations, often using Simpson's Diversity Index
- discussed how the results of calculations can inform management decisions
- referred to organisations working in this field, such as the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC)
- considered how managers of urban green spaces might respond to biodiversity findings
- gave clear examples of how biodiversity ratings are applied in urban green space management, demonstrating advanced applied knowledge.

Weaker responses**:**

- described garden areas in general terms without linking to biodiversity ratings
- stated only that a calculation could be carried out, without further development
- confused biodiversity ratings with climate resilience
- lost focus by discussing plant pest and pathogen control
- discussed related processes such as pollination, pest control, or nutrient cycling, without connecting them to biodiversity rating systems.

Closing comments

Many responses were basic, vague, or undeveloped. A significant number of candidates failed to demonstrate an understanding of how biodiversity ratings are calculated or applied to inform horticultural practice.

Future candidates should ensure they can define biodiversity ratings and understand their role in evidence-based horticultural management. They should be able to describe how biodiversity indices (such as Simpson's Diversity Index) are calculated, explain how the results are interpreted, and provide examples of how these findings can be applied to real-world horticultural contexts.

Question 3

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of **plant selection and cultivation.**

Candidates were required to discuss, with reference to named gardens, how heritage can impact on planting design.

Stronger responses**:**

- supported their answers with a wide range of named gardens to illustrate and reinforce key points
- discussed the concept of heritage in relation to planting design
- explained how concepts such as *spirit of place* can influence planting choices
- provided examples of heritage gardens recently replanted, such as Pitmedden, to demonstrate applied knowledge
- structured their responses by considering:
    - historical plant selections
    - design layout and style
    - authenticity and conservation
    - maintenance practices.

Weaker responses**:**

- described gardens through time, repeating material from their Section B essay on Renaissance gardens rather than addressing the set question
- stated spirit of place without further development
- discussed the work of modern designers such as Piet Oudolf, which was not relevant to heritage planting design
- described the work of Gertrude Jekyll without linking it to the question
- discussed organic gardening practices, which were unrelated to heritage impact
- described heritage gardens in general terms without analysis of planting design.

Closing comments

This was a popular question, and a number of candidates produced high-scoring responses. However, many others failed to respond directly to the question, instead writing general essays on historic garden styles.

Future candidates should ensure that responses remain tightly focused on the specific question. In this case, answers needed to demonstrate how *heritage impacts on planting design*, supported by relevant examples from named gardens. Stronger responses will integrate the principles of heritage conservation, including authenticity, spirit of place, plant selection strategies and maintenance practices, with detailed discussion of how these influence planting decisions. Candidates should avoid the temptation to provide generic histories of garden styles or biographies of designers unless these are directly relevant to the question.

Question 4

This question assessed candidates' applied knowledge and understanding of **plant propagation.**

Candidates were required to discuss the implications of applying sustainability principles to the management of a plant propagation unit.

Stronger responses**:**

- defined the term *sustainability*
- provided a clear structure to their responses by considering and developing key points such as:
    - energy inputs, highlighting the importance of renewable energy sources and low-energy devices, for example LED lighting
    - reducing reliance on single-use plastics, considering alternatives for pots, trays, and glazing/covering materials
    - the use and reduction of crop protection chemicals
    - water footprints and sustainable irrigation practices
    - carbon footprints, particularly in relation to growing media and transportation
    - strategies for achieving carbon neutrality
- recognised the *social dimension* of sustainability, including issues of modern slavery and ethical supply chain management.

Weaker responses**:**

- discussed biodiversity in general terms, without linking this to the question
- framed sustainability solely as an additional cost, without considering benefits or strategies
- described propagation timing or propagation techniques, which were not relevant to the question
- incorrectly described borehole water as sustainable
- focused on the physical layout or ergonomics of propagation units
- discussed staff costs rather than sustainability principles
- outlined a structure or framework but failed to develop points in detail
- discussed maintenance of propagation units without sustainability context
- made inaccurate or undeveloped comments about peat-free growing media
- suggested, incorrectly, that only native plants should be propagated for sustainability.

Closing comments

Many responses did not relate directly to the question, with candidates drifting into general descriptions of propagation units rather than applying sustainability principles. Some high-scoring candidates demonstrated excellent applied knowledge, but many others made basic, undeveloped points that did not meet the level of depth expected.

Future candidates should ensure that they understand how sustainability principles can be *applied in practice* to propagation units. Responses should move beyond generic statements and instead demonstrate clear links between sustainability concepts and horticultural practice, with examples. Areas to consider include energy use, water management, growing media, waste reduction, supply chain ethics, and carbon footprint. Stronger answers will define sustainability, structure their discussion clearly, and provide applied examples that demonstrate awareness of both environmental and social dimensions of sustainable propagation.