RHS Qualifications

Examination:	RHS Level 3
Unit:	Unit 2
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 2.

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

Overview of Examination

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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 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
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

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Command word	Definition
	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
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

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Command word	Definition
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.

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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.

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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 **gardens and their communities.**

Candidates were supplied with information and guidance from *Future Parks* on how to engage communities with parks, which outlined ten key areas.

Candidates were instructed to select four of these areas (for example, *Test and learn*) and to give an example of how each could be used to engage the local community.

Stronger responses provided appropriate and detailed examples, such as:

- *Understand your community*: holding consultations on what local residents would like from the park, communicated through door-to-door surveys, leaflets, or articles in local magazines and newspapers
- *Develop partnerships*: working with other initiatives, charities, or local organisations. For example, collaborating with a charity that provides outings for the elderly, enabling older residents to engage with the park while strengthening relationships with community partners
- *Articulate your purpose*: documenting the mission and goals of the park on a website and sharing these with the community. This can highlight social, mental, and physical benefits while creating transparency and shared ownership
- *Think about underserved communities*: using tools such as the government's Indices of Deprivation to identify marginalised or underrepresented groups and tailoring engagement strategies to ensure inclusivity.

Weaker responses often:

- repeated the wording of the question without adding examples
- gave only basic explanations of the terms rather than examples, as required by the question
- lacked detail and depth
- were vague, unfocused or undeveloped
- provided incorrect or irrelevant examples.

Closing comments

Many candidates recognised the importance of community engagement but failed to develop their answers with clear, applied examples. Stronger responses showed an ability to connect formal community engagement principles to practical actions that could be implemented in a real park or garden context.

Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should ensure they move beyond repeating key terms and instead focus on *applied examples*. When a question requires examples, answers should illustrate how principles can be put into practice in real-life community settings.

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Question 2

This question assessed candidate's applied knowledge and understanding of **optimising yield in productive growing.**

Candidates were required to name one perennial weed that can reduce the yield of productive crops.

Stronger responses**:**

- correctly named a perennial weed, for example *Calystegia sepium*
- used accurate scientific names.

Weaker responses**:**

- named annual or biennial weeds
- relied on common rather than scientific names.

Candidates were then required to describe a strategy to control the weed named above.

Stronger responses suggested appropriate control measures for the specific weed, such as:

- digging out the weed to remove all of the root or rhizome, ensuring no regrowth
- applying a translocated herbicide to kill the entire plant.

Weaker responses were either incorrect for the named weed, vague, or undeveloped. Examples included:

- suggesting mulching for *Equisetum arvense* (credited only where a sufficient depth was specified and supported by evidence of effectiveness)
- suggesting the use of stale seedbeds, misapplying terminology from the next part of the question
- recommending mechanical hoeing without developing the principle of repeated removal to deplete root or rhizome food reserves.

The third part of the question required candidates to describe the use of stale seedbeds.

There were very few strong responses to this part of the question, with the majority providing undeveloped or incorrect descriptions.

Stronger responses correctly described the use of stale seedbeds, noting that:

- the area is cultivated to a fine tilth
- the soil is left for a few weeks to allow weed seeds to germinate
- weed growth is removed with minimal soil disturbance, using careful hoeing or flame-based weed control technologies
- the crop is then sown.

Weaker responses included:

- stating that the area should be covered with black plastic for a year (incorrect)
- suggesting that weeds should be allowed to grow and somewhat mature before removal (vague and inaccurate)
- proposing that crops could be sown on uncultivated or bare land, which did not address the principle of the technique.

The final part of the question required candidates to describe one emerging weed control strategy.

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Stronger responses included:

- describing the use of hot foam, explaining that foam generated from a liquid high in oils and sugars retains heat, which is applied to effectively heat-sterilise the soil surface
- describing the use of electricity, explaining that a high-voltage charge applied to foliage is conducted through cell water, killing the weed.

Weaker responses**:**

- incorrectly discussed traditional weed control methods, such as hoeing, mechanical removal, or flame weeding
- gave vague or undeveloped descriptions without reference to emerging technologies.

Closing comments

Performance on this question varied, with a small number of high-quality answers, but many weak and underdeveloped responses. There was some confusion between perennial and annual weeds. Many candidates demonstrated only limited knowledge of contemporary and emerging weed management strategies.

Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should ensure they can:

- distinguish between perennial, annual, and biennial weeds, using accurate scientific names
- describe appropriate and specific control strategies for the weed named
- explain the principle and stages of stale seedbed techniques in detail
- demonstrate awareness of emerging weed control technologies, and distinguish them clearly from traditional methods.

Stronger responses will show applied understanding, use accurate horticultural terminology, and provide examples that demonstrate both breadth and depth of knowledge.

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Question 3

This question assessed candidate's applied knowledge and understanding of **sustainability and the management of trees.**

Candidates were required to explain four ways in which sustainable horticultural practices have impacted the management of trees in gardens. This question therefore required candidates to apply and integrate their knowledge to inform their response.

Stronger responses correctly integrated sustainability concepts into tree management, for example by:

- recognising that changing weather patterns, such as increasingly strong winds, have led to greater use of pollarding to reduce the sail effect and the risk of falling branches
- identifying the increased use of coppicing of suitable species such as *Corylus avellana* to produce plant supports and structures, reducing reliance on external inputs and lowering carbon emissions from transport
- discussing the use of crown raising to increase shade provision under trees, either for visitors or for shade-tolerant planting in response to reduced cloud cover
- noting that reduced rainfall and drought have resulted in deeper and wider mulching beneath trees to conserve soil moisture and reduce the need for irrigation.

Weaker responses often failed to apply sustainability principles directly to tree management, instead suggesting:

- generic crown management techniques without specification or explanation
- that manual pruning is being favoured to reduce fossil fuel use, overlooking the current role of battery-powered tools in achieving this sustainable outcome
- the sustainability impacts of tree transportation and delivery, which were outside the scope of the question (management of trees within gardens)
- sourcing stock locally or using bare-root plants, both of which are procurement issues rather than management practices
- tree selection, particularly the favouring of native species, which again relates to procurement not management
- removal of non-native trees as a sustainability measure, which misinterpreted the focus of the question
- using chemicals to treat disease, which does not align with sustainability principles.

Closing comments

Overall, while some candidates provided strong applied responses, some failed to differentiate between the procurement of trees and the management of trees. Other candidates confused generic tree care with sustainable management practices.

Knowledge of sustainability principles was often vague or misapplied.

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Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should ensure they can:

- distinguish between *procurement decisions* and the *management of existing trees* in gardens
- apply sustainability principles directly to tree management techniques (e.g. pollarding, coppicing, mulching, crown raising)
- avoid vague references to 'appropriate techniques' by specifying the practice and its sustainable outcome
- demonstrate awareness of modern approaches (e.g. use of battery-powered equipment, water conservation measures) in place of outdated or incorrect practices.

Stronger responses will explicitly link sustainable principles—resource efficiency, reduced carbon footprint, waste minimisation, the impacts of climate change, and ecosystem benefit—to the management of trees within gardens.

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Question 4

This question assessed candidate's applied knowledge and understanding of compliance **with health and safety legislation in a garden setting.**

Candidates were required to explain how the information contained in Safety Data Sheets (SDS) should be used to develop Risk Assessments within gardens.

Stronger responses**:**

- demonstrated understanding of Safety Data Sheets as a requirement under COSHH regulations, linking them directly to the production of Risk Assessments
- accurately described the purpose of SDS and their role in identifying hazards
- discussed specific information from SDS that applies to hazard management, such as inhalation risks from dust
- correctly applied hazard information by suggesting appropriate risk mitigations
- identified required PPE as set out in SDS and explained how this should be incorporated into a Risk Assessment
- noted that SDS specify safe storage practices for chemicals and materials, and applied this information appropriately.

Weaker responses**:**

- confused Safety Data Sheets with instruction manuals for horticultural tools and equipment
- discussed generic hazards relating to electricity, fuel, or blades, which were not relevant to the question
- focused on equipment maintenance and servicing requirements
- described risks associated with chainsaws, which were not linked to SDS or chemical hazard management.

Closing comments

Performance on this question was variable. While some candidates showed clear understanding of the link between Safety Data Sheets and Risk Assessments, many confused SDS with unrelated documentation, leading to irrelevant or inaccurate answers.

Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should ensure they:

- understand the purpose of Safety Data Sheets and their role in compliance with COSHH regulations
- can identify and apply key SDS information (hazards, PPE, safe storage, first aid measures, spill procedures) to the preparation of Risk Assessments
- avoid confusing SDS with tool and equipment instruction manuals, servicing requirements, or unrelated health and safety practices
- provide applied examples of how hazard information translates into practical risk control measures within a garden setting.

Stronger responses will demonstrate both regulatory knowledge and practical application, showing how SDS information underpins safe and compliant horticultural practices.

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Question 5

This question assessed candidate's applied knowledge and understanding of **growing systems used in productive gardens.**

Candidates were required to define the term *square foot gardening*.

Stronger responses correctly defined *square foot gardening* as a system where:

- growing areas are divided into smaller square units, typically around 300 mm square
- each unit is planted with different crops, creating a patchwork of plantings.

Weaker responses were vague, inaccurate, or confused, and often failed to provide a clear definition.

Candidates were then required to state three disadvantages of square foot gardening compared with traditional growing systems.

Stronger responses included valid points such as:

- not all crops are suitable, as some require more than one square foot of growing area
- the original *Square Foot Gardening* publications recommended vermiculite, which is not sustainable
- the original *Square Foot Gardening* publications recommended peat, which is not sustainable
- it can be difficult to meet the irrigation requirements of different crops grown in close proximity.

Weaker responses**:**

- described advantages rather than disadvantages, for example stating higher yields
- incorrectly linked square foot gardening exclusively with raised beds (raised beds may be used, but are not required)
- described crop spacing systems (e.g. 1, 4, or 9 plants per square foot) without linking this to disadvantages
- claimed weed control is more problematic, when higher planting density often suppresses weeds
- stated that reduced spacing produces weaker plants
- introduced irrelevant points, such as there being less space for horticulturists to bend down
- suggested soil management is more problematic, when in fact it is enhanced
- incorrectly claimed reduced space utilisation, when the system increases space utilisation
- discussed raised bed construction costs, when these are not intrinsic to the system
- argued that pests and diseases spread more quickly, when research suggests planting diversity reduces spread
- suggested increased fertiliser use, when fertiliser usage is often reduced due to soil management practices.

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Closing comments

This question revealed a clear divide between candidates who were familiar with the principles of square foot gardening and those who were not. While some candidates produced structured, accurate, and well-developed responses, many others relied on vague or incorrect assumptions and confused advantages with disadvantages.

Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should:

- ensure they can provide accurate definitions of the full range of growing systems identified in the qualification specification, clearly distinguishing core and fundamental principles from optional features (e.g. raised beds)
- be able to evaluate both advantages and disadvantages with evidence-based reasoning
- avoid speculative or contradictory statements unsupported by horticultural Best Practice
- develop their responses with reference to sustainability considerations, such as the historic use of peat and vermiculite.

Clear, accurate, and applied knowledge of growing systems is essential to achieve higher marks.

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Question 6

This question assessed candidate's applied knowledge and understanding of **the planning of projects and maintenance activities and maintenance standards.**

Candidates were required to define the term *benchmarking*.

Stronger responses defined benchmarking as:

- measuring and comparing data with other similar organisations, in order to identify areas for management improvement, comparison, and evaluation.

Weaker responses were often vague, incomplete, or misapplied the concept.
Examples included:

- comparing the growth of a plant against the height specified on a seed packet (an individual measure, not benchmarking)
- describing benchmarking as a decision-making strategy that evaluates situations from various angles, without reference to comparative data or performance standards.

Candidates were then required to apply their knowledge of benchmarking to the development of budgets for tools and machinery.

Stronger responses stated that:

- purchase costs of equipment can be identified and compared across organisations, allowing for more informed procurement decisions
- total cost of ownership can be benchmarked, considering energy efficiency, reliability, servicing, parts availability, and operating lifespan
- benefits such as reduced labour costs can be benchmarked, providing justification for investment and supporting arguments for capital expenditure.

Weaker responses included irrelevant or misdirected points, such as:

- focusing on staff training requirements
- discussing competence certificates
- referring to consumer magazines as purchase guides rather than comparative benchmarking data
- describing research into new gardening methods without linking it to procurement or budgeting.

Closing comments

This question revealed that while some candidates understood benchmarking as a management tool for comparison and evaluation, many responses were vague, confused, or unrelated to the requirements of the question. Misunderstandings were common, with benchmarking often confused with general research, professional updating, training, or decision-making processes.

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Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should:

- develop a clear definition of benchmarking as the structured comparison of performance, processes, or costs across similar organisations
- apply this definition accurately to horticultural contexts, including procurement and budget planning
- distinguish benchmarking from unrelated practices such as training, certification, or consumer research
- show applied understanding by linking benchmarking data to cost justification, efficiency, and long-term value for money.

Stronger responses will combine accurate definitions with practical examples that demonstrate how benchmarking informs procurement and financial planning in horticultural settings.

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Question 7

This question assessed candidate's applied knowledge and understanding of **gardens and their visitors.**

Candidates were required to explain the criteria that can be used to measure the quality of the visitor experience within a public garden.

Stronger responses**:**

- clearly identified a range of relevant criteria and explained these with examples
- considered the provision of visitor amenities such as cafés, toilets, and car parking
- discussed the importance of pre-visit information, enabling route planning and providing details on accessibility
- evaluated value for money, including entrance fees, retail outlets, and catering
- recognised the use of formal feedback techniques, such as surveys and visitor comment systems
- described the value of benchmarking against other gardens
- considered the impact of exhibitions and displays on the overall visitor experience.

Weaker responses**:**

- provided incorrect, vague, or undeveloped points
- identified criteria such as 'pre-visit information' without further explanation or development, which limited marks at Level 3.

Closing comments

Many candidates demonstrated awareness of what contributes to a quality visitor experience, but responses often lacked sufficient depth or explanation. Stronger responses combined a clear structure with applied examples that linked visitor expectations to measurable outcomes. Weaker responses tended to list points without development, which restricted performance.

Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should:

- ensure they explain *why* and *how* each criterion affects visitor experience, not simply list it
- use applied examples from public gardens to illustrate their points
- demonstrate an understanding of both tangible aspects (e.g. amenities, value for money) and intangible factors (e.g. atmosphere, exhibitions, cultural programming)
- show awareness of formal evaluation tools, such as benchmarking and visitor feedback systems, and how these can inform management decisions.

Clear, structured, and well-developed responses that move beyond description to explanation and application will achieve higher marks.

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Question 8

This question assessed candidate's applied knowledge and understanding of **planting styles.**

Candidates were required to explain the difference between ecological plantings and wildlife gardens.

Many candidates were unable to clearly explain these differences, revealing significant gaps in knowledge.

Stronger responses:

- defined the terms *ecological planting* and *wildlife garden*
- explained the core difference: ecological plantings are designed to resemble and function as plant communities and ecosystems, whereas wildlife gardens are created to provide habitat for plants and animals but are not designed as functioning ecosystems.

Weaker responses were often vague or showed partial but undeveloped understanding, for example:

- often confusing ecological plantings with sustainable approaches to garden management
- discussing *right plant, right place* without addressing *right purpose*
- stating that visible bare soil is essential in ecological plantings
- suggesting ecological plantings are designed solely to suit the climate and soil type, rather than with the purpose of becoming functional ecosystems.

Closing comments

This question was poorly answered by many candidates, with limited evidence of understanding the difference between ecological plantings and wildlife gardens. Stronger responses demonstrated awareness of plantings as functioning ecosystems rather than simply collections of plants and garden features for wildlife benefit.

Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should:

- develop a clear understanding of the definitions of both ecological plantings and wildlife gardens
- focus on the functional distinction: ecological plantings replicate ecosystems, while wildlife gardens aim to support species without replicating ecological systems
- avoid confusing ecological planting with sustainable horticultural practices, which are related but not synonymous
- use precise horticultural terminology and ensure explanations go beyond vague statements
- recognise that stronger answers will define terms, show clarity of thinking, and use applied examples of planting styles or garden types to explain the differences between planting approaches.

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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)

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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	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.

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Question 1

This question assessed candidate's applied knowledge and understanding of **garden management plans.**

Candidates were required to explain how garden management plans can be used to maintain plantings *that promote the wellbeing of garden visitors*.

At Level 3, part of the assessment process is to review candidate ability to interpret, evaluate, and apply information and ideas. Candidates are also assessed on their ability to demonstrate and integrate their holistic knowledge of the four qualification-wide outcomes and the four topic areas considered in Unit 2.

This question required candidates to apply their knowledge of garden management plans to the promotion of wellbeing. This required an ability to think critically and to integrate knowledge of the scope and use of garden management plans with an understanding of wellbeing in a garden context.

The majority of candidates were able to discuss garden management plans in general terms, but many failed to apply this knowledge directly to the promotion of wellbeing. As a result, these candidates achieved lower marks. Higher marks were awarded to those candidates who interpreted, evaluated, and applied their knowledge effectively, linking the application of garden management plans to wellbeing outcomes.

Stronger responses**:**

- defined and explained the concept and purpose of garden management plans
- identified the characteristics of gardens that contribute to wellbeing
- discussed the maintenance of trees and shrubs to create shaded areas for quiet contemplation
- stated that crown lifting of trees can create pools of shade for reflection
- suggested placing seating near water features or scented plantings to enhance wellbeing
- proposed creating small seating areas within plantings to encourage relaxation among greenery and birdsong
- highlighted the role of plants in screening and creating privacy
- recognised that disruptive maintenance (e.g. machinery use) should be scheduled outside visitor hours.

Weaker responses**:**

- focusing their responses on the general components of management plans without relating these to visitor wellbeing, to include:
    - site objectives
    - site history and significance
    - site survey
    - audience and visitor management
    - project delivery/operational plans
    - planting records
- discussed tree management in terms of inspection and climate change impacts rather than wellbeing
- described border management activities such as propagation and division, without linking these to visitor wellbeing.

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Closing comments

This was a question that required candidates to make connections across topic areas. While some candidates demonstrated an ability to integrate planning with wellbeing, many produced generic accounts of management plans without addressing the focus of the question.

Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should:

- ensure that their responses directly address the specific focus of the question, in this case wellbeing
- demonstrate how garden management plans can be used not only as general management tools, but also to enhance visitor experience
- integrate knowledge from multiple topic areas, including core horticultural concepts, visitor management, and sustainability/biodiversity, to provide a holistic response
- support points with applied examples of management actions that promote wellbeing (e.g. shade, seating, privacy, sensory planting).

Stronger answers will define terms, show clarity of thinking, and use applied examples to demonstrate how management plans can be directly linked to the promotion of wellbeing for garden visitors.

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Question 2

This question assessed candidate's integrated knowledge and understanding of **Sustainability, Best Practice and Productive Growing.**

The question began with a quotation to frame the topic: *'Climate change is having a profound impact on many sectors of horticulture including productive growing'.*

Candidates were then required to discuss and evaluate current thinking on how yields can be maintained or increased in productive growing settings.

The key command words in this question were *discuss* and *evaluate*; which are defined in the Guidance Document (available on Quartz):

- **Discuss** – identify key points, explore all aspects, and provide a conclusion.
- **Evaluate** – use supplied information as well as own knowledge and understanding to consider evidence for and against when making basic decisions.

Candidates were therefore expected to identify key points, explore multiple perspectives, weigh evidence for and against, and reach a reasoned conclusion.

Stronger responses**:**

- applied knowledge of best practice to identify current thinking on maintaining or increasing yields in productive systems
- discussed advantages and disadvantages of strategies, thereby demonstrating evaluation
- described negative influences of climate change on productive growing, including:
    - drought and water management
    - higher summer temperatures
    - significant rainfall events
    - higher winds
    - soil degradation and erosion
- evaluated soil management strategies to increase water-holding capacity, such as green manures, cover crops, climate-resilient growing systems, and practices to improve organic matter and soil structure
- linked soil management practices to percolation rates
- explained the use of mulching to regulate soil moisture and temperature
- considered crop selection, including cultivars that are low-growing (reducing wind impact), nutrient-efficient, or climate-resilient
- noted the advantages of using cultivars with the RHS Award of Garden Merit
- evaluated a range of growing systems, to include organics
- discussed the advantages and disadvantages of changing cropping schedules to avoid sowing and planting crops during drought
- suggested the use of micro-irrigation systems to provide water at critical growth stages, linked to yield
- explored minimal cultivation strategies to conserve soil water.

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Weaker responses**:**

- described climate change impacts without linking them to yield
- identified issues without suggesting mitigation strategies
- suggested solutions (e.g. green manures) without linking them to yield outcomes
- strayed into discussion of ornamental or general garden management, moving away from productive growing
- stated concepts without discussion or evaluation.

Closing comments

This question required candidates to demonstrate the integration of knowledge relating to sustainability and productive growing, while applying discussion and evaluation. While some candidates met these requirements and produced well-structured responses, many fell short by offering descriptive or undeveloped answers that lacked evaluation.

Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should:

- pay careful attention to command words such as *discuss* and *evaluate*, ensuring they structure responses accordingly
- link climate change impacts directly to yield outcomes in productive growing systems
- propose mitigation strategies and evaluate their advantages and disadvantages
- remain focused on productive growing contexts rather than drifting into ornamental or general horticultural examples
- conclude their response to bring their ideas together and further demonstrate clear thinking and understanding.

Stronger responses will define key terms, show clarity of thinking, and use applied examples to demonstrate both discussion and evaluation of strategies for maintaining or increasing yield under changing climatic conditions.

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Question 3

This question assessed candidate's applied knowledge and understanding of **the management of people in a garden.**

Stronger responses considered the evidence for and against a range of management practices, including:

- providing a structured induction for new team members
- the importance of managers modelling equality and diversity principles in their roles
- the importance of managers modelling health and safety principles in their roles
- using formal and informal feedback from team members
- applying formal management theories and relating these to best practice
- Applying knowledge of management tools and theories to include:
    - **Maslow's hierarchy of needs** – recognising that team members need their basic needs met (job security, safe working conditions) before they can be motivated by higher-level needs such as achievement and creativity.
    - **McClelland's theory of needs** – understanding that individuals may be driven by achievement, affiliation, or power. Good managers provide tailored opportunities accordingly, for example providing responsibility to achievement-driven staff, teamworking opportunities to affiliation-driven staff, and leadership roles to those motivated by influence.
    - **Vroom's expectancy theory** – recognising that motivation depends on staff believing their effort will lead to performance, and that performance will be rewarded with outcomes they value. Good managers set clear expectations, providing regular feedback, and linking performance to meaningful rewards such as training, recognition, or career development.
    - **McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y** – contrasting the view of staff as inherently unmotivated (Theory X) with the view of staff as self-motivated and seeking responsibility (Theory Y). Good horticultural management tends to align with Theory Y, emphasising trust, autonomy, and collaborative decision-making.
    - **Herzberg's motivation–hygiene theory** – distinguishing between factors that prevent dissatisfaction (e.g. fair pay, safe conditions) and those that actively motivate (e.g. recognition, responsibility, advancement). Good managers address both of these factors by ensuring adequate pay and safety while also recognising achievement and offering development.
- developing trust and rapport within the team through open communication and consistency
- ensuring access to training and professional development opportunities to keep skills current and staff motivated.

Weaker responses were vague, unfocused, and undeveloped. These included:

- discussing the technical knowledge managers should have about sites and plantings
- focusing on project management tools such as Gantt charts
- describing the development of risk assessments
- listing maintenance checks for machinery
- mentioning ACAS and other external bodies without providing context or relevance
- describing horticultural trials or technical approaches rather than management practices.

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Closing comments

While some candidates produced thoughtful and well-structured evaluations of management practices, many responses lacked focus and drifted into unrelated areas such as technical horticultural tasks or regulatory references. This limited their ability to show understanding of how managers can optimise team performance.

Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should:

- ensure they address the focus of the question, in this case *management practices* rather than technical site operations
- provide evaluation by considering evidence for and against practices, rather than listing them descriptively
- integrate relevant management theories into their responses, before moving on to show how these can be applied to horticultural contexts
- link their points to practical outcomes such as improved motivation, safety, equality, or team performance.

Stronger answers will define and apply management concepts, show clear evaluation, and use applied examples to demonstrate how garden managers can achieve the best performance from their teams.

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Question 4

This question assessed candidate's applied knowledge and understanding of **wellbeing.**

The question began with a quotation from the NHS website: *'Green Social Prescribing is the practice of supporting people to engage in nature-based interventions and activities to improve their mental and physical health.'*

Candidates were then required to discuss the benefits of using horticultural activities within Green Social Prescribing.

Stronger responses focused directly on the concept of *Green Social Prescribing* as outlined in the question, and included points such as:

- the role of Green Social Prescribing in tackling social isolation
- the role of Green Social Prescribing in creating community and fostering a sense of belonging
- the development of welcoming spaces that support inclusion
- the use of horticultural tasks that enable participation for people of all abilities, from washing pots to filling them with media, potting, and aftercare
- discussed the use of horticultural techniques on manual dexterity and physical fitness and wellbeing
- the mental health benefits of observing plant growth and development
- improvements in self-confidence and self-esteem
- the integration of healthy lifestyle principles alongside horticultural activity
- reference to studies showing that horticultural activities within Green Social Prescribing can positively impact conditions such as PTSD and cognitive decline
- recognition of Green Social Prescribing as an early intervention that can reduce demand for more costly treatments or residential care
- higher-level understanding, for example by discussing the psychological benefits of exposure to fractals in nature or phytoncides released by plants.

Weaker responses often failed to focus on Green Social Prescribing, or lacked the required level of development. These included:

- creating an incorrect definition of social prescribing rather than using the one supplied
- focusing on the horticultural skills gap, suggesting Green Social Prescribing as a recruitment pathway into the industry
- describing the range of sites and settings used, without addressing the benefits of horticultural activities themselves
- focusing narrowly on physical benefits while neglecting mental health impacts
- including ageist statements that failed to demonstrate awareness of Equality and Diversity principles
- discussing the role of gardening clubs and societies, which are not usually part of Green Social Prescribing.

Closing comments

Performance on this question was highly variable. Some candidates showed an excellent grasp of the definition provided and explored the wide-ranging benefits of horticultural activities in Green Social Prescribing settings. However, many candidates ignored, redefined or misunderstood the term, leading to vague, irrelevant, or underdeveloped answers.

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Advice to future candidates

Future candidates should:

- use the definition supplied in questions and ensure their responses remain focused
- balance discussion of both mental and physical health benefits, while also recognising the social value of community and belonging
- integrate applied examples of horticultural activities to show how participation can be inclusive and impactful
- avoid vague, generic statements or inaccurate assumptions about Green Social Prescribing
- demonstrate awareness of Equality, Diversity, and inclusion principles when discussing wellbeing.

Stronger answers will use the given definition, show clarity of thinking, and provide applied examples of horticultural activities to demonstrate the full range of benefits of Green Social Prescribing.

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