



GCSE

Food Preparation and Nutrition

8585/C

Report on the examination

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The moderation team are delighted to report that they have seen some very good NEA work this year. Students responded well to both the NEA1 and NEA2 tasks. Majority of centres have been accurate in their assessments of the students' work. Centres, staff and students are to be congratulated for the work submitted. The following report highlights the main observations in 2024/25. Digital submission was implemented for the first time for this component. The moderation team would like to acknowledge the effort made by centres in submitting marks and samples using this new platform.

The specification is now in its ninth year and centres have become more experienced in the delivery of non-examined assessment and marking to the AQA standard. The wealth of resources and materials available on the extranet has contributed to the accuracy of marking. When centres had used the Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) materials, accessed the online training, contacted their NEA adviser and used the teacher guide both NEA tasks was delivered successfully and marked to the AQA standard.

Adjustments to marks was mainly due to over rewarding students at the top end of the mark range. When awarding high marks for each marking criterion it is essential that all elements of the marking criteria are covered comprehensively. When a significant adjustment to marks was required, this was attributed to misinterpretation of NEA1: Food Investigation Section B and NEA 2: Food Preparation Sections B and D. It is acknowledged that there are many centres that have non specialists delivering the subject. Centres should be encouraged to make use of the AQA CPD opportunities and refer to the materials available on the website and the Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) to assist with the delivery and assessment of non-exam assessment. Each centre has a specialist NEA adviser and any queries, however minor, should be forwarded to the adviser. Centres are reminded that the NEA advisers the centre's moderator.

NEA1: Food Investigation

This task involves investigating the working characteristics and the functional and chemical properties of ingredients through practical investigations. The tasks are based on the food science element of the specification: pages 18-21. The assessment is a report of 1500-2000 words. The vast majority of centres selected the scone task, as this was deemed more accessible using low-cost ingredients. There was some high-quality work based on the soft cheese task, with students demonstrating an excellent knowledge of food science.

Where elements of the food investigation had been explicitly taught, through the teaching of the specification, students used these key skills and applied them to the non-exam assessment. It is excellent practice if students have the opportunity to practice some elements of the NEA1 e.g. recording an investigation, before the live tasks are launched in September. The main areas for development are the connection between research and investigations, the application of knowledge and understanding when analysing the investigation results and the use of a wide range of testing methods when recording the results.

Section A: Research

Presenting all three NEA tasks should be encouraged as this results in a less formulaic approach within the centre. Most students carried out good initial task analysis allowing for relevant research. It was encouraging to see more focused and concise research this year. However, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), as a research tool, was widely seen, and students did not always edit or analyse the information. It was clear later in the project the lack of understanding of the research material when formulating hypothesis and carrying out investigations. A number of Centres presented very similar work from each student for Section A. Updated guidance by JCQ related to AI can be found on the [AQA website](#).

When the research analysis became the basis of the hypothesis/prediction this resulted in appropriate practical investigations. There were some very good examples of justified hypotheses and investigations, a significant improvement on previous years. When the research was formulaic and not student centred the hypotheses did not always reflect the findings of the research undertaken. Within the project it is important that students consider the word limit requirements for NEA when producing Section A.

Recommendations

- Research must focus on the working characteristics, functional and chemical properties of the ingredients detailed within the task. Time was wasted when recording the history of scones, commercial cheesemaking and investigating different soup recipes.
- It is important that research is not copied directly from the source, students should be analysing the research from a variety of sources. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) generated research was evident, and this must be stringently controlled by centres.
- Students should be encouraged to produce a summary of the scientific principles underlying the chosen tasks and use the findings to guide the planned investigations and analysis.
- A review of the research is a method to be encouraged to ensure the findings are then used when developing the hypothesis.
- The research findings should be referred to throughout the food investigation tasks to be awarded the top mark band. In many cases there was a disconnect between the research and sections B and C.

Section B: Investigation

When delivering the specification, it is good practice to carry out some examples of investigation work; this supports students' investigative skills and guides them in how to record an investigation. When students compared several variables, within each investigation, this allowed for in depth analysis of the ingredients and methods they were testing. Most investigations were accurately marked to the AQA standard, with centres showing improved consistency and understanding of the mark scheme. Where students explained the results rather than the process a very good knowledge of the working characteristics, functional and chemical properties of ingredients was seen.

There was good evidence of small-scale group work, reducing costs and waste, students within the group then independently analysed and explained their results. Centres that provided strong authenticated photographic evidence assisted moderation greatly. A wide range of experiments were conducted for all three tasks which demonstrated strong scientific inquiry.

Investigations were well planned, with clear aims and justified hypotheses, this marked a significant improvement over previous years. Students in the higher mark bands exhibited strong analytical skills. Their ability to interpret and evaluate experimental results was a notable strength. Less able students successfully conducted experiments focused on the functional properties of ingredients, showing a good understanding of basic scientific principles. Controls were effectively established and referenced, showing thoughtful consideration of scientific rigour. Many students adopted a scientific and often creative approach to the food investigations resulting in some high-quality work. It was pleasing to see some students extending their investigations with additional research to justify their experimental approaches.

Many candidates spent valuable time recording recipes and methods, this is not required, the focus must be on the recording and analysis of the results. Unfortunately, some centres continue to present one experiment as three different investigations e.g. testing a different fat for three batches of scones. This is an investigation. When students only tested one or two variables, there was often a lack of breadth and depth to the investigation work.

Recommendations

- Photographic evidence must be included for each investigation. It is excellent practice to annotate photographic evidence.
- Some centres failed to include mandatory photographic evidence. Centres need to develop secure, systematic processes to capture and store images.
- It is recommended to carry out 2/3 investigations, testing a number of variables.
- Small quantities should be used so as not to incur costs and waste.
- The investigation work must be fully explained, and the research used to explain the working characteristics, functional and chemical properties of the ingredients.
- Methods for each investigation are not required; students should focus on the recording and analysis of the results allowing access to the higher mark bands.
- Students need to be taught the skill of recording the results and how to link to the properties of ingredients rather than just focusing on sensory attributes. Students are unable to access high marks without this evidence.
- Centres are encouraged to teach students the different methods of recording practical investigations which can then be applied to the NEA. Methods to record investigations could include: Munsell colour charts, bar graphs, viscosity mats, star profiles etc.
- Small-scale group investigations are permitted to reduce costs and waste; however, it is not permitted to carry out whole class food investigation tasks. Students must independently plan the food investigation tasks and not work in the same group throughout the investigation.

Section C: Analysis and Evaluation

Photographic evidence helped with the evaluation of practical outcomes and there was some excellent annotation. There was evidence of good understanding of the underlying principles of food science and the functions of ingredients related to the individual tasks, particularly the soft cheese making task. When students related the findings back to their research, they could explain the working characteristics, functional and chemical properties of the ingredients using scientific terms such as: dextrinisation, gelatinisation, shortening, denaturation, coagulation etc. There was evidence of very good use of ICT to communicate the reports and findings.

Recommendations

- To achieve the top mark bands students must include high level understanding of the working characteristics, functional and chemical properties of ingredients using subject specific terminology.
- When explaining the functional and chemical properties of ingredients students can explain 'what' happened but the '**why**' is often missing.
- It is essential not to over reward Section C if there is only limited reference to the research/knowledge of ingredients, hypothesis and future use.
- When analysing and evaluating students need to show clear understanding and explanation of what happened in the investigation and importantly why it happened.
- To reach the higher mark band, students must explain how the food investigation results will be used when preparing and cooking food in the future. This continues to challenge many students and was not evident from a significant number of students.
- Centres must meet the regulatory requirements, regarding the word count of 1500-2000 words and not exceed the 10-hour time allowance. When reviewing their work students should be encouraged to remove any irrelevant text and repetition and edit their work to fit within the word count.
- A bibliography or alternative reference of sources must be included in the report. This does not contribute to the word count.

NEA 2: Food Preparation

All three tasks were well received and executed by students and centres. The three task options offered a diverse range of topics, enabling students to select challenges that aligned with their academic strengths and interests. Students prepare, cook and present three dishes within a single period of 3 hours to meet the needs of a specific context. The requirement is not to produce a meal: starter, main course and dessert. The NEA2 tasks allowed the students to be creative in the selection of dishes and there were some very good practical outcomes this year. It is important that students don't lose sight of the focus of the project as they progress through, e.g. selecting dishes not related to the task. AQA are always mindful of the challenges to families and centres with food costs and it appreciated the lengths teachers/centres invest in supporting students.

Section A: Researching the task

Research was generally well done, and many students produced a wide range of interesting and relevant information. There was more focus on nutrition and healthy eating guidelines which was pleasing to see. The international school meals task was researched well but there was then a disconnect between the choice of dishes and the completion of Section E.

Students mainly used secondary research sources to gather purposeful research to help select appropriate dishes. Primary research is only beneficial if it produces tangible results to help with the selection of relevant dishes, there was some good evidence of school meals analysis and interviews for the lactose/gluten free task.

Recommendations

- It would be helpful to include some analysis after the research to show the link between the research and the choice of dishes.
- Setting clear aims for each piece of research allows students to have more focus on their research.
- Students must consider a range of ideas (6-8 ideas) related to the research findings before moving on to Section B. The technical skills within each dish should be recorded. This was missing in several centres this year.
- It is important that the research is used when selecting the dishes to make for Section B.
- Students need to consider the dishes they make carefully to enable them to demonstrate a range of technical skills and avoid the repetition of skills e.g., pastry, pasta etc.

Section B: Demonstrating technical skills.

The quality of making was impressive when demonstrating technical skills. Moderators reported an improvement in this section in 2025. There were some very good practical outcomes produced within the time constraints of one-hour lessons. When students reviewed their technical skills, this generally resulted in appropriate and justified final dishes. It is important to look holistically at the dishes made and the technical skills used before marking Section B; some centres leniently marked this section.

Authenticated photographic evidence must be provided to exemplify the dishes/technical skills. Candidate Record Forms are vital evidence to support the evidence in the folders. A list of dishes made, the skills used, with qualitative comments can help support the marks awarded. Limited commentary does not support the students and also makes it difficult for moderators to agree with centre marks. There is no requirement to include tick boxes against the making criteria this is not particularly helpful to the moderation process. A small number of schools omitted Section B entirely, which disadvantaged students by reducing their opportunity to demonstrate key skills.

Recommendations

- Photographic evidence must be provided for this section. Moderation was difficult when no photographic evidence was available and limited qualitative commentary was added to the Candidate Record Form.
- For Section B projects do not need to include methods of making, costing or nutritional analysis, this is unnecessary and does not feature in the marking criteria. Students spent time focusing on these elements to the detriment of reviewing technical skills.
- It is not necessary to fillet fish/portion a chicken to achieve the top mark band. Centres are encouraged to refer to the specification which outlines a range of complex skills.
- The suggested 3-4 dishes need to include a range of skills, and not repetitive skills, to be awarded marks in the top bands.
- Further clarity on what constitutes different technical skills can be seen on the Skill levels in Food Preparation resource.
- Some centres continue to interpret the task sheet or specification incorrectly (page 42) and use this section as an opportunity to practise identical/very similar dishes that are then made in Section D the 3-hour assessment.

Section C: Planning for the final menu

There was some excellent evidence of students reviewing and fully justifying their choice of dishes related to: nutrition, ingredients, food provenance, skills, cooking methods etc. Explicit links to the skills in Section B must be outlined when providing reasons for choice. Section C was completed successfully by the majority of students, with many providing thoughtful justifications for their choices.

Producing a dovetailed time plan is a difficult concept and students need to be taught how to carry out this skill before starting the NEA2 tasks. There was very good evidence of time plans that were detailed, realistic and logical. Documenting food safety considerations remains an area for development. Key food safety temperatures were often omitted, and students did not always refer to cross contamination, storage or personal hygiene in their time plan. The use of key terminology, taught through the specification, is essential to be awarded the top mark band.

It was pleasing to see that the majority of centres are **not** repeating dishes made in Section B to the final three dishes. There is an expectation that students will not simply re-make the same dishes or make superficial development, this is stated on the AQA NEA Food Preparation task sheet and the specification page 44. When this repetition occurs, it is not possible to be awarded marks in the higher bands for Section D.

Recommendations

- There must be clear links between each section of the NEA. Students were not always able to fully justify their recipe choices for the final dishes. It wasn't always clear how the work completed in Section B was used when deciding on the three final dishes.
- When justifying the final dishes, students could refer to: research findings, technical skills and processes, cooking methods, sensory properties, presentation of the final dishes, nutritional value/healthy eating, food provenance and the cost of ingredients/portion size.
- Understanding of nutrition is a key element of the Food Preparation task and therefore this should be considered when selecting the dishes to make. All sweet dishes should not be produced as this does not meet the philosophy of the specification.
- Reference must be made to food safety rather than general safety rules.
- To achieve the top mark bands key food safety terminology and a wider use of key food safety temperatures should be included when producing the time plan. To achieve the top mark band students should focus on enhancing the use of key food safety terminology and justified statements in the time plan e.g. 'I am using a red chopping board for cutting raw meat to avoid cross contamination'. 'High risk ingredients e.g. cream will be stored in the refrigerator 0 to below 5°C to slow down the growth of bacteria' etc.

Criterion D: Making the final dishes.

Moderators were impressed with the quality of making produced by students for Section D. Some of the work produced in 2025 was outstanding! There were some creative and imaginative practical outcomes. There was strong evidence of students attempting garnishes and decorative techniques, enhancing the visual appeal of their dishes.

Students were most successful when they researched the dishes, developed their technical skills in Section B and then planned the three-hour practical session. Centres that provided qualitative comments on the Candidate Record Form supported their students and this greatly assisted the moderation process. Unfortunately, many Candidate Record Forms contained a lack of explanation of technical skills and moderators had limited evidence to explain the centre marks. We appreciate the time invested in completing Candidate Record Forms, the commentary is invaluable in supporting centre marks.

There are still centres where students produce the same dishes in Sections B and D. This limits the marks that can be awarded and was the main reason for adjustments again this year. Students can be guided in selecting the final dishes to minimize repetitive skills. Centres and students must understand that Section B and D are separate entities.

Recommendations

- Teacher's annotation must provide qualitative comments related to the making ability of students. It can be difficult for moderators to validate the centre marks without qualitative comments related to students' making skills.
- The practical work produced for the top band must be complex and challenging. To achieve high marks, students need to show a comprehensive range of making skills. The quality of the finish must be excellent.
- It is important to stress that students do not need to fillet fish/portion a chicken to receive high marks. In some cases, these skills were listed on the Candidate Record Form but there was no evidence on the time plans or photographic evidence that the skills have been used.
- It is a mandatory requirement to include authenticated photographic evidence of the final dishes photographed together.
- Larger photographs to showcase the practical outcomes are appreciated.

Section E: Analyse and evaluate.

There was an improvement in this section this year. All three tasks enabled students to produce detailed nutritional information. The key element to this marking criterion is that students demonstrate a knowledge of nutrition by explaining and drawing conclusions from the nutritional data, not just presenting nutritional data. In many centres, nutritional and costing analysis was not given the priority the section required. Students would be advised to spend more time on the analysis and evaluation of the costing, sensory and nutrition element. Long narrative approaches to the evaluation whereby students tell a story about how their practical assessment went are not required. A final evaluation of the NEA is not required.

Recommendations

- Timing was an issue for some centres and this section may not have had the time devoted to ensure the marking criteria was sufficiently covered.
- The nutritional analysis should reflect and link to the nutritional needs of the target group linked to the task e.g. lactose/gluten intolerance, school aged children, obese people, rather than generic comments on the nutritional profile of the dish
- Students need to explain the nutritional data and costing. Marks were given for the production of data rather than analysis and evaluation.
- To achieve the top band, accurate and excellent knowledge of nutrition is required. In many cases, a nutrition chart was presented with no reasoning/explanation yet awarded marks in the top bands.

- When analysing the cost of dishes – students could consider how to reduce costs, link to food wastage and other food provenance issues.

Administration and Assessment

- The majority of teachers had spent a considerable amount of time and effort producing very detailed annotation on the Candidate Record Forms. The moderators were grateful for this as the comments were clear and helpful to the moderation process.
- Administration errors, such as unsigned/incomplete CRFs and addition mistakes, caused delays in moderation.
- Centres are recommended to review the examples materials on the Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) accessible through AQA Centre Services. This will help with the successful interpretation of the marking criteria and marking to the AQA standard.
- A significant number of centres have used additional mark sheets this year - these often contain the marking criteria which the moderator is already very familiar with. It would be more helpful to have confirmation of the dishes made for NEA 2 and the skills used as well as some indication of how well the skills were executed.
- Centres are reminded that students should not exceed the 10-hour time allowance for NEA1. Centres must follow the regulatory requirements, stated in the specification Section 4.3.5, regarding the word count 1500-2000 words.
- The guidance in the specification states that the portfolio should not exceed 20 sides of A4. Not following the guidance stated in the specification Sections 4.3.5 and 4.3.6 and the task sheet has the potential to advantage centres/students. This is unfair on centres that have followed the guidance.
- Digital submission was carried out very successfully. It would be helpful to moderation if fewer files were uploaded for each candidate and one document including the Candidate Record Form was uploaded.
- Several centres were very late uploading the work which delayed the moderation process.
- Centres are reminded that NEA Advisers are available throughout the year to fully support colleagues with the interpretation of the NEA requirements.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.