



GCSE

Food Preparation and Nutrition

8585/C NEA

Report on the Examination

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The following report highlights the main observations in 2023/24. Marking was generally accurate and when centres had used the Teacher Online Standardisation materials this supported centres in marking work to the AQA standard. There was an improvement in the quality of the NEA1 Food Investigation tasks this year.

Adjustments to marking was required in several centres due to over rewarding students at the top of the sample. When awarding high marks for a particular marking criterion it is essential that all elements of the marking criteria are covered comprehensively. It was noted that there are many non-specialists delivering the specification and there was a misinterpretation of the requirements for both NEA1 and NEA2 resulting in some significant adjustments to a minority of centres. Centres should 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 of the specification and non-examined assessment.

NEA1: Food Investigation

The 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. There was some high-quality work seen based on the raising agent and biscuit tasks. The root vegetable task was not as popular with centres; however, when this task was conducted some excellent practice was seen, with students adopting a scientific approach.

Many centres continue to find the delivery of the food Investigation task challenging. 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 essential that students practice with aspects of NEA1 before the live tasks are launched. This allows for reference materials to be available, and students are well versed in how to conduct a food investigation. The main area for development is the connection between research and investigations and application of knowledge and understanding when analysing the results. Section C: Analysis and Evaluation remains the weaker element of NEA1.

Section A: Research

When all the titles were presented to students this resulted in a less formulaic approach to the work. Presenting all three NEA tasks should be encouraged. When students used a range of different sources to explain the working characteristics, functional and chemical properties of ingredients, the research was impressive. Most students understood the task and produced an analysis of the requirements before starting the research. It was encouraging to see more focused, concise and relevant research this year. When students understood the research, the planning of the investigations was done well with clear links to the hypothesis and research. There were some very good examples of justified hypotheses. There continues to be a disconnect between the research and the investigations, in many samples of work, which demonstrated a lack of understanding of the working properties of ingredients. When the reports were formulaic and not student centered the hypotheses did not always reflect the findings of the research undertaken.

Recommendations

- Research must focus on the working characteristics, functional and chemical properties of the ingredients detailed within the task. When students include an aim for their research this helps to keep a clear focus. Some students wasted time explaining the history of biscuits and bread which is not relevant to a food investigation task.
- It is important that research is not copied directly from the source, students should be analysing the research from a variety of sources.
- The analysis of the research findings must be explicit. A review of the research is a method to be encouraged to ensure the findings are then used when composing the hypothesis.
- 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.
 - 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.
 - The planned investigations must relate to the hypothesis or the research findings when this was not done it was an indication that students had not understood their research, or the projects were teacher led.

Section B: Investigation

When teaching 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, this can then be used as a template for the live tasks. When students compared several variables, within each investigation, this allowed for in depth analysis of the ingredients and methods they were testing. There was good evidence of students having a good understanding of the controls when carrying out scientific investigations; it is good practice to include some of the controls when recording the investigations.

There was good evidence of some group work for individual investigations, which had taken place to reduce costs and waste, students within the group then independently analysed and explained their results which is excellent practice. Sensory analysis continues to be the most popular testing method. However, an increased range of recording methods was seen this year eg., graphs, colour charts, stretch tests related to gluten, annotated photographs etc. Centres that provided strong authenticated photographic evidence assisted moderation greatly.

Recommendations

- The investigation work must be fully explained, and the research used to explain the working characteristics, functional and chemical properties of the ingredients.
- It is recommended to carry out 2/3 investigations, testing a number of variables. Conducting 4+ investigations is not possible within the 10-hour time constraints for NEA1, this would impinge on the analysis and evaluation sections.
- Small quantities should be used so as not to incur costs and waste.
- Long methods for each experiment are not required; students should focus on the recording and analysis of the results.
- Some centres continue to present one experiment as three different investigations eg. testing three different types of sugar in biscuits. This is **one** investigation not three.
- Centres need to teach students the different methods of recording practical investigations which can then be applied to the NEA. 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 areas. Students are unable to access high marks without this evidence.

- When students only tested one or two variables, there was often a lack of breadth and depth to the investigation work.
- 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.
- There was a lack of mandatory photographic evidence to authenticate the investigation work in a minority of centres.

Section C: Analysis and Evaluation

There was evidence of good understanding of the underlying principles of food science and the functions of ingredients related to the individual tasks. There was also some good application of nutritional knowledge when working on the root vegetable task. Photographic evidence helped with the evaluation of practical outcomes and there was some excellent annotation evidenced by lower attaining students. 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, shortening, coagulation etc. It was encouraging to see more students referring to future cooking, a requirement for the top band, this was a focus of the 2023 CPD webinars. Centres had made effective use of the training and resources. 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.
- It is essential not to over reward the analysis if there is only limited reference to the research/knowledge of ingredients, hypothesis and future use.
- There continues to be reliance on analysing the sensory properties of ingredients rather than the working properties.
- Links between the research, hypothesis and planned investigations need to be explicit throughout the report.
- 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.
- 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.
- Centres must follow the regulatory requirements, regarding the word count 1500-2000 words and not exceed the 10-hour time allowance.
- A bibliography or alternative reference of sources must be included in the report. This does not contribute to the word count.

NEA2: Food Preparation

Students prepare, cook and present three dishes within a single period of 3 hours to meet the needs of a specific context. Centres produced some very good work. The requirement is not to produce a meal: starter, main course and dessert. All three tasks were well received by students and centres. The NEA2 tasks allowed the students to be creative in the selection of dishes and there were some superb practical outcomes this year. 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.

There were some excellent task analysis carried out at the start of the projects which provide a focus. Research was generally well executed, and many students produced a wide range of interesting and relevant information. The event, occasion or festival from around the world task allowed students to be creative and there was more focused and relevant research produced. The food budget 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. It was encouraging to see students considering the healthy eating recommendations/Eatwell Guide throughout the research.

Recommendations

- Analysis of the research remains a weaker area. It would be helpful to include some analysis after the research to show the link between the research and the choice of dishes.
- When selecting the dishes, students need to select and justify a range of technical skills used in the making of the dishes.
- 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 good range of technical skills and avoid the repetition of skills eg., pastry, pasta etc.
- Students must consider a range of ideas (6-8 ideas) related to the research findings before moving on to Section B. This was missing in several centres this year.

Section B: Demonstrating technical skills.

There were some very good practical outcomes produced within the time constraints of one-hour lessons. There was excellent photographic evidence presented in the portfolios. When students were aware of different technical skills - basic, medium and complex, which are exemplified throughout the teaching of the specification, they selected some very good dishes. 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; many 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.

Recommendations

- 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 wasted time focusing on these elements to the detriment of reviewing the technical skills. The dishes made need to be justified with a review of the technical skills.
- Photographic evidence must be provided for this section. Moderation was difficult when no photographic evidence was available and limited qualitative commentary added to the Candidate Record Form.
- It is important that complex technical skills are executed to a high standard to be awarded the top mark bands.

- Cost of ingredients should be an essential factor when selecting dishes. 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 dishes need to include a range of skills, and not repetitive skills.
- Dishes in section B should be completed dishes, not just components such as sauces or a flat bread and should be linked to the task. Dishes in this section are awarded for technical skills and should include complexity and demand - this was often not the case
- Further clarity on what constitutes different technical skills can be seen on the Skill levels in Food Preparation resource.

Section C: Planning for the final menu

When students were able to clearly justify the choice of dishes, this allowed them to access the higher mark bands. Explicit links to the skills in Section B must be outlined. Justification was strong when students related back to their research and referred to nutrition, cooking methods, food provenance and sensory properties.

Producing a dovetailed timeplan is a difficult concept and students need to be taught how to carry out this skill before starting the NEA2 tasks. The time plans submitted by many students were poorly attempted and on occasions printed recipes submitted as the time plan. There was very good evidence of time plans that were detailed, realistic and logical. Effective examples were seen when colour coding was introduced. Documenting food safety considerations is developing but still an area for improvement. 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. Students should not be developing dishes, a food technology concept, from Section B and Section D.

Recommendations

- 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. Centres may find that students are able to clearly present this information if they use tables or charts.
- 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.
- A time plan must be included in the portfolio. Several centres failed to include this vital document. The plan should be a written document not a sequence of photographs. The time plan should not be produced retrospectively, it should be used during the making of the final dishes.
- Reference must be made to food safety rather than general safety rules eg., keep saucepan handles to the side, using oven gloves when removing dishes from the oven etc.
- To achieve the top marks 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 provide some justification of the food safety controls eg. I am using a red chopping

board for cutting raw chicken to prevent cross contamination, fish will be covered and stored on the bottom shelf of the fridge, 0°C to below 5°C, to prevent juices contaminating other foods.

Criterion D: Making the final dishes.

There was some very good work completed for Section D. Students had relished the opportunity to showcase their technical and presentation skills in the 3-hour assessment. There were some creative and imaginative practical outcomes. Students were most successful when they researched the dishes, developed their technical skills in Section B and then planned the three-hour practical session. Making was often supported by excellent photographic evidence. Centres that provided detailed and 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 the technical skills and moderators had limited evidence to explain the centre marks.

There are still centres where students produced the same dishes in Sections B and D without any change, and in some cases, minimal modifications were made. This limits the marks that can be awarded and was the main reason for adjustments this year. Students must be guided in selecting the final dishes to minimize repetitive skills. Centres and students must understand that Section B and D are separate entities. Dishes in section B should be completed dishes, not just components such as sauces or a flat bread and should be linked to the task. Dishes in this section are awarded for technical skills and should include complexity and demand - this was often not the case

Recommendations

- Teacher 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. It was disappointing that some centres produced very little, or no commentary related to the students' skills.
- When students repeated the same three dishes in Section B and Section D, this limited the marks that could be awarded.
- The practical work produced for the top band must be complex and challenging. To achieve high making marks, students need to show a comprehensive range of making skills. The quality of 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.
- The final three dishes must be presented and photographed together.
- It is a mandatory requirement to include authenticated photographic evidence of the final dishes.

Section E: Analyse and evaluate.

This section is the opportunity to showcase the nutritional knowledge gained through the teaching of the specification. Analysis and evaluation are essential skills which are also tested through the examination paper. The key element to this marking criterion is that students demonstrate a knowledge of nutrition by explaining and drawing conclusions from the nutritional data. There was an improvement with Section E this year. An area for development is the analysis and explanation of nutritional data. In many centres this was not given the priority the section required and was over rewarded. The analysis of the costing of the dishes was also disappointing, particularly for the budget task, this should have been the main area for analysis. 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, and waste time that could be spent gaining marks on evaluation of the nutrition content.

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.
- Students need to explain the nutritional data and costing. Marks were given for the production of data rather than analysis and evaluation of the information.
- 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.

General points

Making both in Section B and D remained a strength of many students' work and it was pleasing to see that the majority of students rose to the challenge of both the demonstration of technical skills and the 3-hour final practical.

The quality of work when demonstrating technical skills and the quality of finish of the practical work in the 3-hour exam was generally impressive.

Students need to link the information they have gathered in Section A and thread this throughout the report. When producing the family budget tasks and seasonal tasks the focus of the task was lost.

Many students assumed that they had to make a 3 course meal; starter, main course and dessert this is not the case.

High mark projects should be exemplary. All elements of each marking criterion should be comprehensively addressed. The portfolio must have rigour and fully justify all decisions made.

Centres are recommended to view the examples materials on the Teacher Online Standardisation (TOLS) which are accessible through AQA Centre Services. This will help with the successful interpretation of the marking criteria and marking to the AQA standard. Centres are reminded that NEA Advisers are available throughout the year to fully support colleagues with the interpretation of the NEA requirements.

Administration and Assessment

- A Centre Declaration Form must be included in the sample work.
- Many centres had to be contacted due to addition errors or uncorrected submission of marks. Centres must have systems in place to check additions on the Candidate Record Form and the correct mark is submitted. Administrative errors can result in a student receiving the incorrect grade.
- 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.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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