



Lead Monitor's Report Practical Endorsement Feedback

Summer 2025/Cycle 5

Pearson Edexcel GCE Science
Practical Endorsement in Biology A

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Lead Monitor's Report for the Science Practical Endorsement for Cycle 5 of the monitoring cycle September 2023 – May 2025

This report is for cycle 5 of the Practical Endorsement. In this cycle, we were visiting schools that were mostly visited in cycle 2. In most cases, those schools had taken on board the advice offered at the time which meant the cycle 5 visit was relatively straightforward, in particular those schools where the staff had not changed. Only a relatively small number of centres required a second visit as there were concerns about the standard being used to judge practical competence of the candidates. There were also a few centres where the monitor asked for further samples of work usually to cover criteria that had not been assessed by the time of monitoring visit.

On behalf of all the monitoring teams for biology, chemistry and physics, I would like to thank the Lead Teachers for not only arranging the visits but also for sending the completed centre-details form, the spreadsheets and the samples of work as requested. As monitors having this information in advance enables us to go into schools with a good knowledge of how the centre is conducting the assessment of the practical skills and has considerably shortened the time of the visit. It has helped in asking how particular criteria have been assessed and has also helped the centre in any misunderstanding of how particular criteria should be assessed in the discussion between the Lead Teacher and the monitor.

Over the course of this last cycle, as a monitoring team covering all three sciences, we generally found that the successful centres were working with a set of pen portraits tailored to the criteria that were being assessed on each Core Practical. Latterly, the message we were trying to put out concerning the pen portraits was that they can be built up over a period of time and should involve all the assessing teachers in their final wording, so all teachers are working to the same standard. For the smaller centres, a set of portraits is equally beneficial as this allows consistency of assessment from one year to the next. Each portrait just needs to contain about 3 can-do statements of what is considered to be the standard of competence for each criterion being assessed and should be specific to that practical assignment. The set of pen portraits also helps the monitors see how the visual criteria (CPAC 1a, 2a, 2b, and 3b) have been assessed and monitors would find it extremely helpful if a sample of the pen portraits were included with the pre-visit documentation sent to them by the school/college, and if at all possible the pen portrait to be used for the practical during the monitoring visit. Finally on the topic of pen portraits, they could be used to indicate the group size expected for that practical (singly or in pairs) and of any potential apparatus issues there might be.

We have now completed five cycles of assessing skills for the Practical Endorsement. More schools are feeling confident about extending the number of criteria assessed on each practical assignment seen, where set sizes have not resulted in a significant increase in the teacher workload. For example, where 3a is being assessed through the use of a risk assessment prepared by the candidate, some teachers are now assessing 3b in terms of how the candidate is working safely according to their risk assessment. Another example concerns where 3a is being assessed through the candidate writing their own risk assessment, they have also assessed on 5a for the research of that risk assessment and 5b for citing the sources of information from their research (primarily using the CLEAPSS Student Safety Sheets). Where centres choose to diverge from the suggested criteria to be assessed shown on the 'Tracking spreadsheet for CPAC – Revised' (found on the 'CPAC guidance and tracking' section of the website), please remember to assess each of the criteria equally (as far as possible) and spread the assessments throughout the course, but paying particular attention to the Core Practicals

that lend themselves to the assessment of particular criteria. It may be necessary to increase the number of assessment opportunities where some candidates struggle to demonstrate competence in a particular criterion.

Most centres find that they have the time to complete all the Core Practicals. However, as budgets are increasingly coming under closer scrutiny, I would like to remind Lead Teachers that demonstrations of Core Practicals are not considered to be a suitable alternative. The success of the Practical Endorsement over the years has been due to the increased amount of practical work that has been undertaken by candidates, where previously some centres restricted the practical work to just that which would be seen in the controlled assessments of the previous specification. All candidates are now employing the wider range of practical techniques listed in Appendix 5c for each of the science specifications.

Your assigned monitor for cycle 6 should be in contact within the first half of the autumn term 2025 to say whether they plan to visit in the first year or delay the visit until the second year of cycle 6. The delayed visit is mostly due to the previous visit for a different science having taken place late in cycle 5. If you are a new Lead Teacher, please inform the monitor as soon as possible; we will delay the visit until the second term to allow you to 'find your feet' in your new role.

Each monitor has their own approach to arranging a visit to a centre as this sometimes depends on their own workload. Sometimes a monitor might need to arrange visits to a couple of centres that are close-by and they might need to ask for a number of dates and times for a possible visit as they would like to reduce the amount of travelling needed. Once a date and time has been arranged, the monitor does need to receive the pre-visit material a few days beforehand as this means the monitor is well prepared.

The aim of the visit is to ensure that you as a centre are assessing the practical skills to the same standard as in other centres elsewhere in the country. Depending on the complexity of a particular centre, a monitoring visit could last up to about 4 hours. At the start of the visit, monitors do appreciate the 'agenda' for the visit – the time of the practical session to be visited as well as the time that discussion can take place about how the criteria are assessed in the centre as well as time for the monitor to look at the work of other candidates, concentrating on looking at the work assessed by the other teachers and from the different year groups and all the teaching sets. Please feel free to ask the monitor any questions you or your colleagues may have about the Practical Endorsement. If the monitor is not able to answer the question at the time, they will get back to with an answer within the next day or so.

Normally during a visit, the monitor will be observing the assessment of a Core Practical that fits in with the section of the course being taught at that time. Monitors would like to see the assessment of at least one visual criterion being assessed by the teacher during the practical. There can be a difficulty if the criteria assessed are wholly based on written evidence which can often be produced following the practical session as the monitor cannot see if the work carried out by the candidates is being judged at an appropriate standard. Successful visits are those where candidates may have produced a written risk assessment before the lesson (3a), assessed on handling apparatus during the practical (2a) and devise a results table used to record their results during the practical (4b). In this instance, the assessment of all 3 criteria can form a useful discussion between the assessing teacher and the monitor following the lesson. Monitors are looking to see how the criteria are being assessed and not the actual Core Practical.

Most centres are choosing to use the instruction sheets for the Core Practicals that are on the Pearson website, but they do need to be edited to allow successful assessment of particular criteria eg any results table present needs to be deleted if assessing 4b. Centres are welcome to produce their own instruction sheets, but these should be appropriate to facilitate correct assessment of the criteria chosen for that Core Practical.

Following the visit, the monitor writes a report which Pearson then emails that to the Lead Teacher and Head of Centre within about a week. If you have not received the report within two weeks of the visit, please contact the monitor in the first instance.

Most centres are signed up to the Science Advisor Updates, however as staff change from one year to the next, the new Lead Teacher has sometimes not made use of this facility. I would like to encourage all Lead Teachers, new and those who have been in the role for some time, to check if they are signed up – the link to the sign up page is [here](#). Similarly, I would also like to urge all Lead Teachers to look again at the materials available on the ‘CPAC guidance and tracking’ section of the ‘Teaching and learning materials’ section of the Pearson subject websites. We would also like to encourage all teachers involved in the assessment of practical skills to complete the Lead Teacher training as this gives them a better understanding of the requirements when assessing each of the criteria.

Finally, a reminder for those centres who have changed from one exam board to another and to those who are making an exam entry for the first time that you inform the exam board as soon as possible once that decision has been made. A monitoring visit can then be arranged in good time to ensure that all is well.

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