



Examiners' Report June 2010

Principal Learning
Environmental and Land-based Studies
ES101 The Natural Environment

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Level 1 Principal Learning in Environmental and Land-based Studies

Unit 1: The Natural Environment

Introduction

This was the second series for this paper and there was a small entry.

The character of this exam paper is such that the questions become gradually more demanding as the learner progresses through the paper. Differentiation is therefore achieved by giving learners the opportunity to demonstrate the limits of their intellectual capacity within the confines of an examination.

In the main, this is controlled by the key words contained with the questions e.g. list, describe, suggest, and explain. Nevertheless care is taken within the Foundation Level to ensure that questions are accessible by all learners in a determined attempt to ensure that they all have the opportunity to achieve to the best of their ability.

As the Diploma for Environmental and Land Based Studies is a work-related subject and has a strong applied approach, this means that the external examination will always be one in which we will seek to put the learners into scenarios where they will be asked to respond to practical situations they have experienced. This will mean that it will be essential that centres are aware that learners should be armed with a variety of specification based practical experiences which they can hopefully adapt to the stimulus information in the examination paper.

Learners need to experience the full variety of the natural environments in the specification, as one of these will be the vehicle which drives the examination paper forward. They should be familiar with the physical characteristics of the natural environment, the species which inhabit it and their relationship with human activities. This paper was based around a woodland habitat.

Individual centres, and consortiums, should ensure that learners are aware of the requirements of the full range of command words that might be used at this level. Q1(a) to Q2(b)(iii) attempted to elicit basic skills and knowledge whereas Q2(c)(i) - Q4(c) differentiated by attempting to elicit a degree of understanding of the wider concepts of this module and are trying to impart to the learner's experiences, from inside and outside of the classroom.

Report on individual questions

Question 1

All sections of Q1 were structured to bring the learner gently into the focus of the exam paper i.e. a woodland habitat. To guarantee marks in this questions, learners needed to make sure they use the skills and knowledge they have rehearsed during the delivery of the course. Specific rather than generic examples of aspects of the natural environment should become a reflex part of classroom and fieldwork experience. It is vitally important that learners follow the command words, and the questions instructions,

Question 2

It was vital that the learners read the stimulus information before they answered the questions. On occasions, learners were not thoroughly conversant with the stimulus information and responded with inaccurate answers as a result.

Centres should expect to find tables, graphs, diagrams, photographs etc. throughout this examination paper and prepare learners for such eventualities. It is vital that learners familiarise themselves with these methods of presentation otherwise their answers will be applied incorrectly and they will lose marks. A number of learners answered questions very briefly and it is important that they should take notice of how many marks are allocated to the question and respond appropriately. In addition, the number of lines given for the learner to write their answer should suggest to the learner that a more detailed answer is required other than just simple words and phrases.

Question 3

This section of the paper focused on environmental surveys. Generally the questions were not answered well because learners appeared quite limited in their knowledge of the large variety of the main methods of conducting, recording and presenting results of environmental surveys that is necessary for them to understand and offer valid observations and conclusions about the character of the Natural Environment. All aspects of the Learning Outcomes must be covered and it seemed from this paper that aspects such as soil and plant identification keys had not been covered.

Question 4

This question was challenging, in keeping with the progressive difficulty of the paper to initialise differentiation, and learners should have been prepared to offer more higher order skills above simple description, if they were to be successful. The use of the word "Explain" should suggest to the learners that more detailed answers are needed if they are to achieve well.

It would be good practice to use numerous examples in an answer to prove a point and if these were from personal experience in the field they would receive appropriate credit. Many of the answers to the question were not precise enough to deserve high marks because learners did not make the move from description to explanation.

This section will often focus on a topic that examines the reasons why we need to observe research, investigate, and measure aspects of the Natural Environment. This progression from identification of the character of a habitat, to the collection of accurate empirical data and objective evidence and then the application of such information to make a successful decision is of fundamental importance in this Diploma and is a process that learners should be able to recognise.

Grade Boundaries

Level 1 Unit 1: The Natural Environment

	Max. Mark	A*	A	B
Raw boundary mark	40	31	23	15
Points Score	4	3	2	1

Notes

Maximum Mark (raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme or mark grids.

Raw boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a learner to qualify for a given grade.

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