

GCE Biology FAQs - Unit 6

Like the equivalent AS unit, this unit is split into two parts: the general assessment of practical skills, and an individual practical investigation.

Practical Skills Assessment

Q. Do my students have to do the core practicals?

A. Yes - the core practicals are part of the specification. As such, the written examinations can contain questions which require knowledge of the background, method and results of these practicals. Not to cover these practicals would be equivalent to leaving out a section of the specification. In addition, the core practicals aim to develop the practical skills of your students.

Q. How do I record which core practicals my students have completed and which practical skills have been assessed?

A. Use the "Record Sheet for A2 Biology", to be found on the Biology homepage of our website: <http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/biology/Pages/default.aspx>

Q. Do I have to use this Record Sheet?

A. All centres should use this Record Sheet and should not design their own.

Q. The Record Sheet only includes the eight core practicals. What if I have done other practical work whilst assessing the practical skills of my students?

A. The sheet was designed with only the core practicals in mind, but you may add any other practical experiments you have done, if necessary, to assess the practical skills. You can do this by adding extra practicals on the reverse of the sheet, by dividing a row into two or by attaching a supplementary sheet.

Q. Do I have to assess each of the six practical skills in every core practical?

A. No - indeed, it would probably not be possible! Some practicals lend themselves to the assessment of a particular skill: it is probably easiest to assess one or two skills in each core practical; but note the minimum requirement below.

Q. What is the minimum requirement for practical skills?

A. The minimum requirement is one tick for each practical skill i.e. a total of six ticks, one in each column.

Q. Some of the core practicals use expensive equipment which our centre doesn't have access to e.g. for electrophoresis. How can we work around this?

A. It may be possible for you to demonstrate this practical, or use a video / simulation. As long as candidates understand the How Science Works principles behind the practical and are able to answer questions on it, they should not be disadvantaged. It might still be possible to match some of the skills through an associated piece of written work. Even if this isn't possible, candidates should still be able to access all six skills through the remaining (and possible supplementary) practicals.

Q. Some practical skills are made up of more than one component. What happens if a student doesn't meet all the components of this skill on a core practical?

A. It is probably easiest to award a partial tick and supplement it with another partial tick (or ticks) in other core practicals when the other components are fulfilled.

Q. What happens if a student is absent for a core practical?

A. It may be possible for the student to repeat the practical on another occasion e.g. with another set, or in their own time. If this is not possible, teachers should ensure that the student is aware of the method and results of the core practical. This could be achieved by giving the student the relevant worksheet and ensuring that questions about the practical form part of a homework assignment. With eight core practicals (and possible supplementary ones), it should still be possible to fulfill all the practical skills, even if a student is absent for one or more of the core practicals.

Q. One of my students is having difficulties matching all six practical skills.

A. Remember that, if a student misses several core practicals, you can use other practical work to assess the practical skills. Indeed, one such extra practical could be the Individual Investigation. However, there may be circumstances where prolonged candidate illness interrupts the acquisition of practical skills. In these exceptional circumstances, please contact the Biology team at Edexcel for advice.

Q. How do the ticks on the Record Sheet convert into marks?

A. There are no marks for the practical skills - all the marks for Unit 6 (6BI06) are assigned to the Individual Investigation. However, one of the QCA requirements for GCE Biology is that the acquisition of practical skills should be recorded - this Record Sheet, therefore, ensures that our specification complies with the QCA requirements.

Q. What do I do with the Record Sheet once it is completed?

A. Keep the record sheets for all your students and send them to Edexcel when you submit the Individual Investigation. If you have submitted the Individual Investigation for moderation, the Record Sheets may come back to you; if you submit the Individual Investigation for marking, the Record Sheets will not be sent back.

Q. I am submitting my Unit 6 sample for moderation electronically. How do I submit the Record Sheets?

A. You may find it easier to scan the Record Sheets and include them on the CD you are submitting for moderation. Otherwise, you can send a hard copy with your CD.

Q. Do I also send any practical work?

A: No. Your students will need the reports for core practicals to help with revision. Unless there are exceptional and unusual circumstances, such as the suspicion of malpractice, Edexcel does not need to see any evidence for the assessment of these practical skills.

Q. If a candidate is resitting, do I need to submit the Record Sheet again?

A. No: if a candidate resits Unit 6, he or she need only resubmit the Individual Investigation. So that we know that the candidate has already submitted the Practical Record Sheet, please tick the box on the Individual Investigation marking / authentication sheet.

Q. Is there any other requirement for assessing Practical Skills?

A. Please make sure that the Record Sheet is signed by the student and by the teacher.

Individual Investigations

Q. Our centre used the SNAB specification prior to GCE 2008. Is the Individual Investigation for the new specification the same as the old 6135/02?

A. Although there are some similarities, there are also many differences. For example, the new criteria do not include an "Implementation" section, and the marks in each section are different, as is some of the wording of criteria. Please make sure that you check Issue 3 of the specification carefully.

Q. Is there a word limit?

A. The word limit is no longer part of the marking criteria, but students should keep to the guide of 2700 – 3300 words for the Report. This includes all text, with the exception of the bibliography.

Q. In what format should the Individual Investigation be submitted?

A. The majority of work is submitted in the form of a written report and should be word-processed. However, hand-written Reports (so long as they are legible) are perfectly acceptable.

Q. Is submission on CD allowed?

A. If you are submitting work for moderation (6BI06/1A), then you may submit work on CD. Work submitted for Edexcel to mark (6BI06/1B) must be submitted as hard copy.

Q. I've heard that Edexcel will mark our Individual Investigation for us. Is this true?

A. Yes: there are two entry options for this Unit. You may mark your students' work and submit a sample, as requested, to Edexcel for moderation (Entry code = 6BI06/A) or you may submit your students' work to Edexcel and we will mark it for you (Entry code = 6BI06/B).

Q. Do you charge an extra fee for marking the work for us?

A. Please check the Fees page of the Edexcel website as, although the initial intention is for the entry fee to be the same, this may change in time.

Q. I want to mark my own students' work, as I feel it will give me a better appreciation of how well they have done and tell me how I may improve the delivery of this Unit in the future. Is there any guidance available to me?

A. Yes: there are examples of marked Investigations in the Tutor Support Materials on the Edexcel website: <http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gce/gce08/biology/Pages/default.aspx> In addition, there are INSET courses available to help teachers assess this Unit. Some of these courses are face-to-face meetings with members of our senior examining team. As many teachers find coming out of school to INSET meetings difficult, there are also some web-based INSET sessions. Details of INSET courses appear on the Edexcel website.

Q. Is there any other support available?

A. Yes - you may like to check that a title is suitable for your pupils - this can be done through the Ask the Expert service. In addition, there is a Consultancy Service designed to look over reports and give some feedback on strengths and weaknesses. Please see the Consultancy Service documents in the Unit 6 folder on the GCE Biology homepage.

Q. What is the deadline for submitting work for moderation or marking?

A. The submission deadline is 15th May. The deadline is the same for work submitted for moderation and for work submitted for marking.

Q. Where do I send the Investigations?

A. You should receive address labels along with the attendance registers / OPTEMS forms for this Unit. If there is any doubt, the name and address of your moderator / marker can be found using Edexcel Online.

Q. I have some students whose work is being submitted for moderation and other whose work is being submitted for marking. Do these both go to the same person?

A. It's unlikely: our examiners usually only do one job, either moderation or marking. If you're entering candidates under both routes, the work is likely to go to two separate people. Please take care to send the work to the correct person, otherwise there is a risk of work going missing in transit when redirected.

Q. Do I need to submit anything else with the Investigations?

A. The work of each candidate must be authenticated using the authentication form on the GCE Biology homepage. Don't forget to submit the Practical Skills Record sheets too!

Q. Will I get the work back again after results?

A. Samples of work submitted to Edexcel for moderation (6BI06/A) will be returned to centres in the same way as any other piece of coursework. Samples of work submitted to Edexcel for marking (6BI06/B) will be retained by Edexcel in the same way as any other externally-marked examination.

Q. If I submitted Investigations to you for marking, is there any way to get them back?

A. You need to submit an Access to Scripts request. Please note that there is a charge for this service. If you are submitting Investigations to Edexcel for marking (6BI06/B), it might be a good idea to keep a copy of the work at your centre.

Q. I'm not happy with the marks my students got. Can I get a remark?

A. If you submitted work for moderation (6BI06/A), then you cannot query individual students' results: you must ask for remoderation of the whole centre (like any other piece of coursework). If you submitted work to be marked (6BI06/B), then you may ask for a remark for one or more students individually (like any other externally-marked examination).

Q. Do I get any feedback on the marking of the Investigations?

A. If your work was moderated, your centre will receive an E9 moderator's report. These are submitted by the moderator online and can be accessed using Edexcel Online. If your work was marked by Edexcel, we hope to be able to send a similar E9 report, but please note we cannot guarantee this. The Principal Examiner for this Unit will write a report covering aspects of the work noted across all centres: this will be published on the day results come out. There will also be feedback INSET events.

Q. One of my candidates wishes to resit this unit. How does this work?

A. Candidates have a choice: they can do a fresh Investigation with a new Report, or they may try to rework their Report for resubmission.