



A-level science practical endorsement visit

Guidance for Lead Teachers

This document has been designed to provide schools and colleges with further information about the visit from your allocated AQA Practical Endorsement Adviser.

What to expect



Before the visit

- At least two weeks before the visit, the Lead Teacher at your school or college will receive an email and letter from your Practical Adviser with the details of your visit, followed up with a phone call.
- Prepare for the visit with our practical handbook, Common Practical Assessment Criteria (CPAC) information and other supporting resources at [aqa.org.uk/alevelpracticals](https://www.aqa.org.uk/alevelpracticals)
- Complete our updated practical endorsement training at [aqa.org.uk/practicals-training](https://www.aqa.org.uk/practicals-training)
 - Our free online learning modules will help teachers get to grips with the practical skills standard in A-level Biology, Chemistry and Physics.
 - All Lead Teachers are **required** to complete this training, other teachers and technicians can take the training as well.
 - Following the completion of the modules, teachers will be asked 15 multiple choice questions. To pass this assessment, teachers will need to answer 80 % of the questions correctly. Teachers must take this assessment individually.
 - Once completed, you'll be able to print out your own personalised certificate to present to your Practical Adviser.



On the day of the visit

Your Practical Adviser will:

- discuss record keeping with the Lead Teacher
- observe a practical lesson of a Year 12 or 13 Biology, Chemistry or Physics class
- meet with four to six students for around 15 minutes to discuss their general practical progress
- review the minimum documentary requirements, teacher's plans for practicals, records of practical activities, student progress tracking and other relevant materials
- review all the notes and information from the visit.

Please note your Adviser will **not** be giving feedback on the outcomes of the visit on the day.



After the visit

Approximately two weeks after the visit, your Head Teacher and Exams Officer will receive a report from your Practical Adviser outlining the findings from their visit and details of any follow-up actions.

The record will state whether your Adviser agrees with the school or college's application of the CPAC, or not. Should your Adviser not agree with the school or college's application of the CPAC, then guidance will be given as to what measures are required to bring the school or college into line with the requirements. If your Adviser informs AQA that they disagree that your school or college is implementing the endorsement correctly, this may also trigger a visit from other awarding bodies whose A-level Biology, Chemistry or Physics specifications you are delivering.

Suggested outline for the visit

Visits will usually last for around four hours. To help schools and colleges plan for the day of the visit, we have suggested the following schedule:

10:00 – 11:00	Arrive at school or college, meet Lead Teacher. Discuss record keeping.
11:00 – 12:00	Observe practical lesson taking place.
12:00 – 12:30	Lunch.
12:30 – 12:45	Meet students to discuss practical work.
12:45 – 14:00	Time to review evidence.

Given the number of visits we are required to make, we would ask that schools and colleges make every effort to accommodate your Adviser on the day of the visit provided. We understand this may require some changes to timetables and apologise in advance should this be necessary.

Your Adviser can be flexible with timings and will do their utmost to fit in with the school day. If you would like to make any amendments/revisions to this outline, please contact your Adviser.

For safeguarding reasons, all Advisers must be accompanied at all times. Please make the necessary arrangements for your Adviser to be chaperoned on the day of the visit.

Remember, if your school or college has fewer than 140 entries at A-level for each science subject then you will have just one monitoring visit. In larger schools or colleges where there are more than 140 students being entered for each A-level science subject there will be three separate visits.

We recognise that any visit from an exam board may seem a daunting experience but we do aim to make these visits a positive experience with the emphasis on providing advice and support. These visits are not inspections and are simply designed to confirm that all schools and colleges are carrying out the required practicals and awarding the endorsement correctly. This is in the interest of all students completing A-level science qualifications.

Record keeping

The format of teacher records kept will vary between teachers. Your Adviser will be happy to look at records in any format that shows the relevant information. Please have records accessible ready for this review.

The Adviser will also wish to see evidence that the Lead Teacher has undertaken the required online endorsement training.

Observation of a practical lesson

The purpose of the observation is to determine the school or college's ability to deliver and assess students as part of the practical endorsement. As such, we are looking to confirm the teacher's ability to assess students against the standard, not to decide on individual students' competencies. Therefore, it is not necessary and indeed could be counterproductive, to 'rehearse' any practical work with the students before the visit.

Your Adviser will need to observe one Year 12 or 13 AS or A-level Biology, Chemistry or Physics practical lesson taking place during their visit. Your Adviser is **not** required to observe a lesson being conducted by your Lead Teacher but will need to observe students being assessed against one or more of the CPAC. For further guidance please refer to 'A-level practical skills to be assessed via endorsement' in the specification and the relevant sections in the AQA practical handbooks.

Your Adviser will also expect to see all teacher planning, assessment and tracking records and a sample of student lab books. This will help them to establish the extent of forward planning, understanding of the requirements of the CPAC and the progress that your students have made towards the expected pass standard within each CPAC statement.

Meeting with students

Following the observation of the practical lesson, your Adviser will need to meet between four and six students (selected by the school or college) to discuss general practical progress. The discussion should last no more than 15 minutes.

Review the minimum documentary requirements

The minimum documentary requirements that schools and colleges are required to maintain for review are included in your practical visit checklist.

The associated materials allow your Adviser to understand how much guidance students were given. For example, they could show that teachers gave students full details of an experiment, which would limit the students from demonstrating the ability to apply investigative approaches.

Your Adviser will need to review the work from the class observed and also at least two student records selected by the Adviser from each other class undertaking the qualification.

Your practical visit checklist

Our qualifications keep practicals at the heart of science. Practical advisory visits are an opportunity to support and guide you and your colleagues. We are not here to enforce processes, we are here to help you ensure excellent standards of practicals. With that in mind here's how you can be best prepared for your visit.

- Complete our updated practical endorsement training at aqa.org.uk/practicals-training

- Prepare a practical lesson for the day of the visit.

- Select four to six students the Practical Adviser can meet with during the visit.

Make sure you have copies of the following documentary requirements ready and up-to-date:

- documented plans to carry out sufficient practical activities which meet the requirements of CPAC, incorporating skills and techniques, over the course of the A-level
- a record of each practical activity undertaken and the date when this was completed
- a record of the criteria being assessed in each practical activity

- a record of student attendance

- a record of which students met the Pass criteria and which did not

- student work showing evidence required for the particular task with date, for example:

- lab books (allowing all practical work to be kept in one place)
- students' folders, interspersed with their theory work (allowing the link between practical and theory to be highlighted)

- computer-based systems

- individual sheets collected at the end of practical sessions

- pre-printed workbooks

- any associated materials provided for the practical activity, for example:

- notes in lesson plans or schemes of work
- worksheets or workbooks
- notes made on tracking sheets.

More information

Further guidance and information relating to practical work and the monitoring visit can also be found at aqa.org.uk/science or get in touch with the team: alevelscience@aqa.org.uk or 01483 477756.