



Course report 2023

Higher Art and Design

This report provides information on candidates' performance. Teachers, lecturers and assessors may find it useful when preparing candidates for future assessment. The report is intended to be constructive and informative, and to promote better understanding. You should read the report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics in the report were compiled before any appeals were completed.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022: 5,688

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 5,889

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	1,157	Percentage	19.6	Cumulative percentage	19.6	Minimum mark required	178
B	Number of candidates	1,797	Percentage	30.5	Cumulative percentage	50.2	Minimum mark required	152
C	Number of candidates	1,897	Percentage	32.2	Cumulative percentage	82.4	Minimum mark required	126
D	Number of candidates	912	Percentage	15.5	Cumulative percentage	97.9	Minimum mark required	100
No award	Number of candidates	126	Percentage	2.1	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

Please note that rounding has not been applied to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- ◆ 'most' means greater than 70%
- ◆ 'many' means 50% to 69%
- ◆ 'some' means 25% to 49%
- ◆ 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find more statistical reports on the [statistics and information](https://sqa.my/) page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Feedback from markers and the statistical data indicates that the components effectively differentiated between candidates of different abilities and levels of understanding.

Performance in the question paper showed a slight improvement, with an increase in the average mark compared with last year.

There was an overall increase in the average mark for both the expressive and design portfolios compared with last year.

Question paper

The modified question paper allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of either art or design issues covered during the course. Most candidates chose to answer from the expressive art studies section of the paper.

The question paper was well received by candidates, centres, and markers. Feedback from markers indicated that the question paper was fair and accessible for candidates in terms of coverage and overall level of demand.

Most candidates were able to complete three questions from their chosen section in the time allocated.

Many candidates were able to apply their knowledge and understanding effectively to answer the mandatory question. For the optional questions, candidates who selected the design studies questions performed, on average, better than those who selected the expressive art studies optional questions.

Candidates selected a range of works by different artists and designers in response to the mandatory questions. Well-known artists and designers such as Frida Kahlo, Pablo Picasso, Jenny Saville, and Vincent van Gogh were popular in the expressive section. In the design section, A M Cassandre, Coco Chanel, Peter Chang, and Alexander McQueen were popular choices.

The most popular optional questions were:

Expressive art studies:

- ◆ question 3 — ‘5 Umezebi St., New Haven, Enugu’ by Njideka Akunyili Crosby
- ◆ question 4 — ‘Still Life with Bowl of Citrons’ by Giovanna Garzoni
- ◆ question 5 — ‘Merlin’ by Andrew McIntosh

Design studies:

- ◆ question 8 — Jumpsuit by Richard Malone
- ◆ question 10 — Emergency Solar Hand Crank Radio by EEEKit
- ◆ question 12 — Vajracarya Priest’s Crown by unknown designer

Expressive portfolio

Most candidates attempted the assessment task well. It was accessible in terms of level of demand. Many markers commented on candidates' personal approach and the level of commitment evident in their portfolios.

Many candidates followed the expressive portfolio guidance and were able to access the full range of marks available. Candidates often chose to work on a smaller scale for their final piece and to streamline their choice of materials. In many cases this led to a focused and succinct approach.

Candidates displayed a wide range of inventive and highly individual approaches to selecting themes for their portfolio, often using themselves, a family member, a pet, or personal belongings as a starting point.

Markers noted that, in common with last session, many candidates chose a selective and focused approach to their choice of media, for example tonal pencil, coloured pencil, paint, print making, sculpture, or mixed media. As has been the case in recent years, the vast majority of candidates submitted two-dimensional work, especially portraiture and still life.

Design portfolio

Most candidates attempted the assessment task well. Candidates attempted a wide variety of design briefs, and in doing so, demonstrated an extensive range of skills and approaches.

Markers noted the wide variety of approaches to design portfolios within and across centres. Two-dimensional graphic design and repeat pattern textiles, along with three-dimensional body adornment, head pieces, masks, and jewellery continue to be the preferred areas of exploration. Most candidates selected design briefs that were realistic and achievable. This allowed them to successfully explore the design process and gave them scope to effectively demonstrate their range of skills.

Many candidates successfully demonstrated highly effective and creative use of a wide range of media, which was often easily accessible and/or recycled. Many markers commented on this skilful and inspiring approach. The creative effect of digital technology was evident in many portfolios, which candidates often handled with confidence and sophistication.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Most candidates followed the instructions in the question paper and selected one section to answer.

Most candidates structured their responses using a streamlined approach, providing separate succinct points for question prompts. Candidates who used the 'What? Where? Why?' exam technique, or similar, were able to convey their responses effectively. The highest-performing candidates were able to explain and fully justify the impact for each prompt they discussed.

The marking team saw good responses, especially to the mandatory questions. Many candidates conveyed in-depth knowledge and understanding. Candidates that clearly engaged with the selected artwork or design work were able to respond effectively to the given prompts, particularly in terms of the impact of social, cultural, and/or other influences.

Candidates who had a good knowledge and understanding of art and design issues and understood the meaning of question prompts were able to apply art and design terminology effectively in optional questions.

Expressive portfolio

Most candidates displayed a clear understanding of the assessment task and completed focused and relevant investigation work, in line with the portfolio guidance. This helped them to establish and follow a single line of enquiry. Markers noted the considered approach many candidates adopted in developing their theme and the possibilities this gave for creative development.

Many candidates used digital technology and photography inventively to explore and develop their ideas. Digital technology and photography were particularly effective when exploring mood and atmosphere and composition. A few candidates chose to produce some or all of their portfolio digitally and demonstrated a sound understanding of the creative process and course requirements.

As in previous years, many candidates demonstrated a focused line of development, leading from investigative and development pieces towards a skilfully produced final piece. Working on a smaller scale for the final piece allowed many candidates to achieve a higher level of finish and demonstrate their level of skill.

Candidates who effectively evaluated their creative process reflected on and referred to the decisions they made throughout their portfolio, giving full justification for their choices. Successful candidates also used relevant art terminology to describe the effectiveness of their artwork.

Design portfolio

Many candidates selected appropriate and relevant design briefs, with realistic and achievable requirements and constraints. This allowed them to effectively address key design issues and fully explore the design process, creating a focused and successful portfolio.

The most succinct and effective portfolios demonstrated a clear layout following a single line of enquiry, flowing through the investigation and development stages towards a design solution. This clarity of process allows candidates to experiment and fully explore the design process with a focus on developing skills and problem solving.

Candidates who demonstrated a focused and considered approach to their portfolio were more successful. Many portfolios focused on exploring a particular design issue, visual element, or technique to create cohesion and direction.

Portfolios that explored functionality as a key design issue along with aesthetic considerations were more successful, for example a candidate could consider the ergonomics and function of a headpiece alongside its aesthetic value.

Markers noted that there was another increase in 3D design portfolios this year, with 3D design outcomes becoming more popular. If candidates or centres submitted photographs in place of a 3D outcome, they made a very good effort to ensure that the photographs accurately represented the design solution.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Markers noted that some candidates did not respond fully to all three prompts in a question and did not demonstrate the analytical skills necessary at this level. Some candidates did not demonstrate a clear understanding of art and design terminology and provide the expected responses for different prompts. Some candidates discussed prompts in general terms without referencing the artwork or design work, limiting the marks that they could achieve.

In the mandatory questions, a few candidates provided a pre-prepared response and did not relate their knowledge of the artwork or design work to the prompts in the question. In question 1, some candidates responded to the prompt word 'techniques' by describing working methods or use of materials. In question 7, some candidates only gave descriptive comments instead of justified responses for the prompt word 'style'.

In the mandatory question, some candidates discussed at length the artwork or design they had studied. However, they did not identify the work, artist, or designer in their response.

In the expressive arts studies section, for question 3, some candidates did not provide justified responses about 'materials'. They only discussed materials in descriptive terms. In question 3, many candidates referred to the use of 'pattern' generally without stating the types of patterns and where they featured in the artwork. For question 4, some candidates demonstrated limited knowledge of colour theory, responding to the prompt word 'colour' with comments about tone or 'the colours' in general terms.

In the design studies section, for questions 8 and 10, some candidates did not analyse the prompt 'target market' and did not provide the necessary justification in their responses. Some candidates did not convey design understanding or relevant terminology for question 12 and instead gave general descriptive responses for the prompt 'decoration'.

Expressive portfolio

Some centres provided candidates with the same still life objects and arrangements, leading them to produce very similar compositions. This approach limited a few candidates' opportunities to show an individual approach to their portfolio through choice of subject matter.

Some candidates worked on a larger scale for their final piece. In some cases, this resulted in the skills evident at the development stage not transferring through to the final piece.

Some candidates did not fully reflect on the effectiveness of their working methods in their evaluation and instead submitted a record of the steps they followed. This resulted in candidates missing opportunities to gain marks.

Design portfolio

Many candidates submitted more work than the amount recommended in the design portfolio guidance. This tended to be at the development stage. Some of these candidates may have benefitted from a more selective and streamlined approach.

A few candidates chose design briefs that were very challenging to resolve within the scale and format of the Higher design portfolio. This limited these candidates' opportunities to fully address the design issues. A few candidates chose to design a range, such as a CD cover with poster and merchandise, rather than a single line of development to create one design. This made it more difficult for them to meet the required level of refinement for each solution.

Some candidates chose to work with materials that were not appropriate to their design brief or level of skill. This limited their opportunities to achieve the full range of marks.

Some candidates made entirely descriptive comments in their evaluations rather than reflecting on their process throughout their portfolio in relation to their chosen brief. This limited their opportunity to access the full range of marks available.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Teachers and lecturers should give candidates time throughout the year to become familiar with art and design terminology. The course specification contains a list of terms that can feature in the question paper. Appendix 2 gives details about how candidates can interpret and develop these subject-specific terms in their responses.

Throughout the course, teachers and lecturers should expose candidates to a diverse range of art and design imagery, the full range of question prompts, and exam techniques.

Practice in selecting appropriate questions, structuring streamlined responses, and time management should also help candidates respond effectively to the question paper.

To gain a mark, candidates need to make a fully justified point in response to a prompt in the question.

To access the full range of marks, candidates must answer all prompts in the selected questions. Up to 4 marks are available for each prompt. Candidates do not need to make four points for each prompt. There is some flexibility on how they can structure their responses to access the 10 marks available for each question.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to explain and analyse where in the work they can see the specific aspect of the prompt, and what effect the prompt has on the work. Candidates should fully justify each point they make, demonstrating their understanding and knowledge of art and design terminology at this level.

Understanding Standards evidence and commentaries are available on SQA's website. Teachers, lecturers, and candidates can use this material to understand how the question paper is marked and the level of responses required. A specimen question paper, past papers, and marking instructions are also available on SQA's website.

Expressive portfolio

Centres should continue to advise candidates to follow the portfolio guidance. Candidates can maximise the available time by submitting streamlined and focused portfolios that still give them access to the full range of marks.

Candidates should identify a theme for their portfolio and clearly state this alongside their investigation studies. They should develop this theme as a single line of enquiry through to the final piece.

Centres should ensure that candidates review and edit their portfolios before they submit them. It is easier for candidates to access the full range of marks when the work they include in their portfolio is relevant and of a consistent standard.

Candidates should present portfolios with a clear layout. Candidates can show a clear process with two investigations and two developments, leading to a resolved final piece. They can present their work in a straightforward format. There is no advantage in using expensive mounting materials.

Candidates do not need to use many different materials and/or techniques. Candidates who choose to focus their portfolios and limit their choice to only one medium or technique often produce more in-depth development.

Centres should avoid formulaic approaches. While focusing on a single genre, such as still life or portraiture, can help centres with course delivery, candidates should have scope to develop their own creative response in their chosen area of study.

Candidates must complete the self-evaluation process independently. Teachers and lecturers should support candidates to develop their skills before they complete the evaluation. Candidates must complete the evaluation template without help from, for example, prompts, questions, or example answers.

Teachers and lecturers should check that candidates attach the correct evaluation to the first sheet of their portfolio, avoiding overlapping any work. Centres should ensure that each sheet is labelled using the SQA stickers provided to centres. Candidates must attach their flyleaf to the back of their portfolio. Candidates should not modify the evaluation template or reduce the font size.

Design portfolio

Centres should continue to advise candidates to follow the portfolio guidance to allow them sufficient time to develop their skills. Focused and streamlined portfolios developed from concise design briefs can access the full range of marks.

Design briefs should give clear direction to candidates and ask them to consider important functional and aesthetic issues. For example, candidates could consider practical issues, such as ergonomics, material choice, and fastenings, in jewellery or body adornment design, or how to communicate a message while considering the target market in graphic design.

Candidates should consider the suitability of their chosen materials when developing their ideas. Materials do not need to be expensive, and often recycled or easily available materials, such as paper, allow the candidate to experiment freely, finding the most creative and experimental solutions.

Candidates should carefully select and present their work to ensure a clear progressive design process. Candidates should present the refinements to their work, demonstrating a clear line of development, leading to the design solution.

Candidates do not need to submit 3D outcomes, particularly if their 3D work is fragile or difficult to handle. Clear, well-presented photographs from various angles, including detailed shots, provide markers with a sufficient representation of 3D work.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to fully consider all the marks available for self-evaluation. Candidates should be reflecting on their decision making and the effectiveness of their processes rather than recording the stages they went through to reach their design solution.

Centres should ensure that each sheet is labelled using the SQA stickers provided to centres. Candidates must attach their flyleaf to the back of their portfolio. Candidates should not modify the evaluation template or reduce the font size.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

SQA's main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, SQA aims to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- ◆ a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level. Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of SQA's Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- ◆ Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures was developed to support learners and centres. This included modifications to course assessment, retained from the 2021–22 session. This support was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic while recognising a lessening of the impact of disruption to learning and teaching as a result of the pandemic. The revision support that was available for the 2021–22 session was not offered to learners in 2022–23.

In addition, SQA adopted a sensitive approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining

standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams continue to do so in different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019 and 2022.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2023 and the ongoing impact the disruption from the pandemic has had on learners. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and the removal of revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2023 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2023 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).