



Course report 2024

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 with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 5,889

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 5,952

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	991	Percentage	16.6	Cumulative percentage	16.6	Minimum mark required	174
B	Number of candidates	1,834	Percentage	30.8	Cumulative percentage	47.5	Minimum mark required	147
C	Number of candidates	2,050	Percentage	34.4	Cumulative percentage	81.9	Minimum mark required	121
D	Number of candidates	955	Percentage	16.0	Cumulative percentage	98.0	Minimum mark required	94
No award	Number of candidates	122	Percentage	2.0	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

We have not applied rounding 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 statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Marker feedback and the statistical data indicates that the questions in this year's exam effectively differentiated between candidates of different abilities and levels of understanding. However, candidate performance was generally weaker than intended, suggesting that candidates may have found the return to the full question paper challenging. This was taken into account when setting grade boundaries.

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 attempt all six questions in the time allocated, understood the format of the question paper, and selected questions appropriately.

There was no significant difference in candidate performance between 'Section 1: Expressive art studies' and 'Section 2: Design studies'.

Candidates selected a range of works by different artists and designers in response to the mandatory questions. Markers commented on a reduction in the variety of artists and designers being studied compared to previous years. Popular choices in the expressive arts section included Frida Kahlo, Pablo Picasso, Audrey Flack, and Vincent van Gogh. In the design section, A.M. Cassandre, Louis Comfort Tiffany, Peter Chang, and Alexander McQueen were popular.

The most popular optional questions were:

Expressive art studies:

- ◆ question 2 — 'Young Sister' by Jiab Prachakul
- ◆ question 5 — 'Winter Landscape with Skaters and Bird Trap' by Pieter Bruegel the Elder
- ◆ question 6 — 'Gamrie Sunday' by Bryan Angus

Design studies:

- ◆ question 8 — 'Wearable Structure: Tudor Collar' by Tracy Featherstone
- ◆ question 9 — 'Olympus Mons poster' by SpaceX
- ◆ question 12 — 'BoostApak car seat backpack with wipeable, removable cover' by Trunki

Expressive portfolio

Candidates continued to approach the expressive portfolio assessment task successfully, indicating that it was accessible for them in terms of level of demand. Many markers commented on candidates' personal considerations and the high levels of engagement shown through their portfolios. It is evident that both candidates and centres have approached the task with enthusiasm and commitment this session.

As seen in previous sessions, many candidates who choose to follow the expressive portfolio guidance were able to access the full range of marks available. Many candidates opted to work on a smaller scale for the final piece in their portfolio, and this gave opportunity to fully refine their choice of materials. In many cases, this led to a consolidated approach to the assessment.

Candidates demonstrated a diverse array of creative and unique choices when choosing themes for their portfolios. Many candidates opted to explore self-portraiture, or portraiture of a friend, a family member, a pet, or still life as an area of investigation.

Many candidates opted for a selective and focused approach to their choice of media, often selecting mixed media over painting. Many candidates demonstrated high levels of skill using their chosen approaches, including mixed media, drawing, painting, printmaking and sculpting. Most candidates submitted two-dimensional work.

Design portfolio

Most candidates continued to approach the design portfolio assessment task well. Most candidates produced more than the minimum guidance. Candidates continued to work from a wide variety of design briefs, and in doing so, demonstrated a broad range of skills. Most candidates selected design briefs that were realistic and manageable. This allowed for successful exploration of the design process, and gave candidates scope to explore possibilities and demonstrate their full range of skills.

Markers commented on the variety of design briefs selected by candidates, and the individual approaches presented. Two-dimensional graphic design and repeat pattern textiles, along with three-dimensional body adornment, head pieces and jewellery continue to be the preferred areas of exploration for most candidates. There was an increase in the use of digital design in this session, with more candidates exploring digitally produced graphic design and illustration, in particular character design. Digital technology, in combination with more traditional methods, was used successfully in many portfolios for creative effect.

Many candidates successfully demonstrated highly effective and creative use of materials. These materials often continued to be easily accessible and/or recycled. Many markers commented on candidates' skilful and refined approaches, which did not have to be on a very large scale to be successful.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question Paper

Most candidates understood the format of the question paper and selected appropriate questions to answer.

Most candidates structured their responses using a streamlined approach, providing separate succinct points for question prompts. Candidates who used an exam technique such as 'What? Where? Why?', or 'point-evidence-explain', 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.

Many candidates with in-depth knowledge and understanding were able to respond effectively to the given prompts in the mandatory questions, particularly regarding the impact of social, cultural and/or other influences.

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

Expressive portfolio

Most candidates displayed a strong awareness of the assessment task, and completed focused and relevant investigation work in line with the portfolio guidance. This helped them to set, and progress through, a single line of development. Markers commented that many candidates adopted a well-considered approach in the development of their theme, giving them possibilities for creative development.

Many candidates demonstrated a focused line of development, leading from investigative and development pieces, towards a refined final piece. Working on a smaller scale for their final piece allowed many candidates to fully demonstrate their creative potential and level of skill.

Digital technology and photography were used creatively in some portfolios to help candidates explore and develop their ideas. This was particularly effective when developing composition, or when used to create expressive effect. An increased number of candidates chose to create their entire portfolio digitally, and demonstrated a sound understanding of the course requirements.

Many candidates effectively evaluated their expressive process and reflected on the decisions they made throughout creating their portfolio. These statements were qualified with fully justified comments relating to the effectiveness of their choices. Successful candidates also made use of relevant art terminology throughout their evaluative process.

Design portfolio

Most candidates chose to investigate appropriate and relevant design briefs, with manageable requirements and constraints. This allowed them to effectively address the key

design issues while creatively being able to engage in the design process. This created a clear task which translated to succinct portfolios.

The most effective design portfolios demonstrated a clear single line of enquiry from the starting point of the design brief, through the instigation and development stages, to a resolved design solution. This clarity of process allowed many candidates to experiment and creatively explore the design process, with a strong focus on developing skills and resolving the design issues set out in their brief.

Candidates who demonstrated a focused and succinct approach to their portfolio tended to access more marks. Many portfolios focused on the exploration of a particular design issue, visual element or exploration of technique, giving them a strong overall focus and visual cohesion. Several markers commented on the success of some smaller design solutions.

Candidates who considered function alongside aesthetics as a key design issue tended to access the highest mark ranges — for example when exploring the function of a graphic design in attracting the viewers' attention, alongside considering aesthetic values such as colour, layout and pattern.

Markers noted that most candidates who chose to work with digital media to develop two-dimensional design portfolios documented their working process well, contributing to accessing marks in the upper mark range.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question Paper

Markers noted that many candidates found it challenging to provide developed responses for each question.

Many candidates did not respond fully to all three prompts in a question, and did not demonstrate the analytical skills necessary at Higher level. Some candidates did not demonstrate a clear understanding of art and design terminology. 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 appeared to provide a pre-prepared response and did not relate their knowledge and understanding of the artwork or design work to the prompts in the question. In question 1, some candidates responded to the prompt 'scale' by describing composition or working methods. In question 7, some candidates discussed fitness for purpose instead of justified responses for 'function'.

In the mandatory questions, some candidates discussed the artwork or design work they had studied, however, they did not identify the work, artist, or designer in their response.

Section 1: Expressive art studies

For question 2, some candidates demonstrated limited knowledge of colour theory, responding to the prompt 'colour' with comments about tone or 'the colours' in general terms. In question 5, many candidates did not provide justified responses for the prompt

'perspective', discussing viewpoint or opinion instead. In question 6, many candidates referred to the use of 'pattern' generally, without stating the types of patterns and where they featured in the artwork.

Section 2: Design studies

For question 8, many candidates discussed 'materials' in descriptive terms and did not provide justified responses for the materials used in the design piece. In questions 8 and 12, some candidates did not analyse the prompt 'fitness for purpose' and did not provide the necessary justification in their responses. In question 9, some candidates did not convey design understanding or use relevant terminology, resulting in descriptive responses for the prompt 'imagery'.

Expressive portfolio

Some candidates opted to use digital technology to create their portfolios. While this was done successfully in many cases, some candidates did not demonstrate their working methods and creative process. Where candidates effectively show process, they can achieve the full range of marks.

A few candidates chose to work on top of digitally generated images with traditional drawing and painting materials. If choosing this approach, candidates should ensure that they can clearly demonstrate their working method and skills.

Some candidates opted to work on a larger scale for their final piece, and did not finish their work before submitting. Candidates should consider what scale is manageable for them in order to show a consistent level of skill.

Candidates from some centres were all working from the same still life objects. This can limit the opportunity for candidates to develop an individually invested approach to a portfolio.

Some candidates recorded the steps of their working process rather than reflecting on the effectiveness of their processes and working methods in their evaluations, which resulted in not being able to reach the full range of marks.

Design portfolio

Some candidates opted to submit more work than stated in the portfolio guidance. This tended to be at the development stage of the portfolio. In some cases, candidates may have benefited from a more selective and streamlined approach.

A few candidates opted for design briefs that were very challenging to resolve within the scale of the Higher design portfolio. This limited the candidates' opportunities to resolve the design issues and set a very difficult task. A few candidates opted to produce a broad range of merchandise, rather than a single line of enquiry, by only creating one design. This made it more challenging for the candidate to meet the required level of refinement in each of the designs.

Some candidates chose to work with materials that were not appropriate to their chosen area of study, or level of skill. This highlighted a lack of refinement in some cases, which had an impact on the marks awarded.

When using digital technologies, some candidates did not demonstrate exploration and consolidation of their ideas throughout the development stage of their portfolio. For example, in some graphic design and textile portfolios, candidates used technology to create multiple colour variations of identical images. This limited their ability to access the full range of marks.

Some candidates made comments that were descriptive in their evaluations, rather than reflecting on the effectiveness of their judgements through the design process, in relation to their chosen brief. This limited their opportunity to access the full range of marks.

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 [Higher Art and Design course specification](#) contains a list of terms that can feature in the question paper. Appendix 2 of the course specification 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. A specimen question paper, past papers, and marking instructions are available on [SQA's website](#).

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 make it clear where in the work they can see the specific aspect of the prompt, and explain and analyse 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 [Understanding Standards website](#). Teachers, lecturers, and candidates can use this material to understand how the question paper is marked, and the required level of response.

Expressive portfolio

Centres should continue to advise candidates to follow the expressive portfolio guidance on [SQA's website](#). This guidance allows candidates to submit streamlined and focused portfolios that maximise the time available, while also allowing them access to the full range of marks.

Candidates should clearly state a theme for their portfolio. This theme should then develop through as a single line of development to the final piece.

Centres should ensure that candidates review and edit their portfolios prior to submission. When less-relevant work is included and the line of enquiry becomes disjointed, or if the level of the work is not of a consistent standard, it could have an impact on the marks candidates can achieve.

Candidates should present portfolios with a clear layout. Work can be presented in a straightforward vertical format and there is no requirement to use expensive mounting materials.

Portfolios where candidates choose to focus and limit their choice to only one medium or technique can allow for more in-depth skills development throughout the portfolio.

Centres should try to avoid prescriptive approaches. While choosing to focus on a single genre, such as still life or portraiture, can aid the delivery of the course, candidates should be given the scope to develop their own creative response within the chosen area of study. The coursework assessment task for Higher Art and Design allows for personalisation and choice, which can contribute positively to candidate engagement with the course.

Candidates must be given the opportunity to independently complete the evaluation. The evaluation must be completed without assistance, including the provision of example answers or templates. Candidates may find it beneficial to use a bullet point structure when completing their evaluation.

Teachers and lecturers must check that the correct evaluation has been attached to the first sheet, and avoid overlapping any work. The evaluation template should not be modified, and the font size should not be reduced. Each sheet of the portfolio should be identified with the SQA sticker labels provided, and the completed flyleaf must be attached to the back of the portfolio.

Design portfolio

Centres should continue to follow the portfolio guidance. Streamlined portfolios that work to concise design briefs can access the full range of marks available.

Design briefs should be carefully considered to give the best advantage to candidates. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to select manageable and realistic briefs that consider function, alongside aesthetics. Functional consideration in fashion and body adornment and jewellery design might include practical issues, such as ergonomics, material choice, and fastenings. In graphic design, this could include the communication of a message and consideration of target market.

Candidates should be supported to allow them to consider the most relevant materials when developing their ideas. Materials do not need to be expensive, and often recycled or low-cost materials, such as paper, allow for creative experimentation. Considering scale may be beneficial to candidates' working methods and time management, as well as reducing the cost.

Candidates should be supported to edit and present their work, ensuring a clear and progressive design process. Candidates should present a clear line of development in sequential order, leading to the fully resolved design solution.

There is no requirement to send physical three-dimensional design solutions. Clear, well-presented photographs from various angles, with some detail shots, will be sufficient to represent the candidates' work.

Candidates should complete their evaluations independently and be encouraged to consider all marks available. Candidates should reflect on their decision making and the effectiveness of their processes, rather than merely recording the stages they went through to reach their

final design. Candidates may find it beneficial to use a bullet point structure when completing their evaluation.

Teachers and lecturers must check that the correct evaluation has been attached to the first sheet, and avoid overlapping any work. The evaluation template should not be modified, and the font size should not be reduced. Each sheet of the portfolio should be identified with the SQA sticker labels provided, and the completed flyleaf must be attached to the back of the portfolio.

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.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).