Course report 2023

National 5 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.

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Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022:   10,093

Number of resulted entries in 2023:   10,283

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	4,320	Percentage	42	Cumulative percentage	42	Minimum mark required	174
B	Number of candidates	3,099	Percentage	30.1	Cumulative percentage	72.1	Minimum mark required	149
C	Number of candidates	2,067	Percentage	20.1	Cumulative percentage	92.2	Minimum mark required	124
D	Number of candidates	650	Percentage	6.3	Cumulative percentage	98.6	Minimum mark required	99
No award	Number of candidates	147	Percentage	1.4	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 page of SQA's website.

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Section 1: comments on the assessment

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

Performance in all components was broadly in line with last year.

Question paper

Modifications to the question paper remained in place for session 2022–23. Candidates could respond to Section 1: Expressive Art Studies or Section 2: Design Studies. Most candidates chose Section 1: Expressive Art Studies.

Feedback from the marking team, centres, and candidates indicated that the question paper was received positively and was fair in terms of course coverage and overall level of demand. The question paper generated a wide range of marks from candidates and discriminated effectively between candidates with different levels of understanding. Most candidates were able to complete two questions within the time allocated.

In response to the mandatory questions, candidates selected a range of works by historical and contemporary artists and designers. In Expressive Art Studies, Vincent van Gogh, Paul Cézanne, Pablo Picasso, Frida Kahlo, Chuck Close, Peter Howson, and Ralph Goings continue to be popular. In Design Studies, works by Alphonse Mucha, Saul Bass, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, and Peter Chang were popular choices.

Most candidates performed better in the mandatory questions (questions 1 and 7) than the optional questions. Most candidates responded very well to questions 1(b) and 7(b). This was an improvement on previous years.

The most popular optional questions in Section 1 were:

♦ question 2 — 'To Tell the Truth' by Tim Okamura
♦ question 4 — 'Interior with Lamp' by Roy de Maistre

The most popular optional questions in Section 2 were:

♦ question 8 — 'Winter Fun' poster by Anna Hymas
♦ question 9 — engineering building blocks toy kit by HALOFUN

The marking team noted that some candidates did not respond fully to all three prompts in a question and did not always use appropriate art and design terminology. Some candidates structured their responses well and fully explained the impact for each prompt they discussed.

Expressive portfolio

Most expressive portfolios demonstrated the skills and understanding required at this level. There were many high-quality submissions, although not as many at the top end of the marks range as last year.

Still-life continues to be the most popular genre. There was a slight increase in portraiture submissions from last year. Landscape and built environment continue to be least popular, although many of the candidates who chose this genre attempted it very well. There was an increase in fantasy and imagination portfolios. A wide range of interesting themes encouraged personalisation and choice. Markers noted exciting expressive approaches and handling of media, and realistic interpretations.

There were few submissions of 3D work in expressive. Almost all candidates worked in 2D processes. Painting, coloured pencil, and tonal pencil work were the most popular choices of media. It was encouraging to see a range of mixed media and print-making.

Across all genres, an increasing number of candidates used digital media. Some candidates chose to work in a diverse range of media in their portfolio. Many candidates focused on a limited selection of media. The number of candidates who chose to investigate one material in depth increased again this year. Most candidates worked in colour, but some took a monochromatic approach.

Design portfolio

Candidate performance in the design portfolio remained strong. However, there were slightly fewer submissions at the high end of the marks range compared to last year. Most portfolios met the assessment requirements at this level.

2D design continues to be very popular. Many candidates submitted graphic design and repeat pattern portfolios. There was more 3D work this year, with body adornment and headpiece design the most popular areas. Product design and architecture submissions increased and many of these submissions were strong.

It was common for candidates producing 3D work to use inexpensive materials to develop ideas and techniques. The number of candidates using technology, particularly in graphic and pattern design, increased this year. There was also an increase in the number of candidates who carefully combined hand-drawn imagery with digital manipulation techniques to develop and refine their ideas.

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Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

The marking team saw effective responses to all questions. The highest performing candidates demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding and were able to make focused, justified comments in response to the questions asked.

In response to the mandatory questions, most candidates were able to apply knowledge and understanding of specific art and design works. Candidates who demonstrated sound knowledge and understanding of art and design practice were able to access top marks. These candidates applied relevant information to the questions asked.

Some candidates chose to write an essay-style response, while many used the prompts from the questions as subheadings, which helped to keep their responses focused.

Most candidates responded very effectively to part (b) of the mandatory questions and were able to correctly identify two influences and give clear descriptions of how these influences could be seen in the artist and designer's work. Markers noted that revised wording and marking instructions for part (b) of the mandatory questions made marks more accessible.

Candidates with a good knowledge and understanding of art and design terminology responded well to the optional questions.

Most candidates attempted Section 2: Design Studies well. Many of the candidates who chose question 9 (engineering building blocks toy kit by HALOFUN) attempted it well and showed a good knowledge of product design issues. Many candidates who chose question 12 (Team Scotland Commonwealth Games opening parade outfits by Siobhan Mackenzie) attempted it well and demonstrated good knowledge of fashion design issues.

Expressive portfolio

Most candidates accessed the 10 marks available for having highly relevant investigative research appropriate to the theme and showing a clear understanding of the creative process. Most candidates who had a choice of theme or subject matter performed very well.

The strongest portfolios had a clear link to their theme, demonstrated one clear line of development, and explored at least two compositions. Strong portfolios considered viewpoint, framing, cropping, changes of scale, and sometimes demonstrated effective use of technology. Most candidates developed ideas by considering composition as well as colour, style, and texture.

In highly effective portfolios, candidates experimented with materials and techniques in a focused and well-considered manner. Many candidates used and handled coloured pencil and paint very well. Most candidates clearly played to their strengths and demonstrated their personal preferences throughout the portfolio in terms of theme, media, and techniques. Most candidates demonstrated an appropriate level of skill throughout the portfolio. Some portfolios were outstanding and showed skill beyond the level required. Many candidates

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followed the portfolio guidance in terms of the volume of work. This was an increase on last year. The streamlined approach proved very successful for many candidates as it tended to show a clear line of development and focus.

Many candidates finished their final pieces with skill and control, demonstrating excellent visual impact and the culmination of the expressive process. Most candidates made informed and appropriate decisions in terms of the media and scale of their final artwork, building on their experiences at the development stage.

In the most effective evaluations, candidates reflected on the success and areas for improvement in their portfolio, and clearly considered the effectiveness of their decisions throughout the process. Many candidates expressed their opinions with justifications and appropriate art terminology, while making clear references to their theme.

Design portfolio

Most candidates produced appropriate investigative research, for example, by including their source of inspiration and examples of focused and relevant market research. Most candidates achieved marks in the 'highly relevant' marks range (9 to 10 marks).

The most effective design portfolios contained focused and clearly laid out work that was relevant to the design brief. In most portfolios, development linked well visually with the investigative research material, providing continuity throughout the process. The most successful portfolios considered functionality as well as aesthetics. Many candidates demonstrated a high level of skill in using materials and techniques. This included:

♦ good use of paper manipulation and modelling to solve design problems
♦ high-quality drawings of 3D outcomes to describe development and design solutions
♦ skilful handling of low-cost and recycled materials
♦ effective and meaningful use of technology in many graphics, pattern, and architecture portfolios

There was an increase in the number of architecture portfolios. These portfolios often contained plans and elevations and explored appropriate materials.

Headpiece design remains a popular choice of design area. Many candidates were able to work well with paper models on mannequin heads. Most candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the design process and produced a successful design solution.

Many candidates who produced body adornment portfolios showed a high level of understanding of aesthetics and function. Many candidates handled 3D development effectively. They used digital visualisations, design drawings, sampling of techniques, and paper mock-ups. These approaches helped candidates evaluate and understand the best way to refine their idea to produce their design solution.

Many candidates who used digital technology to produce graphics portfolios performed well. Many candidates handled hand-drawn and cut-paper graphics with skill and attention to detail. Where candidates considered how to integrate text with imagery throughout the development process, they tended to perform well.

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Many candidates who used technology for repeat pattern produced portfolios of a high standard. These candidates usually demonstrated a high level of skill and used a clear motif. Their development stages communicated consideration of scale, layering, and colour that showed continuity with their initial investigative material.

High-scoring design evaluations reflected on the success of the portfolio in relation to the design brief and included evaluative language and design terminology.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

This year, some candidates wrote simplistic responses without justifying their comments. Some comments were general and lacked detail. A few candidates did not include the names of their selected artists or designers or gave incorrect names. In the mandatory questions, some candidates gave a pre-prepared response that did not answer the question. Some candidates stated the names of their artists and designers but did not name the works.

Areas for development this year include:

♦ Composition — understanding could be very limited, with some candidates giving a description of subject matter.
♦ Subject matter — some candidates gave a list of what was in the artwork without developing this to explain the effect, for example in terms of treatment, arrangement, symbolism, whether it was conventional, unconventional, or typical.
♦ Style — many candidates demonstrated a lack of knowledge and understanding of this prompt by describing the appearance of an artwork or design in very simple terms. Some candidates gave answers about sources of inspiration instead of style.
♦ Tone — many candidates did not give a definition of tone using art terminology. Instead, they gave definitions of mood and atmosphere in terms of literary technique. Many candidates discussed colour without any reference to tonality and its effect.

Some candidates gave speculative responses, sometimes containing incorrect information, to the mandatory questions (1 and 7). Some candidates selected artworks or designs that did not offer scope to answer the question effectively at this level. In response to question 1(a), many candidates showed a limited understanding of the use of tone in their selected artworks. Many made statements about mood and atmosphere, for example 'a sad tone', but did not relate this to the use of a tonal range. In response to question 1(a), many candidates showed a limited understanding of style. Some candidates gave answers about subject matter, media handling, and techniques instead. Some candidates referred to a style, such as cubism, but did not explain in what way the selected work was cubist.

A few candidates selected artworks or designs that had limited information available, and this caused issues when they attempted to respond to questions 1(b) or 7(b).

Many candidates who attempted question 2 ('To Tell the Truth' by Tim Okamura) answered the prompt 'subject matter' poorly. They tended to give lengthy descriptive responses that

did not show understanding of how the subject matter impacted on the artwork. Many candidates who attempted question 4 ('Interior with Lamp' by Roy de Maistre) demonstrated little or no understanding of style. They described the subject matter without relating it to style. Many candidates attempting question 4 ('Interior with Lamp' by Roy de Maistre) and question 5 ('Classic Landscape' by Charles Sheeler) demonstrated little knowledge and understanding of shape.

Expressive portfolio

A few centres adopted a 'house style', where all candidates followed a similar process, using identical materials and techniques, often with very similar subject matter. This approach resulted in some candidates working with materials and techniques that did not appear to suit their abilities.

Some candidates selected subject matter that appeared to be too demanding for their skill level, for example still-life objects with difficult perspective or portraiture-based subject matter.

Some candidates were unable to access all the marks available for process due to a lack of variation of viewpoints, scale and/or composition. For example, they would use the same set-up or image repeatedly, which limited compositional development in relation to their chosen theme.

Some candidates' final pieces were less resolved than earlier development studies. Some candidates did not achieve a comparable level of finish in a larger-scale final piece.

Some candidates' evaluations contained only descriptive comments about the subject matter, process, and techniques they used. These candidates did not reflect on the various steps and decisions they made and the success of the work. Some candidates did not produce evaluations to a standard consistent with their portfolio work.

Design portfolio

A few centres adopted a 'house style' for their design portfolios. All candidates followed similar processes, used similar design briefs, approaches, materials and techniques, and often worked with very similar sources of inspiration. This approach can limit personal choice and creativity for individual candidates.

Some design briefs were concerned only with aesthetic issues and did not give candidates an opportunity to consider functionality or target market. Some briefs were very open-ended and could be difficult for candidates to respond to. Complex and ambitious briefs sometimes required more than one solution, such as a set of postage stamps, or pattern being applied to multiple products. This presented a few candidates with unnecessary challenges, which at times resulted in a confused design process.

Some candidates could have improved their portfolios by editing them to clarify the line of development that led them to the design solution. Some portfolios lacked a clear process or missed important steps leading to the solution. In some cases, the development steps were very repetitive and did not show adequate development and refinement of the idea. Some

candidates demonstrated poor problem-solving skills. Their portfolios contained very little consideration of functionality.

Some graphic design portfolios contained limited consideration of lettering and layout. Some poster design portfolios did not demonstrate appropriate skill in using layout, scale, and lettering for functional effect.

Development was an issue in some repeat pattern portfolios. A few candidates limited their development to showing the same pattern in a number of colourways, with little or no progression. Some candidates overused technology and created patterns that lost continuity with the starting point.

In body adornment and fashion portfolios, some candidates did not consider the wearability of the design or how it fitted and interacted with the body enough.

In product design, some candidates did not consider practical function issues. For example, a few teapot design portfolios focused on the form and aesthetic and did not consider how to fill the teapot with water and add teabags.

In architecture portfolios, some candidates did not explore layout and use of space. They focused only on the overall appearance of the design.

Some candidates used materials that were not fit for purpose for their design task. This caused difficulty in communicating and refining their idea and affected the finish of their design solution.

Some evaluations contained only descriptive comments about the design brief, process, approaches, and techniques used. Some candidates did not reflect on the various steps and decisions they made and the success of their work.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

♦ Candidates should be familiar with the art and design terminology that can feature in the question paper. The course specification lists these terms. Appendix 2 of the course specification has further detail about how candidates can interpret and use these terms in their responses.

♦ Candidates should have opportunities to develop their exam technique so that they can answer effectively and manage their time.

♦ Teachers, lecturers, and candidates can access specimen question papers, past papers, and marking instructions on SQA's website to help them understand the level of response required and how the question paper is marked. Examples of candidate responses and commentaries are also available on the Understanding Standards website.

♦ Responses to questions 1 and 7 should demonstrate that a candidate has previously studied the works selected. Comments must be based on correct information and show appropriate knowledge and understanding.

♦ In response to questions 1(b) and 7(b), candidates must identify two specific influences on the work of the selected artist or designer and describe how the influences can be seen in any of the selected artist's or designer's work.

♦ Centres should recommend special arrangements for candidates whose handwriting may disadvantage them in a written examination.

Expressive portfolio

♦ Centres should give candidates the 'Instructions for candidates' section of the expressive coursework assessment task.

♦ Although it is practical to place some limitations on candidates at this level, centres should avoid very formulaic approaches. Candidates should have scope for personalisation and choice.

♦ Candidates do not benefit from including a large volume of investigative research or development in the portfolio. A succinct and focused approach is often more effective and less time-consuming for the candidate.

♦ Centres should refer to the portfolio guidance. This recommends a concise and streamlined approach that allows candidates to access the full range of marks.

♦ Candidates should include thematic titles on the first sheet of the expressive portfolio.

♦ Centres should discourage candidates from tracing or colouring over photocopies or scanned drawings, as this does not allow candidates to demonstrate appropriate skills.

♦ Including repetitive compositions from similar angles can limit potential in the development stage. Instead, candidates should explore viewpoint, scale, and framing when developing their idea.

♦ There is no requirement for candidates to produce a painting as a final piece if their strength and preference is in using dry media. Likewise, there is no need for a candidate to work in colour if their strength is in working with tone.

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- It is not necessary for a candidate to produce an A2 final piece if they are not confident working on this scale. Some candidates prefer to work on a larger scale and others prefer working on a smaller scale. This should be a personal choice.
- Portfolios should include only one line of development. Candidates should not include work that has no connection to the final piece as this can affect their mark for process.
- Candidates should make their line of development clear. They can use labelling or arrows.
- Candidates do not need to submit 3D outcomes, particularly if they are fragile or difficult to handle. They should submit clear, well-lit photographs that show the piece from different angles instead.
- The overall maximum size for each portfolio should not exceed three A2-sized, single-sided sheets or equivalent.
- Examples of candidates' expressive portfolios and commentaries are available on the Understanding Standards website.

Design portfolio

- Centres should give candidates the 'Instructions for candidates' section of the design coursework assessment task.
- Although it is practical to place some limitations on candidates at this level, centres should avoid formulaic approaches. Candidates should have scope for personalisation and choice.
- Candidates do not benefit from including a large volume of investigative and market research or development in the portfolio. A succinct and focused approach is often more effective and less time-consuming for the candidate.
- Centres should refer to the portfolio guidance. This explains how candidates can apply a streamlined approach to portfolios in different design areas, while allowing them to access the full range of marks.
- Candidates should include design briefs on the first sheet of the portfolio.
- Design briefs should be realistic, achievable, and give clear direction to candidates. They should ask candidates to consider important functional and aesthetic issues. For example, candidates could consider readability and clear communication of a message in graphic design. In jewellery design, they could consider practical issues, such as balance, weight, and fastenings. Design briefs should also encourage candidates to consider their target market. Centres can provide briefs or design brief templates for candidates.
- Expressive drawing is not a requirement in the design portfolio. Drawing for design can have an important place, but this is often a different type of drawing that is used to explore shape, form, or pattern.
- In graphic design, candidates should consider layout and how lettering will integrate with their imagery.
- Colour is an important element in repeat pattern design, but candidates should consider it carefully. Centres should encourage candidates to consider motif development, layout, different types of repeat, and scale.
- Candidates working in 3D areas should try to engage with 3D development to refine their ideas, techniques, and skills before starting the production of their design solution.

- Candidates should avoid 'wallpapering' in portfolios. For example, the development should not include numerous photographs of a design solution at different stages of construction. This does not attract any marks and the space is better used to show the experimentation carried out before construction of the design solution.
- Portfolios should include only one line of development. Candidates should not include work that has no connection to the design solution, as this can affect their mark for process.
- Candidates should make their line of development clear. They can use labelling or arrows.
- Candidates do not need to submit 3D outcomes, particularly if they are fragile or difficult to handle. They should submit clear, well-lit photographs that show the piece from different angles instead.
- The overall maximum size for each portfolio should not exceed three A2-sized, single-sided sheets or equivalent.
- Examples of design portfolios and commentaries are available on SQA's secure website.

Evaluations

- Candidates should produce their evaluations for both portfolios independently. They must not use writing frames or model evaluations.
- Centres should ensure that candidates have a suitable amount of time to consider the requirements of their evaluations and to complete them.
- Candidates should not change the font size in the evaluation templates. Evaluations for each portfolio must not exceed the one A4 page provided. Candidates must attach their evaluations to the first sheet of their portfolios, making sure they do not overlap other work.
- Candidates should check that they have attached the correct evaluation to each portfolio, as some design portfolios contained the expressive evaluation and vice versa. Expressive and design portfolios are marked separately, so an incorrect evaluation can affect a candidate's mark.
- If a candidate has not completed their evaluation for either portfolio, they should clearly indicate this on their flyleaf.

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.