



## External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Photography
Level(s)	Higher

The statistics used in this report are pre-appeal.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers/lecturers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published question papers and marking instructions for the examination.

# Comments on candidate performance

## General comments

The Higher Photography Course continues to grow in popularity and in 2012 there were 1,495 candidate entries, which is the highest that the Course has attracted to date. This reflects positively on the Course, and entries are expected to rise again in 2013.

'Natural World' and 'Youth Culture' continue to be the most popular themes, though 'Urban Environment' and 'Visual Elements' are becoming more popular.

The creative approach taken by candidates continues to produce outstanding work of a very high standard.

The use of the narrative in the Evaluation is not evaluation, and linking the research to the chosen theme would benefit the candidates.

## Areas in which candidates performed well

The strongest area of the award continues to be the final images. However, many centres have improved the response to the research element with focused, appropriate work supporting the candidate's plan.

Where candidates responded to 'Photo Surrealism', the work was creative and showed that a great deal of research had been carried out.

The Plans showed an improvement this year, with candidates including realistic timescales and achievable targets.

Research in many centres was of a high standard with the candidate showing engagement with the work, and evidence of a selection process. Those candidates who took a holistic approach with focused research produced outstanding results.

## Areas which candidates found demanding

The Evaluation element still proves to be the area where candidates struggle, with candidates submitting unrealistic and descriptive evaluations.

The theme of Technology was, in general, poorly addressed, with repetitive images of mundane subjects.

Although the Plans improved, some candidates produced plans that were written in the past tense, describing what they 'did', not what they will 'do'.

Image quality was not as big an issue as in previous years. However, some candidates still submit work which is not of photographic quality due to the hardware and printing media chosen. Some images had been oversized for the file created, leading to a major rise in noise in many images.

In some cases, the research simply consisted of a collection of un-annotated contact sheets and web downloads; this showed that candidates had not engaged with the research, and this was reflected in the mark awarded for this part of the Development.

Padding out the research with notes from the Unit, *Photography: Basic Camera Techniques*, does not add to the candidate's mark, nor does the inclusion of sheets of Google maps and camera specifications.

Selection of appropriate professional photographers whose work relates to the proposed theme was not always done. For example, the work of Ansel Adams appeared linked to themes like Technology and Youth Culture.

## **Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates**

The lack of a Plan or Evaluation has a devastating effect on a candidate's mark; a number of candidates failed to include one or both of these elements.

Some candidates merged two or more of the themes, eg Youth Culture in the Natural Urban Environment. This led to an uncertainty as to what theme was being followed and generally resulted in a weak response from the candidate. Candidates must ensure that it is obvious what theme they have selected.

Candidates should be guided about image size. The maximum is A4, but this does not mean that all images must be A4.

The research is made up from professional research, contextual research and the candidate's own work. However, without candidate engagement this just becomes padding; adding lists of web addresses does not represent research.

The overuse of digital editing has decreased, though this still affects a number of candidates, particularly over-sharpening and colour saturation.

Many candidates use the theme of Youth Culture to present projects with a theme of Fashion. Candidates should be reminded that friends and classmates are not professional models, and that this may impact on their final images. Of course, we accept that some candidates have friends who are natural models.

Many candidates' projects suffered because they were let down by people who had agreed to pose for them. This factor of unreliability should be brought to candidates' attention before they embark on their projects.

If a candidate wishes to use a specific technique or style to enhance their presentation, remind them to explain and justify their use of the technique. The following is a list of examples but this is not a definitive list: HDR, triptych, photo merge etc.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2011	1153
------------------------------------	------

Number of resulted entries in 2012	1495
------------------------------------	------

## Statistical information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark 200				
A	25.1%	25.1%	375	140
B	37.3%	62.3%	557	120
C	30.6%	93.0%	458	100
D	3.0%	96.0%	45	90
No award	4.0%	100.0%	60	-

## General commentary on grade boundaries

- ◆ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.
- ◆ Each year SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.
- ◆ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.
- ◆ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related as they do not contain identical questions.
- ◆ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.