



## External Assessment Report 2012

Subject(s)	Art and Design
Level(s)	Standard Grade

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

### Critical Activity

The quality of Critical Activity continues to be of a very good standard overall. Markers found fewer Foundation scripts, a handful of them reported that the quality at Credit level was not as good as last year, but the majority indicated that the work ranged from good to excellent and that there was an even spread of grades in most centres. Most submissions addressed the paper with conviction and reflected very good learning and teaching. The best examples demonstrated a mature and perceptive analytical style that was compelling to read.

Most candidates stayed close to the 1500 word limit and, though it is generally accepted as the norm, there was an increase of overlong scripts from some centres, and double and triple length word counts were not uncommon. There is a belief by some, that quantity over quality is required to gain a credit award; this is not so.

The best examples of Critical Activity were focused around a theme or topic and the historical and factual information was kept to a minimum. An in-depth analysis of the topic was rewarded and where no specific comparisons or contrasts were made between artists' and designers' work, markers felt that it was sometimes difficult to award Credit. Moreover, lack of depth, individuality or personal interest on the part of the candidate led to more grade 3s being given.

Generally, candidates dealt effectively with clearly contrasting Design and Expressive content, though Expressive submissions still tend to achieve slightly more successful grades. At times Design submissions failed to achieve as high grades because there was an over-emphasis on discussing and analysing the visual elements. This needs to be discouraged — a good reliable design submission should take account of basic design criteria such as the function of the item, its materials, technologies used, the target group, ergonomics, construction methods, style and aesthetics. The visual elements are thoroughly addressed through the analysis of Expressive art work and should not be the sole focus for discussion in Design submissions.

The list of topics selected for Design and Expressive submissions continue to grow and markers commented that illustrations were in decline, giving rise to the need to use the Internet to find less well know paintings or design items. Expressive submissions favoured the Scottish Colourists, Currie, Howson, Redpath, Mach and Watt. Additionally, Picasso, Van Gogh, Kahlo and the Impressionists featured heavily.

In Design, comparisons between jewellery designers Peter Chang, Jack Cunningham or Lalique were popular, taking over the top spot traditionally belonging to William Morris's and Charles Rennie Mackintosh's textiles and wallpapers. Fashion designers Vivienne Westwood and Alexander McQueen were very popular choices; fashion design, product design, architecture and jewellery were by far the most often discussed topics. Where candidates examined products that they used on a daily basis, their submissions were stronger with regard to criteria such as function and materials; they also demonstrated genuine personal enjoyment and interaction with their chosen topic.

Some of the best Expressive essays were created around gallery visits where the candidates had first-hand experience of paintings and sculptures; markers felt that this had a positive effect on their ability to convey personal interest. Some centres set specific topics for their pupils to choose from: *War and Conflict* or *Children at Play*. This was a nice touch and set a good tone, providing structure and meaning in the eventual choice of artworks.

Markers reported that portraiture and figure compositions seemed to be the most successful images for a genuine and intelligent response. Still life was often difficult for candidates to offer meaningful personal opinions as they struggled to relate to the subject matter. Markers commented that the more unusual choices of topics were much more interesting to read.

### **Expressive Activity**

The standard and quality of Expressive outcomes produced for the external practical examination remains high. The majority of candidates made a positive response over the 5-hour examination. Most were well prepared and the outcome, for the most part, was clearly a solution to a creative process. When individual centres' work is observed during the marking process, it is immediately apparent to the markers where there has been strong direction and support from teaching staff. Candidates who have been well prepared through a process of personal choice regarding subject matter and materials, show confidence in their performance across all levels.

Candidates responded positively to the titles, which were provided by the SQA to stimulate the development of work towards the examination outcome. It is evident that many centres had put a great deal of thought into the preparation of resources in order to provide opportunities for their pupils to thoroughly develop the titles, themes and materials over time. There were many excellent examples of still life and portrait, which accounted for the majority of the submissions. There were fewer examples of landscape and ceramics, though a slight increase in figure composition, which was welcomed by markers.

The personal and creative responses of a number of candidates were extremely limited by a those centres that promoted only one title or one technique. Additionally, markers raised concerns again of a number of centres who evidently disregard the titles provided and who produce similar work every year.

The most popular title choice was *Afternoon Tea* and it was exclusively used to generate still life outcomes. Unfortunately, ellipses proved challenging for many candidates but for some, the delicate tones of whites in crockery allowed for excellent colour mixing and subtle tonal variation. There were many very good examples of painting prompted by this title and surprisingly little use of coloured pencil. Oil pastels were effectively used in complex compositions including items such as cakes and sandwiches. Where this title was interpreted particularly well was when pupils and teachers had taken time to select, arrange and light appropriate objects. Unusual viewpoints and cropped compositions added further interest.

*The Real Me* elicited many effective portraits and three-dimensional ceramic heads. Careful consideration was given to dress and costume, make up and even tattoos to promote the personality of the sitter. It is apparent that many portraits were produced from photographs, but where candidates simply posed in front of a mirror there was an honesty and integrity

about their work. Dramatic lighting helped add emotion and mood and markers reported some striking pieces using paint and oil pastel within this genre.

*The Continental Market* was the second most popular choice for still life and was sadly used by some centres as an opportunity to set up groups of unrelated objects with little relationship to the title. Additionally, some of these were difficult groupings that disadvantaged even the most able candidates. Many centres did, however, resource this title very well and candidates produced colourful and exciting still life outcomes. Although the remaining titles were suitable for stimulating landscape and the built environment, there were fewer examples this year.

In terms of materials used, poster paint, pastel and oil pastel were the most popular media choice. Acrylic work provided the most impact in terms of colour intensity.

## **Areas in which candidates performed well**

### **Critical Activity**

In Critical Activity, the most successful examples dealt with areas of art and design that were of personal interest to the candidate and where there was obviously some degree of individual choice available. The best submissions demonstrated a clear focus of study and invited opportunities for personal opinions and evaluative comments to present themselves. The factual or historical information was kept to a minimum and cleverly used to inform the personal response.

Centres that encouraged more freedom of choice in subject matter achieved more credit grades. These submissions displayed more of the pupil's own voice and genuine personal enthusiasm.

Where centres focused their submissions around a theme, topic or Movement, there were more opportunities for candidates to include relevant and considered direct comparisons. The most banal comparisons were simple statements of fact that lacked any depth or real understanding, for example 'Picasso used paint and Degas used pastels'. These usually did not achieve more than General 3. Candidates should try to compare and contrast specific aspects of their chosen artists' and designers' work, for example, methodologies, style, and treatment of topic or use of materials.

As in previous years, markers commented on the outstanding presentation of Critical submissions. The vast majority were word-processed and contained illustrations, though colour illustrations are on the decline. These are invaluable to markers when lesser-known works are being discussed. It was noted that the final submissions are obviously the result of several drafts; teachers seem keen for their pupils to present their best efforts.

### **Expressive Activity**

Candidates performed well when they were given the opportunity to make some personal choice regarding subject matter and materials. Careful preparation for the examination and consideration given to composition and scale greatly benefited candidates' performance across all levels. Most of the best work was in the form of still life and portraiture using first-hand sources. While this is to be encouraged, it is not always possible and many candidates

derive imagery from photographs. It is therefore desirable then that they at least have some input in the setting up or production of the photographs.

Markers commented on the quality of painting this year, which they felt was generally of a very high standard and, in some instances at Credit 1, exceptional. It is a testament to the quality of teaching and preparation and efforts of the young people that this has occurred during an examination where there is no support available.

This year, it was widely recognised that the vast majority of centres had very successfully interpreted the titles and candidates had generated an interesting mixture and variety of responses across all levels. In the very best centres, the work showed variety in the range of themes selected and in the skill and diversity of media handling techniques allowed.

## **Areas which candidates found demanding**

### **Critical Activity**

Markers were very concerned about the growing number of centres who allowed all of their pupils to discuss the same limited number of paintings and design items. In these examples it was difficult for the marker to hear the voice of the individual.

Exceeding the word limit is a growing problem and some centres are guilty of encouraging this practice in the mistaken belief that their pupils will achieve better grades. By editing the writing, submissions will be more concise and generally more successful, which should not jeopardise results. Often, these overlong submissions were exceptionally repetitive and failed to better inform the marker of the candidate's knowledge and understanding of the topic.

Some well-written submissions achieved General 3 awards because the analysis of the artwork or design item was purely descriptive. It is personal opinions and justifications of those opinions that count and not a lengthy commentary on what the piece looks like. Markers were frustrated by these examples as some very able candidates were missing out on Credit awards.

Problems continued to exist in Design submissions where the item under investigation was discussed in Expressive terms. In the very poorest examples it was an analysis of the visual elements alone that comprised the main body of the essay. In the worst examples candidates had to be awarded a 7 as they had failed to submit two clearly contrasting items, one Expressive and one Design. The design topics where this happens most regularly are textile and wallpaper design, mask design, illustration and poster design.

When candidates chose to investigate cars, motorbikes and smart phones and other similar technological hardware for their design submission, they regularly failed to analyse the product in a meaningful manner as they were too focused on listing the detailed specification of the product. This has little to do with showing an understanding of the design process in its basic form.

Markers continue to register their concerns that in some submissions the subjects under investigation have no fundamental theme or link, candidates had chosen to analyse a painting with a print or a chair with a clock, making any relevant comparison impossible. It is

desirable to focus an essay around a theme, topic or Movement and to avoid comparing unrelated items with one another.

Many markers noted many more examples of poor spelling and grammar and were especially troubled when the names of artists and designers were wrongly spelled throughout an essay. It is recommended that pupils spell check their essays on completion.

While it is recognised that teachers need to direct the teaching of Critical Activity through questionnaires or worksheets, it was reported that some centres had used a very restrictive formula providing over directed questionnaires, which stifled and limited the scope of candidates' responses. This also had the effect of preventing some very able candidates from gaining a grade beyond general level.

### **Expressive Activity**

Markers observed that some candidates' creativity and freedom of expression was limited when they were forced to share and work from the same photograph or group of objects. It is highly detrimental, and in some notable cases the work appeared almost identical.

A growing number of centres allowed very small-scale outcomes to be produced, which markers felt did not enable candidates to explore scale, space and composition to their full potential. Of more concern was the feeling that some able candidates had not made the most of the five-hour exam as they were working to a very limiting scale of A3 or even A4.

Candidates should avoid using photographs of famous people to generate portraits. The generally wooden and often graphic results are self-penalising.

Markers reported that some candidates encountered difficulties when they were faced with very poor and uninspiring groups of objects from which to work. Still life groups composed of very challenging objects which were beyond a candidate's capabilities was a strong factor in the production of low General and Foundation awards.

Markers continue to highlight an increasing number of centres where submissions were not cropped or mounted. While the quality of the presentation is not relevant in the marking process, cropping and mounting work simply onto A2 paper can make a big difference to the impact of the submission when it is being hung and viewed by the markers. Candidates deserve their work to be presented in a professional format

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

### **Critical Activity**

Centres should:

- ◆ Discourage the use of text speak and bullet point responses which lack depth and clarity of thinking.
- ◆ Ensure that candidates adhere to the advisory 1500 word limit for each submission.

- ◆ Ensure that submissions are of a sufficient length to enable candidates to demonstrate their full knowledge and understanding of the topic within the 1500 word limit. Very brief submissions lack sufficient depth for markers to judge a candidates true ability, especially at Credit.
- ◆ Permit candidates to have some choice in their topics to ensure a personal and individual response. Absolutely avoid every candidate discussing the same artist and designers' works.
- ◆ Discourage over emphasis of historical and factual information at the expense of making personal opinions and evaluative comments.
- ◆ Check that the Design submission contains comments pertaining to design criteria and does not solely rely on discussing the visual elements.
- ◆ Ensure that information collated from internet sites is interpreted into candidates' own words and is not quoted directly as their own.
- ◆ Ensure candidates spell-check their submissions.

### **Expressive Activity**

Centres should:

- ◆ Use the titles provided by SQA to generate the outcome for the examination. It is clear that some centres supply the same stimulus every year regardless of the titles and they turn out the same images, which markers recognise.
- ◆ Encourage and support candidates in making individual choice with regard to the titles, media and techniques from which to make a personal response. Avoid candidates working from the same photograph or still life group, especially en masse.
- ◆ Encourage candidates to work from first-hand sources wherever possible.
- ◆ Plan and prepare candidates for the examination, including how to crop and mount work simply.
- ◆ Avoid the mechanical scaling and gridding up of drawings from photographs; markers see obvious evidence of this.
- ◆ Discourage the copying of photographs of celebrities when producing portraits, as this is not marked favourably.
- ◆ Ensure candidates work at an appropriate scale commensurate with their ability.
- ◆ Ensure the appropriateness of images selected by candidates.
- ◆ Photograph all three-dimensional ceramic work from a variety of angles in case the piece is damaged during transit. The candidate and also the invigilator should initial the piece before firing.

## Statistical information: update on Courses

### STANDARD GRADE

<b>Number of resulted entries in 2011</b>	16094
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<b>Number of resulted entries in 2012</b>	15852
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## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of overall awards

Grade 1	23.1%
Grade 2	37.3%
Grade 3	25.7%
Grade 4	10.5%
Grade 5	2.1%
Grade 6	0.2%
Grade 7	0.0%
No award	1.1%

### Grade boundaries for each assessable element in the subject included in the report

Assessable Element	Credit Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		General Max Mark	Grade Boundaries		Foundation Max Mark	Grade Boundaries	
		1	2		3	4		5	6