



External Assessment Report 2013

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 wide variety of projects shows an excellent level of engagement with the photographic process. Innovation and creativity were evident across the presentations.

The increase in numbers shows that this course continues to be a popular choice for candidates, allowing them to express their opinions on a numbers of issues.

'Natural World, Urban Environment and Youth Culture' continue to be the most popular themes, with very few attempting 'Technology or Photo Surrealism'.

Areas in which candidates performed well

- ◆ The Research element has shown great improvement, and where centres directed their candidates effectively at the Planning stage the projects produced were of a high standard.
- ◆ Although there were very few presentations on the theme of 'Photo-Surrealism', some of those presented were outstanding.
- ◆ Some candidates combined their project with a school visit to a famous venue. This resulted in one candidate gaining full marks.
- ◆ The Natural World continues to be the most popular theme, and those candidates who planned their project effectively achieved some outstanding images.

Areas which candidates found demanding

This year, the issue of Basic Camera Techniques, or the lack of them, was noticed by the whole marking team. The lack of effective use of focus and the apparent unawareness of the candidates to this fact was a cause for concern. Many candidates appeared not to understand the control of depth of field, or the use of appropriate shutter speeds, or even the basic requirements of exposure.

The overuse of digital editing ruined many candidates' presentations. Lack of understanding of file size and the effect on the final print also contributed to the loss of technical marks. The overuse of digital filters and effects added nothing to the presentations.

Although the research showed improvement, there was also a tendency to include irrelevant research that had no possible link to the selected theme. Also, candidates included pages of found images which might have been their inspiration but at no time engaged with this research, which gave it the appearance of padding.

Candidates produced large quantities of work on their chosen themes, expressed in the contact sheets. However, many candidates showed virtually no link or engagement with this body of work.

Print quality again is a cause for concern. The use of low-quality paper, non calibrated printers and laser printers resulted in poor quality prints. Size was also an issue — candidates produced large A4 prints from files that could barely be printed at A5.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

- ◆ Candidates must be aware of the limitations of the equipment they have access to.
- ◆ Candidates must identify the theme they are following, eg Natural World, and then go on to describe their interpretation of the selected theme. Candidates must not combine themes, eg Youth Culture in the Natural World, as this leads to confusion.
- ◆ Candidates should not use other peoples' images downloaded from the internet in their final presentation.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged to produce clear, unambiguous plans with clear timescales. Candidates should ensure that plans are written before the Development, as plans written in the past tense lose marks.
- ◆ Candidates should be discouraged from including all the notes and research on the supporting Units eg Digital, Basic Camera etc, as this is seen as padding and irrelevant.
- ◆ Candidates should be guided towards projects that are achievable within the timescale, and the issue of Health & Safety should be given a high profile.
- ◆ Candidates must include in their contact sheets their final selections, as if these images are missing there is a question over authenticity. Encourage candidates to produce sheets of contacts as opposed to strips.
- ◆ When candidates present their final project, ensure that each element, Plan, Research, Development and Evaluation, are clearly defined and included.
- ◆ Evaluation skills at times were lacking, with more description than evaluation, and evaluation tended to be repetitive. Candidates sometimes did not identify faults or failings in their own work, producing unrealistic, over-positive evaluations.

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2012	1495
Number of resulted entries in 2013	1729

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	18.9%	18.9%	326	140
B	38.0%	56.9%	657	120
C	33.2%	90.1%	574	100
D	6.0%	96.0%	103	90
No award	4.0%	100.0%	69	-

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.