Course report 2022

Subject	English
Level	National 5

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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any appeals.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	47720

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	41.5	Cumulative percentage	41.5	Number of candidates	19795	Minimum mark required	72
B	Percentage	27.8	Cumulative percentage	69.3	Number of candidates	13280	Minimum mark required	61
C	Percentage	18.3	Cumulative percentage	87.6	Number of candidates	8750	Minimum mark required	50
D	Percentage	8.2	Cumulative percentage	95.8	Number of candidates	3915	Minimum mark required	39
No award	Percentage	4.2	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	1980	Minimum mark required	N/A

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in appendix 1 of this report.

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 page of SQA's website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

The passage, 'Life after The Sims,' was a slightly adapted version of an article by Liv Siddall from *The Observer*. The passage was selected for its detailed content, and for its relevance to the cohort and their recent collective experience. Questions followed the established pattern in sampling candidates' skills in understanding the writer's main ideas and analysing the writer's use of language. Within that overarching framework, there were, as is usually the case, questions on structure and vocabulary in context.

The assessment was positively received by candidates, teachers and lecturers. Feedback suggested that it was appropriate in terms of content and demand. Most candidates showed a good understanding of the passage in their responses to the questions.

Question paper: Critical Reading

There was some evidence that centres chose shorter texts than would normally have been the case, in order (understandably) to minimise disruption and associated risks caused by the pandemic. Texts from the Scottish set text list also featured fairly prominently for the critical essay.

It was good to see centres using the flexibility offered by the Critical essay section to try new texts, or to try to engage candidates with texts that reflect contemporary concerns, for example *The Hill We Climb* by Amanda Gorman, *Night Over Birkenau* by Tadeusz Borowski, *Two Scavengers in a Truck, Two Beautiful People in a Mercedes* by Lawrence Ferlinghetti. A familiar National 5 text, *The Pedestrian* by Ray Bradbury was a common choice, perhaps chosen for its relevance to recent experience of pandemic-related lockdown.

It was good to see centres taking on and using texts of depth and substance, despite the challenging circumstances. These texts always have wider benefits and value for candidates beyond the requirements of question paper assessment.

For Scottish texts, Norman MacCaig was the most popular option, followed by *Tally's Blood* by Ann Marie di Mambro, and then Carol Ann Duffy. Edwin Morgan, and *Sailmaker by* Alan Spence were very popular choices. For prose, Anne Donovan was a popular option, followed by Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde.*

For the critical essay, text choice was reasonably varied, with shorter texts being more evident. Question 4 from prose (on an interesting character) drew the most responses from candidates.

The following are examples of some of the texts studied:

Drama

An Inspector Calls by J.B. Priestley, *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, *A View from the Bridge*, *All My Sons* by Arthur Miller, *Blood Brothers* by Willy Russell, *Whose Life Is It Anyway?* by Brian Clark.

Prose

The Pedestrian, Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury, *On The Sidewalk Bleeding* by Evan Hunter, *The Test* by Angelica Gibbs, *The Lighthouse* by Agnes Owens, *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson, *All That Glisters* by Anne Donovan, *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding, *A Hanging, Animal Farm* by George Orwell, *Superman and Paula Brown's new Snowsuit* by Sylvia Plath, *The Sniper* by Liam O'Flaherty, *The Tell Tale Heart* by Edgar Allan Poe, *Flowers* by Robin Jenkins, *At The Bar* by William McIlvanney, *To Kill A Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, *Stone Cold* by Robert Swindells.

Poetry

Dulce et Decorum Est, Disabled by Wilfred Owen, S*hooting Stars, Havisham, In Mrs Tilscher's Class, Stealing, War Photographer* by Carol Ann Duffy, *Mid Term Break* by Seamus Heaney, *Southern Sunrise* by Silvia Plath, *Porphyria's Lover* by Robert Browning, *Telephone Conversation* by Wole Soyinka, *The Jaguar* by Ted Hughes, *The Wild Swans at Coole* by William Butler Yeats.

Film

Psycho, 1917, Dunkirk, Shutter Island, Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo and Juliet, Prisoners, The Dark Knight, The Book Thief, Shawshank Redemption, The Truman Show, The Perks of Being a Wallflower.*

There was a slight increase in the number of candidates answering on the Language section of the critical essay. Here a few candidates used the text of Marcus Rashford's 'Letter to Parliament' on the subject of poverty to explore persuasive language, for example the use of perspective and point of view, tone, word choice, sentence structure, and repetition.

Portfolio–writing

This year candidates were required to submit one portfolio piece, chosen from either broadly discursive or broadly creative work completed throughout the year. It was clear that a lot of work had gone into this one piece, with many pieces at the top end of the word limit.

There was a large number of responses where it was evident that candidates had enjoyed producing the work and this engagement was reflected in the marks received.

Most candidates submitted a substantial, committed response in language that was sufficiently clear and technically accurate.

Candidates were split roughly equally between those who chose to write in a broadly discursive way, and those who chose to write broadly creatively. Under the broadly creative heading, most candidates reflected on and wrote about their own experiences. Some candidates chose to submit a piece of creative writing, mostly prose fiction. The theme or subject matter here was often war or situations developing among groups of friends in scary houses. There was more poetry than usual, and for candidates that this form of expression suited the pieces were successful.

Although candidates covered a broad range of subjects, popular topics were:

♦ social media
♦ the experience of loss or illness of a loved one
♦ video assistant referee (VAR)
♦ mental health and impact of covid and lockdown
♦ climate change

Candidates who chose to write about covid and lockdown tended to concentrate on how this experience had affected their schoolwork, but a number also chose to reflect on the positives of the situation.

Performance–spoken language

The requirement to assess spoken language was removed for session 2021–22.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

Performance overall was slightly stronger than anticipated. This may have been the consequence of increased teaching and learning time due to course modifications, together with the suggestion that candidates found the subject matter and language of the passage accessible.

Areas that candidates found demanding

♦ Question 4: this was a structural link question. Candidates who were unsuccessful here tended to quote the whole sentence without making a selection; or they didn't indicate a direction; or they treated it as a word choice question and made no reference to structure.

♦ Question 5: this was a question on vocabulary in context. Most candidates attempted a response, but some were not close enough to the required idea of 'putting off important tasks'. The question required candidates to show understanding of two words: 'peak' and 'procrastination'. For some candidates, there was not enough in their responses to indicate an understanding of both. However, most candidates made a genuine attempt here and often achieved at least 1 mark.

♦ Question 9: this was a question on structure, specifically the ending of the passage. Most candidates were able to select a relevant and appropriate reference, but many were unable to link it back to an earlier reference or idea.

♦ Some candidates did not make their language selection clear in analysis questions. Sometimes large sections of the passage were offered as references or quotations, and it was not obvious which particular words or expressions were being analysed.

♦ In questions that assessed candidates' understanding of the writer's main ideas (for example questions 3 and 8), some candidates were too vague in their responses and more detail was required. This was also the case of a few candidates when discussing sentence structure as a language feature.

Question paper: Critical reading

There was strong performance in the Scottish text section where candidates had clearly engaged with the texts, they had specialised in. There was evidence that, in general, they had benefitted from the revision support measure (advance notice of which text or extract would feature in the question paper). In the Critical essay section, there was a number of exceptional responses that showed a thorough awareness of texts studied. However, performance in the critical essay was slightly weaker overall: some essays were thin in understanding and analytical detail.

A few candidates had difficulties in constructing essays that communicated a line of thought at first reading and were structured appropriately. These essays were often note-like, rather than pieces of critical writing.

A small number of candidates had difficulty in navigating the options available in the question paper.

Portfolio–writing

Candidates were well prepared for the portfolio, and performance was slightly stronger than usual. Most portfolios achieved between 9 and 12 marks. There were very few achieving less than 7 marks.

Overall, there was a good standard and candidates made a very good effort, especially considering the challenges they have faced in two difficult years.

As is generally the case with the National 5 portfolio, there was a freshness to the writing, and in most cases, candidates had taken care to demonstrate the skills they had learned as fully as possible. A few essays were exceptional and were of a standard from the very top end of National 5 performance and beyond.

Discursive pieces were well structured with a clear line of thought. Personal pieces had a good sense of involvement but, at times, lacked creativity in the use of language.

Candidates who submitted poetry, and who engaged creatively with it, produced some very good work. However, a very small number of candidates submitted poetry that relied heavily on models, and this was less successful, often coming across as derivative.

Most submissions contained expression which was sufficiently clear and accurate, but a few candidates had difficulties in dealing with verb tenses, often switching from past to present and back again for no obvious reason. There was some confusion between 'there, their and they're' in a few submissions.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper: Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

It is important to emphasise to candidates that this question paper requires precision, and they should be careful to:

- think about and try to separate the writer's ideas
- use own words where required
- not repeat back the words of the question
- not lift key words from the passage and use them as a basis of a response. An example of this was the word 'create' in question 3
- read the questions carefully. In question 7 this year, a few candidates did not pick up on the fact that the question was about how 'new video games <u>do not</u> contribute to stress or anxiety.'

Candidates should pay careful attention to the requirement to use their own words to demonstrate their understanding of key ideas in the passage. The expression 'own words' is emboldened where appropriate in order to remind candidates of its importance. Direct lifts of words or expressions from the question and/or passage will gain no marks in this type of question.

In questions that require the analysis of a writer's use of language, the simplest model to follow is reference plus relevant comment. At National 5, appropriate references are awarded 1 mark. A further 1 mark is given for a relevant analytical comment. Candidates should try to explain their analytical comments as clearly and as fully as they can.

It can be helpful to organise responses to high mark understanding questions in bullet point form.

For a structural link question, candidates must make a selection from the sentence quoted in the question. It must be dealt with as a question on structure, not a 'word choice' question.

In analysis questions, candidates should make their language selection (either quotation or reference) clear.

Candidates should be encouraged to read as widely as possible and to think about the main ideas in the text that they are reading. This will help them to prepare for an assessment of their ability to show understanding of an unseen text.

Question paper: Critical Reading

Candidates should try to have a sense of the work as a whole in terms of a play, novel, collection of short stories or poems while preparing for the final question in the Scottish text section (for example key ideas, themes and characterisation). Consideration given to thematic concerns is highly valuable.

Candidates should be made aware of the requirements of the question paper and be reminded of how to navigate the range of options successfully.

Candidates should be careful not to repeat key words of the question and use them as a basis for analytical comment. This is especially true in the final question of the Scottish text section. The skill of analysis is required for this question and candidates should not rely on just a narrative summary of the texts studied.

When constructing critical essays, candidates should remember that these are pieces of critical writing, which should have coherence and a line of thought relevant to the question selected. Candidates should be aiming to express a point of view in response to the question: the essay should not just be a list of separate points or be solely narrative or descriptive.

Portfolio–writing

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to choose genres and subject matters that suit their personal strengths. Candidates should be offered personalisation and choice in terms of the submitted piece.

In creative writing, candidates should be aware of, and try to use, the key features of the genre. In personal writing, candidates should attempt to express an exploration of, or reflection on, their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to an experience.

In discursive writing, candidates must acknowledge all sources they use in preparation for writing. Taking time on the organisation and acknowledgement of sources improves presentation, assists markers, and helps to develop good study habits.

Candidates should aim for clarity of expression and structure in their writing. They should take care with verb tense, making sure that any changes in tense correspond with intended effects.

Candidates should take the opportunity to reflect on and to redraft their piece of writing following feedback on a first draft.

For poetry, a single poem is treated in exactly the same way as any other piece of writing: that one piece is required. It is acceptable to submit a group of related short poems, but these will be treated as one piece and will be marked as such.

It is not necessary to include any introductory comments to a piece of writing. If this is included, it will not contribute to the marks awarded.

Candidates should be reminded of the required word limits (1,000 words). There is no minimum number of words.

Appendix 1: 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 including assessment modifications and revision support, was introduced to support candidates as they returned to formal national exams and other forms of external assessment. This was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams have done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019.

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 2022. 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 revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2022 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 2022 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).