



Course Report 2016

Subject	Photography
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. 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 assessment documents and marking instructions.

Section 1: Comments on the Assessment

Component: assignment

The assignment was, as expected, challenging for the candidates. However, candidates who understood the process and purpose of the assignment performed well.

The themes were varied and creative with Visual elements being the most popular. Still life photography is growing in popularity with the candidates, and lighting techniques show a general improvement year on year. The use of traditional systems such as darkroom work shows a marked decline.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component: assignment

The planning element was in general very well done, leading to research which, when linked to the plan, was excellent. Students set out achievable goals within the limitations of the equipment available to them, showing they had a good understanding of what the technology could and could not achieve.

Some of the candidates took on very challenging issues, and in many cases dealt with them in a mature adult fashion. Some of the themes dealt with difficult subjects like self-harm and depression. These required a great deal of research and very sensitive handling.

When the topics selected were understood and researched effectively by the candidate, the resultant projects were of a very high standard, at times producing challenging images.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component: assignment

Unrealistic and unfocused project choices resulted in poor submissions. Many candidates did not show or explain how images choices were made and, sometimes, the selected final images could not be found in the body of the candidate's work.

There were digital issues involving overuse of a number of elements — ie over-saturation, over-sharpening, over-enlargement of small files, and absence of white balance. This resulted in lower marks for candidates.

Many candidates did not appear to understand the basic relationship between aperture, shutter speed and ISO. In addition, the lack of use of photographic terminology resulted in vague and ambiguous statements.

Candidates discussed photo shoots at length in their research and evaluations. However, in many cases they only showed the selected image from that shoot. This issue could have been avoided if candidates had submitting contact sheets (or their equivalent) for every shoot carried out.

Candidates often failed to explain or give any indication of why an image had been selected and how it related to their initial proposal. The whole selection process must be transparent and logical.

The standard of evaluation was generally poor. Evaluations often did not mention the actual images produced. They were also, in the main, narrative with minimal reference or comment on the images or process.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Assignment

Candidates should remember that research must be specific/directed and related to their Higher project, not their Unit work. The research must be relevant and is not limited to two photographers. The chosen photographers that are researched by the candidates must relate to the theme or the technique selected.

Selected research may also include Artists or Scientists who have contributed in some way to the topic — it is not restricted to famous photographers. Reference can also be made to image sites on the internet such as 'Pinterest', but research should not exclusively be draw from such sites.

Themes used within the units would need to be developed for use in the Higher project, and should only be considered as a general starting point from which a refined project will emerge.

Adornment of workbooks adds nothing to the project; candidates should remember this is a Higher project.

Print mounting is not a requirement of the course, but can be used at the centre's discretion. However, it is recommended that centres seriously consider the colour, tone and quality of the mounting materials used. Low quality black paper does not compliment images and, at times, draws the colour and vibrancy out of the images.

The use of Photo Books is increasing. Candidates/centres should ensure that the images/text submitted are using the correct colour space (eg RGB, sRGB) as this has a major effect on the final result.

Un-annotated images within research and development are of little benefit. Candidates must engage with both their research and their own image development to express their opinions and show their grasp of the process.

When a candidate takes on a challenging topic, the centre must ensure that the back of the flyleaf is ticked to indicate that all child welfare issues have been considered.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2015	1048
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Number of resulted entries in 2016	2258
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	25.2%	25.2%	569	70
B	25.3%	50.5%	571	60
C	29.7%	80.2%	671	50
D	6.1%	86.3%	137	45
No award	13.7%	-	310	0

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.