

## Principal Assessor Report 2004

**Assessment Panel:**

**Art & Design**

**Qualification area**

**Subject(s) and Level(s)  
Included in this report**

**Art & Design – Higher Level**

### **Statistical information: update**

<b>Number of entries in 2003</b>	6,817
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<b>Number of entries in 2004</b>	6,892
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### **General comments re entry numbers**

Entry numbers remain steady and the subject continues to attract substantial numbers of candidates at all levels and retains its healthy position in the National Qualifications structure.

## Statistical Information: Performance of candidates

### Distribution of awards

Distribution of awards	%	Cum %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
A	19.2	19.2	1323	229
B	28.2	47.4	1945	197
C	31.7	79.1	2184	165
D	9.7	88.8	669	149
No award	11.2	100.0	771	133

### General commentary on passmarks and grade boundaries

- While SQA aims to set examinations and create mark schemes which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum 50% of the available marks (notional passmark) and a very well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70%, it is almost impossible to get the standard absolutely on target every year, in every subject and level
- Each year we therefore hold a passmark meeting for each subject at each level where we bring together all the information available (statistical and judgmental). 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 senior management team at SQA
- We adjust the passmark downwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly more demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- We adjust the passmark upwards if there is evidence that we have set a slightly less demanding exam than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance
- Where the standard appears to be very similar to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries
- 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 are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. And just because SQA has altered a boundary in a particular year in say Higher Chemistry 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
- Our main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

### Comments on grade boundaries for each subject area

The increased number of A awards was welcome as stated in the previous section. This was owing to better understanding of the Design Activity requirements by centres and an upturn in candidate performance in this component.

## **Comments on any significant changes in percentages or distribution of awards**

Pass mark was restored to 50% of available marks reflecting an unchanged examination paper and a similar cohort of candidates to previous years. Performance was generally better than the previous year and more in line with the years before that.

Noticeably, performance at the upper end was improved and attributable to a significantly improved presentation in the design component. This was a very welcome upturn in the eyes of the examining team owing to the substantial input by the SQA and team members towards staff development in Design Activity, preparation of estimate grades and understanding standards in all components.

The overall pass rate of 79.1%, though down very slightly on 2003, was nevertheless quite satisfactory.

## **Comments on candidate performance**

### **General comments**

Candidates performed well in all four components of the examination with very little variation in the mean mark from previous years. Design was the exception by 'bucking the trend' of the past few years and showing an increase of 5.3 in mean marks.

### **Areas of external assessment in which candidates performed well**

Candidates performed particularly well in Design Activity this year with an improvement in standards across the board. Design briefs were more realistic and focussed, enabling more challenge in problem-solving. A significant increase in the amount of 3 three-dimensional work reflects the growing confidence in tackling product and architectural design in presenting centres.

### **Areas of external assessment in which candidates had difficulty**

The Practical Assignment still presents a stiff challenge to many candidates. Though increasingly better understood by most centres now a considerable number of centres appear to make inadequate preparation for this examination and their candidates struggle to give of their best. There is much evidence to suggest that the gap in standards between a candidate's internally produced folio work and their performance in the external exam remains wide. Very rarely does the examination work match or exceed folio performance.

In Paper 2, Art & Design Studies, a fair number of candidates lose marks in the Critical Analysis (Part A) section of the paper by treating paintings in a narrative context instead of in an artistic and aesthetic context. The tendency is to seek meaning in the work in terms of a story or 'message' rather than in its intrinsic visual or symbolic communication and media processes.

## Recommendations

### Feedback to centres

Centres in general should be congratulated for their commitment to improving the quality and presentation of Design folios. The considerable input by the Higher examining team, with a high level of support from the SQA, towards teacher understanding of the requirements of Design Activity has paid off in terms of candidate performance in this component.

Also the advice given at national seminars and moderation visits on preparing estimate grades has been effective in enabling centres to present candidates at the appropriate level and in achieving greater compliance with the national standard.

Taken by Component:

**Expressive Activity** continues to produce work of a very high standard and few centres have difficulty with preparing candidates and meeting the national standard in these folios. The most common area for candidates to lose marks is in the development sheet where the mandatory two ideas are not sufficiently distinguishable from each other. The best advice is to ensure that there are two distinct **directions** represented on the sheet even if one of them is minimally shown. Too often the two ideas are merely extensions of each other.

**Design Activity** was much improved this year with briefs and evaluations better understood by candidates and examiners alike. Candidates again can lose Marks, as in Expressive Activity, for not making clear their two distinct ideas on the development sheet. It is also well to remember that a three-dimensional brief requires a three-dimensional study and that evidence of this engagement with 3D concepts appears in the folio.

**The Practical Assignment** continues to present a challenge to many candidates and it should be borne in mind that time to prepare candidates adequately for this exam should be built into the course. The best advice here is for the candidate to develop their second idea from the development sheet, not previously taken through to completion in the folio.

**Art & Design Studies** seems to have bedded in well with most candidates seemingly well prepared for their written exam. The response to questions appears to reflect the most prevalent Expressive practical activities in centres as being still-life, figure composition and the natural environment. In Design, graphics, product and textile/fashion design are most often tackled in the written paper.

There is evidence to suggest that when a candidate chooses to answer on architecture in their second Part A they do not perform well in terms of understanding architectural concepts.

Care should also be taken to ensure that candidates do not spend time on complex narrative explanations – both in Part A responses to visual imagery and in Part B answers eg on the life and times of artists. Marks are awarded for Critical Analysis in Part A and for Knowledge and Understanding of Art and Design concepts and issues in Part B.