



Course report 2022

Subject	Art and Design (Design) and Art and Design (Expressive)
Level	Advanced Higher

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: Art & Design (Design)

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	665
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	33.3	Cumulative percentage	33.3	Number of candidates	220	Minimum mark required	70
B	Percentage	30.7	Cumulative percentage	64.0	Number of candidates	205	Minimum mark required	60
C	Percentage	27.9	Cumulative percentage	91.9	Number of candidates	185	Minimum mark required	50
D	Percentage	6.3	Cumulative percentage	98.2	Number of candidates	45	Minimum mark required	40
No award	Percentage	1.8	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	10	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](#).

Grade boundary and statistical information: Art & Design (Expressive)

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	1280
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	37.1	Cumulative percentage	37.1	Number of candidates	475	Minimum mark required	70
B	Percentage	30.4	Cumulative percentage	67.5	Number of candidates	390	Minimum mark required	59
C	Percentage	26.9	Cumulative percentage	94.4	Number of candidates	340	Minimum mark required	48
D	Percentage	4.9	Cumulative percentage	99.3	Number of candidates	65	Minimum mark required	37
No award	Percentage	0.7	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	10	Minimum mark required	N/A

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Section 1: comments on the assessment

For both the design and expressive portfolios, markers reported high standards of performance. Despite the disruption that candidates have experienced, throughout the process markers saw work with a strong personal interest in the subject, a confidence in technique and an enjoyment of the creative possibilities of the course. One marker commented, 'After two difficult years, young people have performed with such energy and personal commitment.' Another said, 'So many candidates have responded brilliantly to the creative challenge.'

This was the first year that SQA externally assessed the revised Advanced Higher Art and Design courses since they were introduced in 2020. The modifications to the courses also meant a reduction in the volume of required evidence. The volume of practical work for both courses was reduced from 8–16 A1 sheets to 6–12 A1 sheets (or equivalent). The following observations were made as a result of the modifications and revisions.

Modifications

A reduction in the size of the portfolio is likely to have made the Advanced Higher courses more accessible to candidates who previously might have found the workload demanding. As a result, the step between the Higher and Advanced Higher courses has been narrowed. There is now more time and leeway, over the extended period in which candidates create the portfolio, for candidates to change the emphasis or direction of their work as they gain more understanding of the subject.

A reduction of the required volume of evidence helped candidates to better organise their portfolios by encouraging them to remove less relevant work. In the past, candidates have often included superfluous work to 'pad out' their portfolios to reach the maximum volume of work, or to justify a year's work. Markers noted that a smaller amount of evidence did, in many cases, result in a more coherent portfolio.

Revisions

Each portfolio is accompanied by a flyleaf document that candidates must sign, specifying what type of evidence they are including for their portfolio. The flyleaf was updated alongside the revisions to the course assessments to further help candidates organise their submissions.

The evaluation template was introduced to allow candidates to state their chosen theme for expressive, or brief for design, along with their creative intentions. Candidates are also asked to provide a short explanation of how their contextual analysis links to their practical work. In previous years, this link has not always been apparent from the work. Markers found that this helped candidates maintain a coherent portfolio that broadly stays within the confines of the statement.

The change from the previous critical analysis to the current contextual analysis meant that some candidates were able to gain marks for statements that both analysed and referred to context in the same sentence. Some candidates also gained over 15 marks for either context or analysis.

Observations of themes

There were some noticeable trends in subject matter that may relate to the experiences of candidates during the pandemic. Though it is difficult to avoid making generalised comments when commenting on thematic responses to Art and Design, these features seem quite new and attracted comment from nearly every marker:

- ◆ A concern with mortality. There have always been Advanced Higher expressive themes that reflect worries about identity and relationships. This trend continues, and a new dimension of anxiety about the frailty of life appeared in much of the work this year. It was sometimes seen in symbols of mortality common in the 'vanitas' paintings of the 17th century, with their fading flowers, bones and hour glasses. In other portfolios, the internal organs of the body featured, for example, the heart, lungs and intestines. These themes appear to have replaced concerns about body image that predominated in this type of work in the past.
- ◆ Polemical art. Markers also commented on expressive portfolios that addressed social and political issues. Divisions in gender and between wealth and poverty, the industrial exploitation of the environment, and the gentle mocking of political figures represented a relatively new trend in polemical art.
- ◆ Aesthetic delight. In contrast to these topical issues, there was a return, in both design and expressive, to an enjoyment of beauty for its own sake. In expressive work this took the form of lush, colourful, semi-abstract depictions of, for example, foliage, folds of material, and reflections on water or from shiny objects. In design work, candidates combined colour, texture, pattern, printmaking and photoshopped images to make more carefree items of fashion, textiles and jewellery from organic forms.

Use of media and techniques

In recent years, the range of art and design media has greatly expanded. This is largely a digital revolution that has put image creation and manipulation in the hands of everyone who has a mobile phone. This might appear to challenge traditional art and design materials such as paint, paper, brushes and print rollers, but this has not happened. Digital and traditional media appear to sit quite happily together in many portfolios and the notion that screen-based skills would replace drawing is a myth that is confounded every year.

Digital media

Many portfolios contained digitally created research, development and resolution of ideas. At times, markers were impressed by candidates' skills using editing apps such as Procreate, or 3D modelling, drawing and painting apps such as SketchUp. Use of digital media added a rich mix of new and traditional art materials to many portfolios.

One of the most popular uses of digital media this year was where candidates have responded to design briefs by inventing imaginative characters for illustration, video games or storylines. Some of the better examples of this style of graphic design included research from first-hand sources that gave rise to a wealth of original ideas. In the less ambitious projects, the design was little more than a variation on an existing 'stock' character.

3D

The number of 3D submissions has continued to decline. This is likely because of difficulties of packaging, consideration of storage and lack of access to resources.

Photography

The broad and flexible nature of Advanced Higher is a natural place for candidates who enjoyed Higher Photography and want to use what they learned to produce a larger creative project. In 2019, there was an increased number of Photography portfolios, and we expected this number to increase this year. Surprisingly, this did not happen, and there was a decrease in the number of photography-based portfolios submitted.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Portfolio

Compared with previous years, a higher proportion of portfolios achieved full marks, and many candidates achieved high marks.

Artistic independence

One of the defining features of Advanced Higher is that candidates have more time and opportunity to choose and direct their work. Markers noted that candidates seemed to have taken control of their work, showing greater artistic independence. The words 'honest' and 'genuine' were frequently used to acknowledge portfolios in which the theme or design, and the development of the idea were intrinsic to the candidate. For instance, some of the investigation into the chosen design brief or theme was delightfully independent, with supporting material brought together from disparate, 'non-arty' sources. Though the presentation of this could lack polish, and was perhaps not always highly skilful or creative, it showed a personal exploration of the subject that was refreshing.

A notable reduction in centres submitting portfolios in a unified 'house style' was a further indication of artistic independence.

Clear presentation

Markers were impressed by the clear organisation of portfolios. Many candidates defined the theme or design brief and presented work in a logical and coherent sequence of research, development and resolution. Sheets were numbered and annotated, development work was linked to research, and resolutions were identified.

Diverse sources

Markers underlined the part played by the initial source material in many portfolios. This included a mixture of fine art, popular culture, personal experience and first-hand drawings, as well as an increased number of references to science, politics and geography compared with previous years. This rich mix of starting points led to interesting and ambitious creative processes and interesting resolutions.

Technical skill

Skill in Art and Design is often equated with drawing, and the standard of this remains high, with some outstanding examples of drawing and painting technique. However, there were many more skills seen this year in card model making, sewing and jewellery, digital drawing, and photo editing and manipulation.

Creative work with limited drawing

Markers were impressed by candidates who were creative or personally expressive, but who had limited drawing skills. These candidates used mixed media such as printmaking, collage, photography and digital drawing to achieve works that often expressed their ideas brilliantly. In design, it was clear that teachers helped advise candidates to choose the right option for their interests and skill set. Candidates explored ways of creating fashion, illustration, jewellery and architecture portfolios that did not involve academic drawing skills.

Applied understanding of Art and Design practice

This represents the way in which candidates absorb the influence of works of art or design that they have enjoyed. This year markers were delighted by the number of portfolios that benefited from this influence.

Contextual analysis

The revision of the marking instructions for the contextual analysis generated more holistic, but no less accurate, results. Although the assessment of this work could, at 30%, have a consequential effect on the overall mark, markers often found that commitment and ambition in one area of the submission was echoed in another.

Markers were pleased to see new approaches to contextual analysis. There was an increase in well-chosen captioned illustration that accompanied the text to illuminate the analysis, and some examples of responses to specific questions or quotes about the topic. These innovative approaches may have been influenced by the recent SQA Understanding Standards audio presentations.

Illustrating analysis

Because of candidates' experience through National 5 and Higher, in which they respond to the visual elements of a work of art or design and support their observations, most candidates are well versed in the analytical part of the contextual analysis. Some candidates found that illustrating specific aspects of the work through captioned details illuminated the text. Markers were excited to see the use of graphic or presentation software skills to support the contextual analysis.

Answering a contextual question

It is easy to understand why writing about the context is the more difficult aspect of the contextual analysis. Candidates can discuss how the chosen art or design work relates to the artistic or cultural milieu; the background or influences that came together to make it look the way it does; the social, environmental, cultural and ethical contexts; and the time and place in which it was created. This year, markers noticed a new approach to this, which in many cases was quite successful. Instead of attempting a survey of the influence or context, candidates asked specific questions such as:

- ◆ Where did the artist get this idea?
- ◆ Why was this design popular?
- ◆ What was the reaction to this work at the time and how is it viewed now?
- ◆ For what reasons is this design practical?
- ◆ What did the artist mean by this comment?

Individual comment

The individuality that was shown in the approach to practical work this year was also seen in the contextual analysis. Candidates at times chose to discuss more accessible examples, such as video game characters, magazine photos or stills from films. By expressing their personal critical reaction to the chosen work, they demonstrated that ideas, feelings and meanings can be conveyed and interpreted in images, designs or artefacts.

Evaluation

Turning points

Candidates are asked to evaluate their specific turning points in relation to their practical work. The response to this aspect of the evaluation was generally successful, as it encouraged candidates to explain their intentions and why they reached a turning point or felt the need to alter or rearrange their work.

Conceptual evaluations

Markers were impressed by evaluations from candidates who attempted more conceptual portfolios. These evaluations often helped to explain the aims of the work that might not be obvious, while also giving a critical appraisal.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Portfolio

The creative process

The marking instructions for the portfolio describe aspects of the creative process. Terms such as 'relevant investigative research', 'applied understanding of art/design practice', 'creatively using materials and techniques' and 'explore and experiment with visual elements' outline the ways in which artists and designers prepare, try out and resolve creative ideas. It was apparent that candidates found aspects of this process difficult.

Potential of visual ideas not seen

Many portfolios this year have lacked a development of visual ideas. Instead, the design brief or expressive theme has been given a one-dimensional response where there is less concern with formal visual elements, such as composition, shape, line or colour, and more with getting directly to an outcome. The work lacks an exploration of the creative possibilities inherent in an expressive theme or design brief.

Flexibility

The creative process requires a flexible, self-critical capacity to think again about possible solutions and rearrange an idea so that the initial stimulus is reimaged in different forms. Some candidates found this aspect of the process demanding.

Single source research

Some candidates experienced difficulty in expanding their investigation of an expressive theme or design brief beyond a single source, for example, a face from a given angle or an image of a natural form. This starting point may be uncomplicated and coherent, but it puts quite severe limits on how the work can be developed. The same image can be put through various permutations of materials, styles or colour, but, as a marker commented, the resulting portfolio can become quite one-dimensional.

Linking research and development

Often the most demanding aspect of the creative process is the first step of transforming the background research for an expressive theme or design brief into the beginnings of a design or an artwork. Some candidates appeared to miss this part of the process, with the source material instantly appearing in a new state.

Repetitive experiments

A challenging part of the creative process of developing ideas is trying out different solutions. In doing this, candidates can show their understanding of the visual elements in putting their ideas through iterations of, for example, composition, shape, colour or texture. Some candidates lacked this grasp of art grammar, and the same image tended to be repeated, sometimes as a print, or a traced copy, or in different digital 'artistic effects'. These repetitive experiments do not genuinely represent a creative process.

Missing the potential for development

Markers highlighted examples in which design candidates making graphic communication portfolios chose just one typeface that was repeated in various sizes. When considering the possibilities for expression in areas such as typography, and number of lettering fonts available, it seemed that in some cases these areas were not fully explored.

Design briefs

Some candidates experience difficulties in responding to an open design brief that provides general guidelines and offers the opportunity for a wide range of possible outcomes. Their solution is sometimes to make a detailed brief that virtually describes the design that is to be made. It cuts down the creative process to small decisions about colour or pattern. This simplified approach can be done well, but too often it creates a straight line from the brief to the solution where alternative ideas are hardly considered.

Contextual analysis

Making art and writing about art are two different skills, and very different means of communication. Edward Hopper is believed to have said, 'if I could say it in words, there would be no reason to paint'. Markers are not looking for art criticism or historical study, but for insights that reflect a personal understanding of the chosen subject.

Making the subject too broad

In the contextual analysis, candidates must provide evidence of their ability to select an artwork or design with relevance to their practical expressive art or design work and discuss the impact of related contexts through the analysis of the features of the art or design work. Some candidates enlarged the scope of the subject until it became too broad and generalised to attract marks. For example, candidates may have begun analysing one piece by a designer, but then enlarged their scope to all work produced by that designer.

Biographies

Many candidates have the reasonable tendency to see the lives of artists and designers as being closely related to the work they produce. Many candidates included a short biography beside the analysis of a chosen work without any connection between the two. It can be useful to link aspects of a biography to the features of a chosen work but dropping biographical details into the text does nothing towards creating a context.

Analysis

Candidates are asked to look at a single artwork or design in detail. Many candidates would highlight a high number of features of their chosen work, rather than analysing relevant features in detail. By choosing too many features to analyse, candidates diluted the effect of the analysis and were at times unable to look in detail at the effects of technique and content or, for design, function, style and impact.

Evaluation

Many candidates wrote an account of their Advanced Higher year rather than evaluative comments on the work. It is difficult to write a 'story of the portfolio' while also giving a relevant evaluation of the work. Many evaluations did not gain marks because of this.

Many candidates found great difficulty in presenting self-critical points in their evaluations. It was evident that they wanted to defend and justify the work against possible criticism. Candidates who are able to see shortcomings as well as strengths in their practical work are more likely to achieve the full range of marks.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Portfolio

Candidates should not start their portfolio too early. Candidates who choose their theme or design brief early may be more likely to change their minds later in the process. A quick start can risk pushing candidates into a semi-independent condition before they have learned much about the involved, uncertain process of developing ideas. The reduced evidence required for Advanced Higher allows teachers more time to prepare their candidates.

Markers of Advanced Higher suggest the following to help prepare candidates for assessment.

Create a bridge from Higher

Most teachers start the year with an introductory course that aims to make a bridge from Higher. There are no certain guidelines as to how this might be done, but developing a process already learned at Higher is often the first step.

Use sketch books

Sketch books are a means of encouraging an individual approach. Candidates can begin to form ideas, with a series of quick sketches and collections of material around a theme. At this stage it seems important to be fluid and create more than one idea so that there are always alternative options.

Teach research skills

Set an exercise in collecting and creating material on a theme. Explore, examine and take photographs so as to build a fund of background material.

Look for art or design that relates to the theme until candidates have the beginnings of a design or expressive portfolio.

Look to artists and designers for ideas

Encourage candidates to use and adapt ideas for artists or designers they admire. It is useful even at an early stage to make notes, or find quotes about the methods, ideas or practice that they like: they may be useful in writing the contextual analysis.

Introduce basic design ideas

Candidates might explore the abstract language of art and design, looking at elements such as format, negative space, scale, enlargement, cropping, proportion, viewpoint or perspective. They may use photographs of conceptual models or mock-ups, storyboards, or photographic contact sheets to create a range of options.

Make collections

Encourage candidates to make collections of favourite items or images that relate to areas of visual culture. Candidates could document work through photographs, sketches, a diary, diagrams or computer-aided design (CAD) software to explain their ideas and how they have developed and taken them in new directions.

Experiment with materials and techniques

Try progressive abstraction in a development process based on quick sketches, or rough drawings that try out visual elements such as texture, surface, colour, line, shape, form or space.

Explore ideas, new techniques and formats, looking all the time to extend the ways in which a visual idea can be represented. Candidates can use a range of cheap materials to explore mark or shape making, for example, collage, mono-printing, thread, paint rollers, palette knives, craft knives, scissors and stencils. More sophisticated equipment could include sewing machines; digital cameras; darkroom equipment; printing presses; photocopiers; scanners; and CAD software such as Adobe Photoshop, Adobe InDesign or SketchUp. Candidates could experiment with mixing digital and sketching, for example, drawing on top of digital images, to look at the theme in a new light.

Encourage 3D work

Encourage candidates to make something 3D as part of the portfolio, and photograph, or if possible, submit it. It is noticeable that 3D work, even very small items that are well made, tends to demonstrate more development ideas.

Justify exercises

It is important to explain to candidates the point of these exercises. They are not done for their own sake, but they have a purpose in building a vocabulary and a store of visual ideas that may be useful in developing ideas in the future. It is hoped that each candidate will begin an Advanced Higher theme or design project without being wholly aware that they are doing so.

Contextual analysis

Before candidates choose an artwork or design work, it is useful for them to do some wider research into the background of the whole field of interest. If they find that their chosen example offers too little available information, it is possible to broaden the subject. For example, analysing a single drawing of a ballet dancer by Degas might expand to Degas' studies for a particular painting such as 'The Rehearsal'. Equally, a single fashion design by Iris van Herpen might progress to analyse a collection by Van Herpen such as the 'Micro' collection.

From reading a wide range of contextual analysis, markers suggest the following ideas that might help candidates to write more engaging pieces of work.

Do not discuss own work

Candidates have the opportunity to discuss the link between their work and the subject of contextual analysis within the evaluation template.

Answer questions

Candidates could begin by explaining what they are writing about in the form of questions. Asking questions can give their writing a structure. For example:

- ◆ How did Degas break away from the academic style of posed figures to make drawings of people that look natural and unposed?
- ◆ Why did he choose young dancers as his subject?

- ◆ What was the position of these young people in society at the time?
- ◆ I want to explain how Iris van Herpen's designs relate to natural form. Where does she get the ideas?
- ◆ How does she collaborate with scientists to research and make the forms for her 'Micro' collection?
- ◆ Are they wearable, and if so, for what occasions?

Analyse the topic with illustrations

The audio-visual presentations that are available on the Understanding Standards section of the SQA secure site show how to use visual images along with text to explain visual elements. The illustrations should closely follow the writing to deconstruct the example.

Explain quotes

When discussing an artist's or designer's work, it is useful to find quotes. They can be from almost any source that makes an interesting comment on the subject. For example:

- ◆ What did Degas mean when he said: 'People call me the painter of dancing girls. It has never occurred to them that my chief interest in dancers lies in rendering movement'?
- ◆ What did Degas mean when he said: 'The artist does not draw what he sees, but what he has to make others see'?
- ◆ What does the critic mean by: 'A fascination for architecture has been with Van Herpen from the very beginning'?
- ◆ What does the critic mean by: 'Her creative process brings together architecture and nature'?

Use discursive words

Writing about art is often a balance of statements. Words that make links between statements help to form a discussion. For example, by starting a sentence with 'Although' it is possible to make a complex statement: 'Although Degas' ballet pictures are thought to be pleasing scenes of beauty, they in fact depict the lives of young people who were exploited...' or 'Despite Herpen's interest in nature, her work is made in the most unnatural way.'

Speculate or give an opinion

Much in the writing about context and influence is a matter of opinion. Candidates should consider including why artists or designers might have been influenced by, commented on, or created something as part of their analysis. For example: 'Degas does not seem to have any liking for the dancers, it is as if they are just a decorative subject.'

Evaluation

The evaluation offers an opportunity for candidates to look back at their initial creative intentions and determine to what extent they have done what they set out to do. Candidates should:

- ◆ Explain initial ideas, stimulus, theme or design brief. This needs only to be a short statement that explains how the initial research was developed.

- ◆ Show to what extent they have developed or changed their ideas and consider what they might have done differently. It is important to identify turning points in the development of ideas. How effective were they?
- ◆ Make a balanced evaluation of things that worked well and less well. To what extent have they done what they set out to do? Candidates should try to be self-critical and imagine how their work might be seen from an objective viewpoint.

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](#).