



## Course report 2019

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 post-results services.

## **Section 1: comments on the assessment**

Again this year, markers reported on high standards of performance. Throughout the process, markers saw work by candidates with a strong personal interest in the subject, a confidence in technique and an enjoyment in the relative freedom of the course.

### **Standards of commitment**

Teachers, lecturers and candidates appear to appreciate the requirements of what is, when compared to National 5 and Higher, a less clearly defined task. This is seen, not just in the high achieving work, but also at the other end of the spectrum. One marker commented that 'even less successful work showed care, commitment and a level of personal creativity'.

### **Design work**

This year continued the trend of the last five years where results for design achieved parity with expressive. Design portfolios are generally well researched, with more organised development and often better presentation than expressive. Though some candidates still lose focus and produce a disappointing outcome, any concern that candidates would be unable to sustain a whole portfolio on a single design topic is unfounded.

### **Benchmarks**

Markers commented favourably on the quality of the benchmarks. During the marking process, 'benchmark examples' of standards offer visual exemplification of marking instructions. At Advanced Higher, finding benchmarks that represent typical performance over the whole portfolio at different levels is challenging because the submissions are so varied: there is no 'typical' portfolio for any given mark. To overcome some of this challenge, the benchmarks sampled only parts of the portfolios: some showing standards in practical design and expressive, others exemplifying levels of performance in the critical analysis. These examples of benchmarks were reinforced by ongoing selection and exemplification of standards throughout the marking.

### **General trends in presentation**

Detailed observations of the style and character of the work and how it changes from year to year are difficult to pin down. Trends in presentation are too gradual to be captured in any annual report, but an overview of markers' comments over the past five years would include portfolios that show some of the following characteristics:

- ◆ groups of work that concentrate on displaying and refining a technique in drawing, printmaking or painting
- ◆ portfolios that have absorbed the influence of an artist or designer and show how this influence can be expressed through a personal theme
- ◆ portfolios that respond to a narrative such as an event, a traditional story or a musical as the theme for expressive illustration or associated design
- ◆ work which celebrates families or friends: the joys and difficulties of relationships
- ◆ portfolios in both design and expressive that express a love for nature or address concerns about the environment
- ◆ themes about personal issues such as body image, health and wellbeing, peer pressure or depression

- ◆ more 'conceptual' approaches that explore an individual theme through research and development with less emphasis on finished outcomes and a greater concern for experiment

Variants or combinations of these portfolio types evolve over time and are enriched by new developments.

### **Photography and digital media**

In the 1920s, the artist, designer and polymath Moholy Nagy envisaged a future where everyone would make a record of their everyday lives through the democratic medium of photography. The future has arrived, and its implications for the assessment of art and design were evident in many portfolios. The use of photography at Advanced Higher has been growing since the course began and this year saw more photography and digital representations at every stage of the creative process. For example:

- ◆ the camera used as a research tool to explore a wide range of subject matter
- ◆ the development of ideas documented through photographs
- ◆ photographic images manipulated to form visual experiment and development of ideas
- ◆ photographs copied or presented as finished outcomes in design and expressive portfolios

While welcoming the creative possibilities of the camera, markers commented on the degrees of difficulty involved in the specialised skill of observation drawing and the relatively simple task of representing the subject with a camera. This puts a greater emphasis on the process of developing creative ideas.

### **Resurgence in craft**

Coinciding with the rise of technology, there appears to be a resurgence in handcrafted work moving in the opposite direction. Markers commented favourably on activities such as:

- ◆ woodcuts, etching, collagraphy and monoprinting
- ◆ weaving, knitting, stitching, beadwork and applique
- ◆ sculptural maquettes, architectural model-making and puppetry
- ◆ paper-folding, and paper-spinning to create sculptural forms
- ◆ constructing sculpture from electric cables

### **Expressive inspiration**

In a number of expressive portfolios, the thematic emphasis was not so much on a topic as on the art that inspired it. Candidates found inspiration in forms such as the fragmentation of cubist painting or the filmic qualities of magic realism, the distortions of Francis Bacon or the negative shape in the work of Rachel Whiteread. In general, the work benefitted from this inspiration and, in most cases, candidates were able to find a personal means of interpreting the influence and avoided the temptation to make a weak copy.

## **Design inspiration**

The range of starting points for design portfolios seems to broaden each year. Inspirations such as cultures of the world or homelessness seem vast and unmanageable, while the minute world of mushroom gills or cancer cells would appear to be too small and insubstantial, yet all these projects were well focused and sustained.

## **Not design or expressive**

The headings of 'design' and 'expressive' define two separate realms of creative work. In design, the portfolio is defined by a brief, while in expressive there is at least an expectation of individual freedom of expression. This year continued to see portfolios that successfully crossed these boundaries, for example expressive portfolios that responded to a tightly defined narrative and design portfolios that took on sculptural design. Markers welcome the freedom with which the headings are interpreted, but teachers and lecturers are reminded to enter candidates for the subject they present.

## **Section 2: comments on candidate performance**

### **Areas that candidates performed well in**

#### **Skills learned from Higher, National 5 and Higher Photography**

There is perennial discussion about the experience of progression from Higher to Advanced Higher. Many portfolios had evidence of successful transition, with candidates developing the skills they brought from previous experience.

#### **Skills in drawing and painting**

It is impressive to see how many candidates are confident in drawing and painting technique, for example making effective use of the scale of tonalities through subtle gradations of light to create a sense of volume and form. Still-life compositions or portraits were often underpinned by this sensitivity to the form revealed in light and shade. These technical skills were allegedly on the decline, but there is no evidence of this at Advanced Higher.

#### **Progressive abstraction**

One of the artistic concepts learned through National 5 and Higher is the ability to gradually simplify forms to more basic shapes — for example, a pepper becomes a more abstracted shape. Advanced Higher candidates who have learned more sophisticated variations on this theme can develop ideas with fluency and confidence. It is often inspiring to see how far this abstraction can be taken without repetition or deviation while still bearing a relationship to the original stimulus. This skill opens up a wealth of possibilities in considering how forms can be created and developed.

#### **High standards of photography**

An increasing number of candidates who have completed Higher Photography find scope at Advanced Higher to take their ideas further. Markers were often impressed by the coherence and organisation of their work. Candidates showed confidence in technique, a sensitivity to visual elements such as composition colour and form, and care and discrimination in editing examples of work. Much of this good practice had come from Higher Photography.

The variety of light settings, viewpoints and exposure times showed how much technique candidates had learned in Higher Photography. Photography was also used more freely with Photoshop, mixed media and printmaking to develop ideas. Often, candidates digitally manipulated images through paper weaving and layering, with acetates and even sewing to create 3D relief.

#### **Justified analytical points**

In the critical analysis, it was impressive to read analysis of art and design where the visual elements of a single work were seen in detail. This deconstruction of the work was not simply a series of observations; the candidate explained the effect of each element. For example, they explained the difference made by using a particular colour, shape or composition in the work and related this to a larger aim or meaning of the piece. This skill is difficult to acquire without having learned it at Higher or National 5. The addition of detailed illustration, which is possible at Advanced Higher, can further enhance the analytical points.

## **Examples of good practice**

### **Independent learning**

At Advanced Higher there is a greater expectation of independent learning and a greater emphasis on personalisation and choice. While some candidates see this as an exciting opportunity, others find it a challenge. Markers commented widely on the delight of seeing a personal direction in the work.

### **Individual research**

Personal research seemed to be the basis of portfolios where candidates performed well. The capacity to see connections between differing areas of investigation was evident throughout these portfolios in activities such as:

- ◆ observation drawing
- ◆ photographing sites or things of interest
- ◆ collecting objects or images associated with the theme
- ◆ investigating the work of artists or designers
- ◆ finding cross-cultural links to film, music or literature connected to the theme
- ◆ looking for unexpected associations and non-linear connections
- ◆ researching materials to see how they might contribute to the next step

### **Research: making connections with the development of ideas**

In both design and expressive portfolios, candidates seemed to have made connections between the theme or stimulus and the media they had chosen. For example, a candidate who had researched a theme based on 'anxiety' produced an animation that brought together investigation into the causes of an emotional state with an array of visual expressions into an experiment with animated forms. In another example on 'Trompe L'oeil', the experiment with painting technique was part of an investigation of shadows and texture in a shallow space between drawing, photography and the work of Edward Collier.

### **Development of ideas: bringing ideas together**

Many candidates find it challenging to sustain a personal project over a period of months. Some candidates brought two ideas together to make a more substantial theme that was easier to sustain. For example, one candidate produced self-portraits featuring still-life objects that symbolised a state of mind. When brought together, the two forms — portrait and still life — gave the project a depth it might not otherwise have had.

In a more complex example, the addition of paper folding in developing ideas for stage costumes for 'Alice' enriched and sustained a design theme on floral pattern.

However, for every project that successfully combined ideas, there was a corresponding portfolio where too many ideas become unmanageable.

### **Critical analysis on a theme**

Markers commented on some outstanding examples of critical analysis where the context of the study linked to a larger idea. Some of these studies uplifted what might have been an

average mark. Often, successful written pieces took on a specific title. For example, one candidate discussed ‘fear of the dark’ with analytical reference to Goya’s ‘Black Paintings’, enabling them to analyse the work and to investigate the context of scary feelings in psychology, literature and film. Another candidate gave an interesting account of ‘butterflies in mythology’ as the context for an analysis of John Paul Gaultier’s ‘Butterfly’ fashion collection. In each case, the title of the written study directly related to the practical work.

## **Areas that candidates found demanding**

### **Sheet 1**

This opening sheet is a preliminary guide to the portfolio and sets the scene for what is to follow. In a design portfolio, Sheet 1 would clearly display all aspects of the design brief and — through sketches, illustrations, diagrams, photographs, annotations and references — outline the nature and character of the portfolio. An expressive portfolio would contain the same kind of material, showing the thinking and background research, development and experimentation that candidates had already covered.

Markers were impressed by exciting examples of Sheet 1. However, in some portfolios the presentations were no more than a mood board of vaguely related images that did little to illuminate the portfolio.

### **Evaluation — not a story**

Candidates are asked to respond in 300 words to two aspects of the portfolio:

- ◆ Turning points in the portfolio. In general, the specific nature of the question elicited good answers and explanations about how the portfolios developed. However, some candidates seemed to think they were being asked to tell the story of the development of the whole portfolio. This meant they ran out of words to do this and often forgot to evaluate.
- ◆ Evaluate their first intentions in the light of their completed outcome. Some candidates did this part of the evaluation less well, partly because they attempted something too long-winded, but also because they seemed unable to make any self-critical comments.

### **Sustaining development**

The central theme of the marking instructions for Advanced Higher is built around the concept of the creative process. This unfolding of a visual idea is seen first in its initial stages and then, as it goes through a progression of try-outs and experimental studies, evolves into an enquiry. Each marking instruction focuses on a different aspect of the developmental work:

- ◆ development of skills and techniques
- ◆ use of visual elements and experiment
- ◆ the candidate’s ability to create coherent development
- ◆ how the development of ideas is informed by art and design
- ◆ the candidate’s capacity to sustain this development

Most candidates have the greatest difficulty with the last of these: sustaining the development of ideas.

### **Over-ambitious schemes of work**

Markers commented frequently on projects that are over-complicated, for example where candidates designed several items, or attempted three or four distinctly different expressive projects within the one theme. This approach may be in response to the difficulty of sustaining the creative process; instead of thoroughly developing an idea, there is a tendency just to start another. The result is a highly ambitious project with a series of superficial bits of creative process. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to do one thing thoroughly.

### **Examples of 3D — ‘the act of making’**

The amount of 3D work improved this year, but it is still low. ‘Making’ is one of the defining concepts of art and design. Conceiving of something on paper is all very well, but making it in 3D, even in the form of a model, is to take a step closer to experiencing the diverse questions and possibilities inherent in a creative project. The act of making is also an encounter with the materials and techniques, with all their potential for further invention and problem solving. Many portfolios could be improved by the addition of 3D work, even sent in as a photograph, or in the form of a maquette, a papier mâché mock-up, or a scale model.

### **Playing it safe**

The circumstances in which candidates take on the Advanced Higher portfolio vary greatly. Some candidates are part of a specialist class with their own teacher and plenty of discussion of inspiring ideas, while others are part of a larger Higher class with less scope for ambitious work. In the latter case, there is a natural tendency to confine the range of the work and limit the candidate’s independence. It is difficult for candidates to take a personal approach to this more restricted portfolio: they are apt to play safe.

### **Limited ambitions in expressive**

In portfolios where the candidate was unable to find a personal direction, the theme or stimuli had a generalised direction. For example, a portfolio with the theme ‘portraits’ turned out to be some studies of faces that represented a technical challenge: there did not seem to be any other reason for doing the work. Though there was clear evidence of progress throughout the practical work, and an attempt in the critical analysis to deconstruct portraits, the whole portfolio was rather limited.

### **Restricted design projects**

In a small number of portfolios, the candidate had chosen to design an item where the idea was already formed in the design brief and required only small creative decisions and some refinement. For example, a design brief that asked for a brooch in the pre-existing shape of a flower allowed the candidate to bypass any depth of individual research, or any experiment or consideration of creative ideas, leaving only the technical challenge of making the jewellery. This kind of project can sometimes be well executed, but the parameters are relatively narrow and leave less room for candidates to take charge of the project.



## **Photography with limited development**

Some candidates submitting a photographic portfolio presented very limited development or experiment. Sheets of contact prints with explanations of why images were selected were shown as evidence of developing the idea. Like any medium, photography is open to a wide variety of experiment in technique and investigation of visual elements, but candidates had not explored this potential.

## **Critical analysis**

### **Deconstructing and finding contextual links**

The critical analysis which runs parallel to the practical coursework focuses on the study of a work or related works of art or design. The candidate is asked to write about two aspects of the work(s).

### **Candidates who write about themselves**

Candidates are asked to make a link between their practical work and the topic of their written study, and this encouraged some to make comparisons between their work and the work of their chosen artist. 'Cezanne uses a broad-brush stroke, but I...'

It seems at times that the most interesting art or design known to some candidates is their own. It is better that candidates do not mention their work: the link should be self-evident in the portfolio. The evaluation template for the revised assessment for 2020 makes provision for candidates to explain this link.

### **Biographies of artists or designers**

For many candidates, the most obvious context in connection to a chosen study is the biography of the artist or designer. Candidates can use biographical information, but only if it is linked to the topic to show how it is part of the context. Many candidates used biographical summaries without regard to its relevance to the topic.

### **Analyse or deconstruct features of the work**

Some candidates chose too many examples, or attempted too wide a range of visual elements connected to the work. This meant they were unable to look in detail at the effects of technique, content and — in design — function, style or impact. In responding to the design critical analysis, markers are aware that there is less background information available on specific works, especially if they are contemporary, relatively unknown or obscure.

### **Contextual writing: the weakest area**

This part of the critical analysis presents a more academically challenging task and was the weakest aspect of many portfolios. Contextual writing invites candidates to explore the background to the work they have analysed. Some candidates appeared to find difficulty in doing more than an outline biography of the artist or designer. Others added further artists or designers, or other works by the same artist or designer, in the hope of broadening the topic. Some candidates did not mention context, and so were unable to access any of the 15 marks.

This seems to suggest that contextual writing is a higher-order skill that is beyond the reach of some candidates. However, markers felt that candidates who understood the need to address this part of the course met the requirement comfortably, 'with impressive connections and some original ideas'.

The present Higher question paper makes a similar demand for context, and candidates are familiar with how searches on the internet are set up to make connections — for example asking 'Mackintosh influences?' results in a torrent of data. It is tempting to conclude that, with more information on the demands of the course, all candidates could cope with this part of the critical analysis without overly extending themselves.

## **Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment**

The course is about to change in significant ways and, while the advice of previous reports is still relevant, some changes are particularly important for future assessment.

The first and most significant change involves the removal of units. The units for Advanced Higher provided an important preparation period of research and formation of initial ideas. Now candidates will present this research material in the folio and can do the preparation without regard to specific guidelines.

### **Preparing candidates**

The course support notes for the revised Advanced Higher contain detailed accounts of how teachers and lecturers might prepare candidates to take the step from the Higher course to the creative freedoms of Advanced Higher. Although Advanced Higher candidates create a greater volume of work than those at Higher and National 5, it is a single portfolio and they have a little more time to consider and formulate ideas. Teachers and lecturers have a greater opportunity to teach and respond to the needs of their candidates and their local situation. However, in general, teachers and lecturers should:

- ◆ try to develop an individual outlook by encouraging candidates to keep a personal sketch book, a pinboard or wall of visual support, or a loose collection of associated research
- ◆ teach research skills in making connections between images
- ◆ outline ways of looking for and collecting visual resources
- ◆ create quick sketching exercises that generate ideas fluently
- ◆ suggest ways in which visual elements such as line, silhouette or negative shape might open up other ways of seeing a topic
- ◆ show candidates how to research with a camera
- ◆ experiment with a variety of media and suggest ways of extending technical skills
- ◆ encourage candidates to look for influences and ideas from artists and designers

### **Selecting a theme or stimulus**

When candidates begin to formulate ideas for a theme or stimulus, teachers or lecturers should advise and discuss but not direct candidates. It is important that candidates can freely propose ideas and begin to take ownership of the project. Teachers and lecturers might:

- ◆ give time for candidates to evolve their ideas and consider different possibilities: ideas formed impulsively are sometimes difficult to sustain
- ◆ suggest that candidates consider proposing two possible themes or stimuli: this allows them to discuss alternatives or bring ideas together
- ◆ suggest that when candidates propose ideas, they refer to sketches, images or models to avoid the confusion caused by verbal descriptions of visual ideas

## **How much work — 8 to 16, a rough guide**

The size of a submission for Advanced Higher depends on many factors, not least the nature of the project, so the guidelines on how many A1 sheets it takes to make a portfolio are necessarily inexact. Between 8 and 16 A1 sheets covers a wide range of possible types of presentation or schemes of work.

Candidates can present work in many different forms, from sketchbooks and canvases to sculpture and textiles. The A1 sheet is a notional framework that gives a rough idea of the size of any presentation. The best advice on sheet numbers is not to focus on counting the sheets, but to consider whether the submission fully covers all the course requirements, particularly those related to development.

## **Photography portfolios**

Portfolios that are entirely devoted to photography must fulfil the requirements for all work at Advanced Higher. This means that candidates must: thoroughly research the theme/stimulus or design brief from a variety of sources; develop the work by experimenting with a range of materials; and bring together relevant visual elements into a visually coherent and sustained portfolio. The course support notes have further advice and suggestions about submitting photography portfolios.

## **Experiment — in many ways**

Candidates should include as much relevant experimental work as can be achieved in the portfolio, even if it is very small. Whatever the material being used, candidates should try out different effects with it: explore ideas, new techniques and formats, looking all the time to extend the ways in which a visual idea can be represented. Candidates could use a range of cheap materials — such as collage, mono-printing, drawing on top of other images — to explore mark or shape making and look at the theme in a new light.

## **3D work**

3D work, even very small items that are well made, tends to create a good impression. This is because a 3D project attracts more development ideas and creates a greater variety of approach in the portfolio.

## **Ask candidates to document work — illustrate what they are doing**

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to use such things as photographs, sketches, a diary, diagrams, Photoshop, or Google SketchUp to explain their ideas and how they have developed the theme or taken it in new directions.

## **Encourage annotations — explain ideas**

Candidates should explain and fully annotate development sheets and reference material. This helps to amplify the thinking behind the work and show the purpose of visual ideas that may look less connected.

## Sheet numbering

The final portfolio must have sheet numbers so that it can be viewed and understood in sequence. The numbered sheets can then be referred to in the evaluation.

## Evaluation

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to be self-critical in answering the following questions:

- ◆ What was the effect of creative decisions or turning points on your portfolio?
- ◆ How effective is the response to the initial idea/creative intention/design brief in the final portfolio? How did it turn out?

## Critical analysis

In the revisions to the course, critical analysis will become 'contextual analysis'. The course specification and support notes for the new arrangements explain this change and suggest how it might be tackled. The demands of the contextual analysis are quite similar and most of the previous advice about this written part of the course remains relevant.

## Encourage candidates to choose a topic that can be analysed and offers plenty to write about

Before candidates choose a topic, 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 topic offers too little available information, it is possible to enlarge the subject. For example, a single drawing of a ballet dancer by Degas might become all Degas' studies for a particular painting such as 'The Rehearsal'. Equally, a single fashion design by Iris van Herpen might become part of a collection by van Herpen such as the 'Micro' collection. A broad subject offers more to write about but is less easy to analyse or deconstruct. A precise subject provides a straightforward analysis but may have to be broadened to create the context.

## Making the contextual analysis relevant to the practical work

The subject of the contextual analysis must relate to the practical work and come from the research candidates have done during the course. The evaluation form for the revised course will give candidates an opportunity to explain the relationship between their work and the topic of their contextual analysis. Candidates should not refer to their own work in the contextual analysis. However, they might discuss an issue or subject closely connected to their practical work. For example:

- ◆ a candidate with a theme based on 'homelessness' studied the work of Neil Shigley and based the portfolio on 'depictions of the homeless'; the study also discussed art by homeless people
- ◆ a design study based on recycled materials looked at the work of Ryan Frank and then discussed issues connected to upcycling in design

## **Biographies of artists or designers**

Many candidates see the biography of the artist or designer as the most obvious context in connection to a chosen study. Candidates can use biographical information, but only if it is linked to the topic to show how it is part of the context.

## **Discussing a design or art work**

In the contextual analysis, candidates are asked to discuss the impact of related contexts through analysis of the features of the design/artwork. 'Discuss' suggests an element of evaluation, consideration or opinion rather than a statement of facts. This way of looking at art may be new to some candidates. Teachers and lecturers could encourage candidates to ask questions about the work. For example, if the study was about Picasso's 'Guernica', the candidate might ask: 'Where did Picasso get the idea for the imagery?'

There is no right answer to this question, but the candidate can discuss some alternative theories. Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to ask the same kinds of questions about the sources, the purpose or the reaction to works of art or design, and to speculate in giving their response.

## **Quotes — a way of exploring meaning**

One of the best ways to open a discussion in writing is to use a quote from the artist or designer, or from a critic or historian. For example, what did Picasso mean when he said:

- ◆ 'A painting is not thought out in advance. While it is being done, it changes as one's thoughts change.'
- ◆ 'It is not up to the artist to define what symbols mean in the work.'
- ◆ 'Art is a lie that tells the truth.'

## **Speculate — candidates should give their opinion**

Much in the writing about context and influence is a matter of opinion. In their analysis, candidates should speculate about why artists or designers might have been influenced by, commented on or created something.

## **Illustrations — illustrate every aspect of the topic**

Candidates should aim to include many illustrations of details of the chosen works, or contextual links that explain particular points. They should add other illustrations that further illuminate points made, or extend ideas that they do not have space to fully address.

## **Captions — a useful way of extending points**

Each illustration should have a caption that explains the point of the picture. The captions and headings need not add to the word count.

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

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	540
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Number of resulted entries in 2019	507
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### Statistical information: performance of candidates

#### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
<b>Maximum mark</b>				
<b>A</b>	36.7%	36.7%	186	70
<b>B</b>	27.8%	64.5%	141	60
<b>C</b>	27.0%	91.5%	137	50
<b>D</b>	4.7%	96.3%	24	45
<b>No award</b>	3.7%	-	19	-

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

### Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	920
Number of resulted entries in 2019	937

### Statistical information: performance of candidates

#### Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	Percentage	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
<b>Maximum mark</b>				
<b>A</b>	29.9%	29.9%	280	70
<b>B</b>	30.9%	60.8%	290	60
<b>C</b>	29.9%	90.7%	280	50
<b>D</b>	6.4%	97.1%	60	45
<b>No award</b>	2.9%	-	27	-



## General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions that allow:

- ◆ a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary)
- ◆ 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.

Therefore, SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The principal assessor and SQA qualifications manager meet with the relevant SQA head of service and statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. Members of the SQA management team chair these meetings. SQA can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper has been more, or less, challenging than usual.

- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper is more challenging than usual.
- ◆ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual.
- ◆ Where standards 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 to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for question papers set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the question papers that they set themselves.