



Course report 2019

Subject	Photography
Level	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

Question paper

Overall, the question paper component performed as intended: providing breadth and challenge to the existing course assessment. Feedback from markers, centres and candidates identified that the question paper component was pitched appropriately, was fair and accessible, and provided a suitable level of challenge for this level.

The question paper followed the structure of the specimen question paper very closely which helped centre staff and candidates prepare for the assessment. The majority of candidates attempted all twelve questions.

Section 1: Multiple choice performed as expected. These questions provided varying degrees of challenge for candidates based on the areas of the course that were covered and the available options to select from.

Section 2: Question 12 was designed to differentiate between A and C-type candidates. Candidates found answering this question challenging and this was taken into account when setting the grade boundary.

Project

Candidates' response to the coursework assessment task was as expected. The task proved to be fair and accessible for all candidates in terms of coverage and overall level of demand. Markers commented positively on the overall quality of projects however, candidates found the following aspects of the project challenging:

- ◆ explaining the impact of social, cultural, historical and/or scientific influences on relevant photographers' work and practice from their investigative research (5 marks)
- ◆ technical and creative quality of final 12 prints (40 marks)

The majority of candidates did not explain the impact of the influences that they identified on their chosen photographers' work.

The general standard of photographic work was on par with previous years, however there are significantly more marks available for this aspect of the project than before.

Both of these aspects were taken into consideration when setting the grade boundary.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Markers commented that overall candidates were well-prepared, had attempted most or all questions, and that there did not appear to be issues with candidates being unable to complete the paper in the designated time. There was evidence that centres had practiced exam techniques with candidates and that they were familiar with the structure of the question paper.

Generally, candidates demonstrated a good understanding of photographic language and terminology and were able to apply this to the questions and given images. This has been a significant improvement on previous years when comparing it to the language used in units or the project.

Section 1: multiple choice

Overall, candidates performed very well with this section of the question paper and were able to apply their knowledge and understanding of photography in a variety of contexts. All questions within this section performed as expected, the vast majority of candidates attempted each question.

Section 2: analysis

Question 11(b)

Candidates were able to respond to this question well and demonstrated a broad knowledge and understanding of compositional techniques within photography. Most candidates were able to explain how these compositional techniques were used to create visual effect by linking their responses to the given prompts. Most candidates linked their response clearly to the given image.

Question 11(c)

Candidates generally performed well in this question and were able to identify relevant camera controls and explain how they were used to capture the given image. Some candidates however, provided standard responses that did not directly link to the image.

Question 11(d)

Most candidates were able to identify one lighting technique or lighting equipment that was used to create the image. Candidates demonstrated a good understanding of lighting and its effects on the still life however, many candidates did not fully answer the question by referring to lighting techniques **and** lighting equipment.

Project

Generally, most candidates selected a topic that was appropriate for the nature of this assessment. Candidates selected a range of genres and styles and tackled their theme with enthusiasm and creativity.

The overall presentation of candidate projects was similar to that of previous years. Many candidates used a traditional sketchbook approach to the presentation of their project. Markers noted an improvement in presentation layouts used by many candidates which helped to highlight their skill, knowledge and understanding. Candidate projects were generally much more streamlined, succinct and focused, with fewer candidates sending in irrelevant evidence, such as basic photographic properties or class learning exercises.

Section 1: producing and compiling relevant investigative research

Most candidates produced a body of research work which was focused and relevant to their selected theme and approach. Visual imagery linked well to the style of the candidates' own photographic work. Many candidates had adopted the approach of providing additional 'shoot-specific' research throughout their development work which kept them on track and in-line with their earlier research work.

Section 2: demonstrating applied technical and creative photography skills

In comparison to previous years, the general standard of this aspect of the project was very well executed. The majority of candidates produced a body of photographic work which explored their theme in depth. Candidates demonstrated a range of creative and technical photographic skills in their work which was relevant to their selected approach.

Candidates structured this aspect of their project very well. Most candidates broke their theme down into sub-sections or photoshoots which gave them scope to be creative while minimising repetition. Candidates presented their body of work in a variety of formats, however the majority continue to use contact sheets, edits and test images as a means to develop their work.

Candidates demonstrated particular strength in their critical reflection, refinement and decision-making skills; most showing an ability to reflect on their work effectively through shoot reviews and mid-point reviews. Candidates also exemplified refinement in a variety of ways which illustrated their thought process in arriving at their chosen set of images. Candidates used appropriate language and terminology when reflecting on their work.

In previous years annotation was used excessively but often did not contain any useful information. There was a definite reduction in the amount of over-annotation this year which helped to focus the creative decision-making more in the shoot reviews or on-going critical reflection.

On a whole, the print quality of the majority of final images was very strong and an improvement on previous years. The majority of candidates had made the decision to print externally however some chose to print their images internally.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Question 9

Many candidates found this question challenging and were unable to demonstrate a clear understanding of a histogram or how it represents the image.

Question 11(a)

The majority of candidates were able to access one mark for this question by correctly identifying a valid white balance setting. Candidates found explaining the effect on the image challenging with many demonstrating a poor understanding of how white balance works.

Question 12

This question is designed to give candidates an opportunity to demonstrate a broader understanding of photography by discussing relevant technical and creative photographic factors which the photographer would have considered when setting up the shot.

Most candidates approached this question enthusiastically and were able to clearly identify relevant factors but were unable to discuss them in detail. Many candidates listed their points but did not fully explore them or link them to the given image. Many candidates provided generic learned responses which were irrelevant or incorrect for the given image.

Candidates who did not perform well in this part of the question paper failed to show an understanding of the question prompt: discuss. Question prompts that are used within the Higher Photography question paper are included in the course specification with a description of what it means. Example responses are also available in the specimen question paper.

Project

Section 1: producing and compiling relevant investigative research

Project plan

Candidates chose to present their plans in a variety of formats, such as a body of text, mind map, or broken up into different sections etc. Many candidates chose to illustrate their planning with screen shots and relevant imagery.

The general standard of candidate planning was good however, many candidates failed to highlight key planning aspects that were relevant to their project. Candidates spent a large portion of their plan explaining why they wanted to do their project and while this is important, the focus should be on project planning; how they will undertake their project, and the issues or considerations that they must think about.

In many instances, the project planning was generic or irrelevant. Candidates must ensure that the issues they choose to include are relevant and personal to their project, locations and equipment etc.

Social, cultural, historical and scientific influences

This aspect of the project was generally very poorly executed. The majority of candidates attempted this aspect by including the work of influential photographers and examples of their work. However, some candidates chose to completely ignore this aspect of the project and this was reflected in their mark.

Some candidates related the influences of their chosen photographers on their **own** work, however the assessment task states:

- ◆ Select relevant photographs from your investigative research and explain the impact of social, cultural, historical and/or scientific influences on the photographers' work and practice.

The majority of selected photographers related to the candidate's project, genre or style. Candidates who selected contemporary photographers often struggled to find relevant and reliable research on the photographer.

Section 2: demonstrating applied technical and creative photography skills

Technical quality

Overall, the quality of photographic work remains similar to that of previous years. One of the key changes to the project is the weighting of marks available for the final 12 images.

In many instances candidates presented images which demonstrated issues with focus and exposure. Candidates must ensure that they are able to apply their technical understanding to their work and this must be reflected in their final images.

Many candidates made poor selections for their final images. The final 12 images must be the candidate's technically most competent images and this should be reflected in their refinement and decision-making earlier in the project.

Some candidates submitted fewer or more than the required 12 images for their final selection. Some also produced their final images outside of the designated sizes. Where candidates printed up to the maximum A4 size, their images were often of poorer quality than they would have been if they were printed smaller.

Creative quality

Markers noted that many candidates did not show creativity in their images, for example their images appeared like snapshots. In these instances, the images did not visually link to the creative and dynamic research that they had included in their investigation.

Candidates should always aim to demonstrate a variety of skills in the following areas (where appropriate):

- ◆ composition
- ◆ lighting
- ◆ viewpoint/camera angle
- ◆ focal distance
- ◆ subject matter
- ◆ approach

Markers also noted that many candidates were repetitive in their choice of final images, with many of them being the same or very similar. Final images should work well together, link to their plan and research, and should not be repetitive as this impacts on the creativity of their final set.

Section 3: evaluation

The quality of candidate evaluations continues to be a concern. While most candidates adhered to the 500 word limit, many did not and a penalty was applied. Many candidates did not attempt both aspects of the evaluation:

- ◆ critically evaluate photographic practice
- ◆ critically evaluate final 12 prints

Candidate evaluations were often not critical in nature and did not highlight issues which were evident in their body of work. Candidates can only be awarded marks if what they are saying is relevant, accurate and reflective.

Most centres adhered to the conditions of assessment for coursework but there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case.

Some centres provided candidates with writing frames, handouts and pro formas to assist them in the completion of their coursework assessment task. It is clearly stated in the course specification document that candidates should only receive reasonable assistance in completing their project and must not be given templates and pro formas.

Centres must adhere to the criteria which are published clearly on SQA's website and in course materials. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications. SQA carries this out by consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases where conditions may not have been met.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Centres should continue to develop candidates' knowledge and understanding of photographic terms, techniques, styles and genres. This will ensure that they are fully prepared for any images or scenarios which may arise in the question paper. This will also help to broaden their understanding of photography for their project.

Centres should continue to support candidates by helping them develop exam technique through timed responses and opportunities to complete practice questions and papers.

To further prepare candidates for answering questions in Section 2: analysis, centres could use the marking instructions from the specimen question paper and the 2019 past paper. Centres and candidates can access the specimen question paper, past papers and marking instructions on SQA's website.

Project

All candidates should be issued with the 'Instructions for candidates' section from the Project coursework assessment task. This information will support them at each stage of the process. Centres should ensure that candidates show engagement with all aspects of the assessment criteria and do so independently.

All candidates must complete a flyleaf for their project which provides their personal details and allows the marker to insert the final mark. It is best to place this at the front of the project to allow the marker easy access to it.

Project packaging should be kept simple. Sketchbooks do not need to be individually wrapped and sealed. Difficult packaging can take a significant amount of time to open and re-seal, multiplied by many candidates, this can consume a lot of the marker's time. Ensure that all evidence is secured within the folder/sketchbook and parcel in a larger bundle.

Good practice with regards to the presentation of candidate projects would be to keep them clean and simple. Candidates that perform well structure their project in accordance with the instructions for candidates, which in turn mirror the marking instructions. Complicated presentation such as pull outs, fold downs and button ups etc, do not add to the candidate's mark and can sometimes make it difficult for the marker to decipher.

Centres should ensure that only relevant evidence is included in the candidate submission. Candidates should edit the evidence that they choose to submit to ensure that it is in line with the requirements of their selected topic and approach.

Candidates must ensure that they select a theme and approach which is achievable given the resources and equipment available to them. Themes should also be broad enough to give them scope for creative exploration. Candidates should agree their theme and approach with their teacher or lecturer. This is a good point to help steer candidates in a more appropriate direction if they have chosen something which is inappropriate or unachievable.

Centres should also be mindful that some themes are inappropriate for this type of submission. Some candidate projects this session were deemed to be unsuitable due to the sensitive nature of the images produced, the approaches employed by the candidate, or the themes explored.

It was evident that some centres and candidates began the coursework assessment task at the start of the academic session. Before candidates undertake the project, teachers and lecturers must ensure that they have the necessary skills and are aware of the requirements of the assessment.

To prepare candidates for undertaking this project independently, centres could give them experience of undertaking a similar type of project. This type of learning will help prepare them for this assessment task and may also help them to understand their limitations and what is achievable.

Candidates should be advised to keep their project planning simple and focused. The plan should present a very clear understanding of how the candidate intends to complete the project and the considerations that they must explore.

When exploring an idea in a photoshoot, candidates should give themselves scope to try different things. Candidates could be encouraged to document their learning and exploration of techniques, detailing how they arrived at their conclusion. Prior learning should give them confidence to understand what constitutes an effective photoshoot versus taking a whole series of identical images of the same subject.

Candidates should focus more on producing quality photographic outcomes. Their final images should be technically competent and creative in nature. Candidates could be taught this skill in their prior learning before beginning this assessment task. Candidates must also avoid producing repetitive images.

Candidates must produce 12 final images. These should be no smaller than A5 and no larger than A4. Candidates should be able to understand file optimisation and spot issues with print quality and then use this knowledge to ensure their final images are of the best possible quality.

Prior learning is a great opportunity to teach candidates how to critically evaluate their own work. Candidates must be able to identify valid strengths and weaknesses in their photographic practice and final 12 images. Good practice would be to keep these two sections separate. Candidates could use the headings in their instructions to structure their response.

Candidates should be reminded that there is a 500 word limit for the evaluation. If the word count exceeds the maximum by more than 10%, a penalty will apply.

Teachers and lecturers should continue to make use of Understanding Standards materials that are published on SQA's secure site to develop practice in the project.

Grade boundary and statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2018	2312
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Number of resulted entries in 2019	2473
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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
Maximum mark				
A	21.2%	21.2%	524	87
B	28.8%	50.0%	713	74
C	28.2%	78.2%	698	61
D	13.1%	91.3%	324	48
No award	8.7%	-	214	-

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.