External Assessment Report 2015

Subject(s)	ART AND DESIGN
Level(s)	ADVANCED HIGHER ART AND DESIGN

Comments on candidate performance

General comments

This was the last group of candidates entered for the 'old' arrangements. The new Advanced Higher course has already begun in many centres. There will be no concurrent running of the 'old' and new courses, and we are already looking ahead to the challenges and possibilities of this exciting development in the subject.

Areas in which candidates performed well

The statistics for 2014–15 marks that are included at the end of the report show that, while this year's results represent a slight levelling from the high point of last year, they show a consistent percentage of upper grades that reflects the high standards of achievement in this level of the subject. We have seen that in Enquiries of all levels there was a thoroughness and clarity of purpose that indicates a confident grasp of the course and a genuine enjoyment of the personal challenge in creating a folio. There are a number of features of the work that contribute to this success.

Advanced Higher offers the freedom of choice to fully develop a completely individual expression and, in the choices of theme and in the presentation and interpretation of ideas, it is wonderful to see the assortment and range of possibilities and approaches. We were particularly interested to see the way in which individual artistic directions appeared to emerge from experiment with materials together with concentrated research into a topic. This thorough ground work is the basis of all good projects and it is delightful to see how many candidates have personally directed this work with apparent self-confidence.

Organisation

The statement of intent is a vital part of the structure of the Enquiry and this year it was good to see the beneficial effects of this on many of folios. Candidates showed a clear understanding of the importance of presenting the group of work in the various stages of its production. Folios had been edited and numbered with important turning points in the work clearly referenced in the candidate's statement: this presentation and structuring has an important part in the marking.

Technical Skill

Any visitor to the Advanced Higher marking is immediately impressed by the technical skill shown in the folios. Refinement and finish in drawing and painting was widely on view this year: it reflects a progression through the subject that culminates at this level. In some cases the topic, such as portraiture or still life, was only a vehicle through which the candidate showed this talent for refinement and finish. IT skills such as Photoshop were equally impressive and in 3D design, and the care and skill in creating architectural models and fashion designs were far beyond the time limits of the course.

Evaluative comments

The ability to explain and make a self-critical appraisal of work has greatly improved at this level. Hopefully, the guidelines on the Statement of Intent have contributed to this improvement, but evaluation is perhaps a bigger part of education as a whole. The examining team was impressed with the way that candidates took the opportunity to assess their own performance.

Trends in subject matter

Last year's report commented on subjects that showed a reassuring interest in depicting friends and family that was countered by other projects that explore the same subject to create expressions of anxiety about body image and personal relationships. The same kind of balance of comforting and worrying topics can be seen in some of this year's work. There were a proportion of folios that looked at the natural world, both in design and expressive. Nature featured in many design projects and animals appeared in expressive work. In some folios horses or pets appeared as comforting companions, but in others they seemed like silent witnesses of environmental change and uncertainty about the future.

Emblems of Scotland

The preoccupation with Scottish identity that has been the subject of so much political discussion during this academic year is notably absent from all but a tiny number of folios. However, emblems of Scottish life continue appear in the form of Tunnocks, tartan and Irn Bru. This kitsch material has been used in both expressive and design folios with great affection and more than a touch of irony. In landscape and some design projects that use natural form there are references to a sense of delight in Scotland's environment, and there are many references to the reality of Scottish life of grittier type.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Art and design in 3D

Candidates are doing less three-dimensional work of all kinds: presentations of jewellery, sculpture, product design, ceramics and architectural modelling are seen less frequently. There are good reasons for this decline: cost and space restrictions on departments make all these creative experiences less easy to accommodate. Also, the difficulties of transporting 3D and managing sculptural projects in class are very real. However, the act of making things in the round has a special place in art education: it has a direct appeal to many candidates who are excited, not so much by an illusion in 2D, but by creating a tangible object with their hands. Some of the very best 3D work of this year was done in a small scale and produced using inexpensive materials like drinking straws, papier-mâché and box card.

IT or new media

This year saw a continuing increase in the number of candidates expressing ideas and creating design work through new media like photography, animation or Photoshop, as distinct from the more traditional art materials. The technical skill in all this work is impressive, but markers have expressed concern about the extent to which ideas have been developed.

Photography

Over the years of the development of the 'old' AH course markers have delighted in the rise of the digital camera with all its possibilities for research, documentation and expression. It is good to see candidates using their mobile phones for these purposes. This is a democratic and ubiquitous medium with none of the baggage of academic drawing, but candidates must be careful to edit and present material showing stages of research or steps in development. Without this careful selection and documentation that represents a particular direction, a project can easily lose its focus and begin to resemble a random collection of images that support an expressive or design idea in name only. The excellent and rigorous Higher Photography course has proved a grounding for many of the best Advanced Higher projects with a photography bias. Markers have appreciated examples of skilful lighting and technique and the way in which candidates have enjoyed and exploited the relative freedom that Advanced Higher offers.

Animation

Animation has been particularly impressive this year. Clearly there are an increasing number of candidates and teachers who are conversant with filming, sound and editing techniques. These are used with a skill and fluency that reflects the way in which the creative possibilities of this means of expression are being explored. The finished animations are good, but even more impressive is the work on developments and story boards. Here candidates have clearly enjoyed presenting the ideas and sometimes characters that create the narrative. In much of this work there is an also carefree mixture of traditional and new media, drawing, plasticine and paint that is sometimes missing from photography projects, but that is very much in the spirit of Advanced Higher.

Image manipulation

This heading, which covers the whole gamut of image manipulation, has become less dependent on expensive packages and effects and is well within the range of all candidates. It has been effective in developing design and expressive ideas as well as forming the basis of exciting architecture, product, fashion and most frequently graphic design projects. In the best projects of this kind Photoshop is used in conjunction with other media to develop ideas so that a range of possibilities are considered in different ways. For example, simple line drawings can illustrate compositional studies, while Photoshop is used to show blocks of shape or texture. However, when the same image is repeated many times with relatively limited changes in colour or lettering, the project loses a sense of exploration, becoming rather limited; the same solution or idea is simply shown in many different guises.

Advice to centres for preparation of future candidates

Advice to candidates on the new Advanced Higher course

Amounts and standards of work

It is important for candidates to understand that the quality of work required to pass or to achieve high marks at Advanced Higher will not change in the new course. Though the stipulation for the number of sheets submitted has been reduced in relation to the commitment to the units of the new course, this does not signal any reduction in the expectation of work. The wide gap in suggested numbers of A1 sheets of eight to 15 recognises that while some candidates may, for example, submit a concentrated group of work that includes a 3D outcome, or a DVD and would therefore need as little as eight sheets to illustrate the development of ideas; other candidates, who are exploring Expressive or Design ideas on a bigger scale, would require 15 sheets to do justice to their ideas. The stipulation refers to A1 sheets or equivalent: the equivalent allows candidates to submit work in a variety of forms and sizes such as sketch book, or 3D development work, without needing to stick to A1.

Sheet one

This introductory sheet is intended to bridge the gap between the initial research and development done in the Units and the Course work that is submitted for external marking. The sheet should perform the some of the functions of the present Statement of Intent as it explains and illustrates the intentions of the candidate. The presentation of this sheet is an important in establishing a background to the project, and it may be extensively annotated and illustrated so it conforms to the look of the whole folio. Candidates should not be misled by the fact that the sheet attains no specific mark; it has a vital part in the whole scheme of work.

Research, development and outcome

At Advanced Higher, just as in the wider professional world of Art and Design, there has never been a proscribed definition of research and development work — the two have been presented on the same page and sometimes in the same drawing. There is also no requirement for the amount of development in relation to outcome: the balance of these parts of the project is at the discretion of the candidate. The marking guidelines allow assessors to award marks in each area for either development or outcome. Submissions may show a wide range of development leading to one outcome, or contain a larger proportion of finished work than development, but candidates should be aware that the richness, variety and relevance of development is a key component of the overall grade.

Documenting development work

The process of formulating, experimenting and refining ideas is central to Advanced Higher Art and Design and it is referred to throughout the marking instructions for the new course work. Candidates should be aware that this process must be carefully presented and

documented so that, as well as explaining the evolution of the central concept behind the project, the consideration of each of the visual elements, methods, materials and techniques must also be shown. In design projects some candidates are also documenting the process of making by photographing themselves in the stages of making a model or try out to show how specific problems have been addressed. The new arrangements ask candidates to explain how they have solved problems, and this is a good way of verifying that this has been done.

Experimental work

The emphasis on documenting the process of developing work can be combined with opportunities for candidates to undertake experimental work associated with their project; marks are given specifically for trying out ideas or methods. This kind of work will sometimes involve a quite spontaneous free-thinking exploration of techniques or visual elements with relevant materials, arrangements or structures. An intuitive approach of that kind might be followed by a more self-conscious retrospective review that would document and edit the process to show what has been gained by this experimental work. Candidates should be aware that this experiment must be integrated into the whole development of ideas.

Demonstrating the influence of artists or designers

Many candidates presently use their knowledge of artists' and designers' work and practice to inspire and refine a personal creative response to the project. This influence is often demonstrated by making direct reference to specific works that have informed their own work — sometimes candidates have made sketches of parts of a work to learn a technique or to show areas of particular interest. This integration of aspects of influence is valid and useful practice in the development of ideas. However, simply copying whole works is not in the spirit of an individually-directed project.

The written Critical study

Choosing the topic

The new arrangements for the written study are more specific: they ask candidates to write about a single work or related group of works (eg a series of paintings or a fashion collection) associated with their practical project. This is a fine but significant difference: a work of art and design rather than artist and designers. It calls for a careful selection of topic. Not all works of art and design are easy to research, and candidates should be advised to choose a work that has played a part in the creation of their project and, most importantly, for which there is a reasonable amount of available information. The first part of the study can been done as a deconstruction of the work and, in the case of a design, it can discuss the structure, style and uses of the item(s).

Influence and context

The second part of the study involves an exploration of the influence and context. There will be some crossover between the two aspects of the topic, but it is important to allow candidates to explore and give examples of the way in which art and design exists in a wider context. Candidates are encouraged to research a range of context and influence: the

variety of points of influence and the ways in which they can be seen in the chosen work is important. Although this written project is quite small, it is worth 30 marks — the same proportion of marks that are given for the 'old' Art and Design Study.

Evaluation

Candidates have shown real enthusiasm for discussing their motives, intentions and ideas in relation to the project. Many candidates are also developing a capacity to be self-critical. An evaluation at this level must involve elements of detailed self- appraisal. How well have certain decisions contributed to the process? How might things have been done differently?

Statistical information: update on Courses

Number of resulted entries in 2014	555

Number of resulted entries in 2015	568

Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of Course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of Course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark	200			
A	31.9%	31.9%	181	136
B	26.4%	58.3%	150	118
C	28.3%	86.6%	161	101
D	8.5%	95.1%	48	92
No award	4.9%	-	28	-

The Course assessment functioned as intended, therefore no adjustment to grade boundaries was required.

General commentary on grade boundaries

♦ While SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which will allow a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional C boundary) and a well prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional A boundary), it is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject at every level.

♦ Each year, SQA therefore holds a grade boundary meeting for each subject at each level where it brings together all the information available (statistical and judgemental). The Principal Assessor and SQA Qualifications Manager meet with the relevant SQA Business Manager and Statistician to discuss the evidence and make decisions. The meetings are chaired by members of the management team at SQA.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the exam is more challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

♦ The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the exam is less challenging than usual, allowing the pass rate to be unaffected by this circumstance.

♦ Where standards are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

♦ An exam paper at a particular level in a subject in one year tends to have a marginally different set of grade boundaries from exam papers in that subject at that level in other years. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set in centres. If SQA has already altered a boundary in a particular year in, say, Higher Chemistry, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter boundaries in their prelim exam in Higher Chemistry. The two are not that closely related, as they do not contain identical questions.

♦ SQA's main aim is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and all levels and maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.