



Course Report 2017

Subject	Photography
Level	Higher

The statistics used in this report have been compiled before the completion of any Post Results Services.

This report provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers, lecturers and assessors in their preparation of candidates for future assessment. It 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.

Section 1: Comments on the assessment

Summary of the course assessment

Component 1: Assignment

The assignment performed as expected. The planning section shows improvement on previous years, and the research and development element supports the final project. The presentation produced the work in accordance with the standards, and the evaluation allowed the candidates to reflect on their quality and practice.

Feedback from the marking team was positive and suggested that the assignment gave candidates excellent scope for creative responses.

Section 2: Comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: Assignment

Generally, candidates produced a coherent and logical structure for the projects. The proposals have shown a marked improvement linked to well thought-out planning for the proposed theme.

Research and development has improved with candidates using research from a range of creative sources — not just photographers, but also for example fine art and graphics etc.

The themes chosen were wide ranging and creative, with many candidates taking on difficult social issues in a mature manner.

Identification of selections when carried out were good, and annotation systems supported the candidate's choices. Greater use of the contact sheets showing all the images taken by the candidate showed the wide range of work carried out and indicated how and why the choices of images had been made.

Shortlist selections again when used lead to greater clarity on what the candidate was trying to achieve.

Selection of the substrate (printing paper) on which the final images would be produced showed that the candidates were making considered decisions. Many candidates carried out test printing to identify the best type for their work.

The use of digital editing was in general satisfactory, but candidates must remember that the images must be well taken before editing is carried out.

Presentation of the final images was satisfactory.

The evaluations, when they referred to the candidate's photographic practice and their photographic work, showed a marked improvement on previous years.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: Assignment

Some of the themes selected by candidates required access to specialist resources such as competent models, make-up artists etc, and advanced photographic equipment such as studio lighting, soft boxes etc. These facilities are not generally available to the candidates, and this lack impacted on the projects. Candidates should consider what facilities they have access to when selecting their theme.

The proposals must not be written in the past tense as they then cease to be a proposal and become merely a narrative.

Basic technical issues impacted on the work of a number of candidates — focus was a recurring problem, even on static subject such as buildings and still-life projects.

Research, although in general is done quite well, was at times the bare minimum or not in any way related to the chosen theme, for example, for the theme still-life, research was on landscape photography.

Candidates produced a great deal of work, but sometimes did not indicate the choices/selections they had made or give any justification of the images chosen.

Engagement with the development work shows the candidate's understanding of both the technical and the creative. Use of symbols or coloured annotation marks is excellent, but if no key is supplied with these marks they become mere decoration.

The absence of any clear justified shortlist cost many candidates marks.

Critical reflection, when done, was generally good, but in many cases it was just a technical comment or unnecessary narrative. The reflection should link to the research and the plan.

Some of the candidates produced projects which included abuse and self-harm. These were graphic and at times challenging to mark. Centres had indicated that they were aware of these projects, but these subjects at times run very close to being unacceptable with the use of language and imagery presented.

Digital editing impacted on a number of candidates with the over-use or inappropriate use of 'sharpening'. This facility should be used with discretion. 'Vibrancy' has its place, but excessive use will devalue the image quality.

Some candidates produced excellent images within the development phase, but the final prints were of poor quality and this cost marks. Issues such as file size still impact on the final quality of images, and using non-calibrated printers leads to poor quality images.

Candidates sometimes put borders on prints, sometimes they do not. Both are acceptable, but having borders only on two sides, or top and bottom, or only one side, is not acceptable. No marks were deducted, but candidates should be made aware of accepted conventions.

The evaluation has improved, but some candidates still failed to include precise critical reflection on the photographic work and practice. Candidates still at times produce merely a narrative of what has been done.

Section 3: Advice for the preparation of future candidates

Component 1: Assignment

When selecting a theme for the project, ensure that the facilities and equipment needed to carry this out successfully are available.

Research must be directly related to the chosen theme. Use a wide range of sources when doing research, and remember that a list of web sites is not acceptable. Printed downloaded pages of technical information will not be considered research unless some form of engagement is shown.

Ensure that engagement with the development process is evidenced and indicate clearly how choices were made.

Always include a shortlist of selections and give a justification of why the selections were made.

Focus, exposure and composition are basic tenets of photography and should be applied at all times.

When presenting images, the inclusion of a single page showing the final selection gives an excellent indication of the response to the selected theme.

The use of digital editing must be done with discretion and if using a specific style, for example colour popping, justification must be made. Remember, images can be degraded as well as improved with digital editing.

File size should be adequate for the final prints, for example an A4 print would require 24.9Mb at a resolution of 300dpi. The final presentation does not have to be at A4 — this is the maximum, and smaller prints, for example A5, do not get lower marks.

Research print quality and paper types to ensure they complement the work presented.

Whilst it was pleasing to see that the conditions of assessment for coursework were adhered to in the majority of centres, there were a small number of examples where this may not have been the case. Following feedback from teachers, we have strengthened the conditions of assessment criteria for National 5 subjects and will do so for Higher and Advanced Higher. The criteria are published clearly on our website and in course materials and must be adhered to. SQA takes very seriously its obligation to ensure fairness and equity for all candidates in all qualifications through consistent application of assessment conditions and investigates all cases alerted to us where conditions may not have been met.

Grade Boundary and Statistical information:

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2016	2258
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Number of resulted entries in 2017	2214
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Statistical information: Performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	%	Cum. %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum Mark -				
A	30.0%	30.0%	664	71
B	27.9%	57.9%	618	61
C	27.8%	85.7%	615	51
D	6.6%	92.3%	146	46
No award	7.7%	-	171	-

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.