



Questions and answers

Higher Art and Design

Question paper

What is the difference between target market and target audience?

The following information is given in appendix 2 of the course support notes for Higher Art and Design:

- target audience

A particular group of consumers who are the intended audience for a graphic design, advertisement or production.

- target market

A particular group of consumers who are the intended market for a product, jewellery or fashion design, or the intended users of an environmental, architectural or interior design

When discussing materials as a prompt, will candidates be penalised for mentioning techniques as part of their answers?

SQA examiners do not penalise candidates when awarding marks. Candidates can access marks when responding to a 'materials' prompt by referring to techniques, as long as the response demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the use of materials. Appendix 2 of the course support notes provides further information on the types of points that could be expanded and explained in detail for each prompt.

What is the marking tolerance applied to papers?

The approach to setting tolerances is very specific to individual components, considering the nature of the assessment instrument and the degree of interpretation and judgement required, with close consideration of the marking instructions.

The detail of what the tolerances are for each subject and level is specific to each qualification and is not something that is published or widely shared.

What are your thoughts on the poor performance in the QP where the National Mean average in this component is below the pass threshold and the impact this is having on pupil attainment. Are you aware that most learners are performing better in other written based Higher QP's. Should evaluative writing be the only measure of subject understanding? What are your thoughts and how do you plan to bridge this attainment gap particularly from N5 to Higher where only 18% of pupils across Scotland manage to convert an A pass at N5 to an A pass at Higher.

The performance in the question paper component is an area we are keen to improve on. This is why we hosted the webinar this year and have been providing updated resources for this component over the past few years. Evidence has shown that there are a number of factors as to why performance has been impacted for this component. When the modifications were removed from the assessments in 2024, Higher Art and Design candidates found the return to both sections of the question paper particularly challenging. In recognition of this, we adjusted the grade boundaries in 2024 to take account of this. Performance in the 2025 question paper showed significant improvement, and we're hopeful that this trend will continue for future examinations.

It's important to note that the attainment statistics for 2025 are provisional, as the appeals data is still to be included. We have continued to see an increase of candidates achieving an A in Higher Art and Design over the past few years.

Attainment across A and C grades has remained stable since 2022, which is positive to see, especially considering the increase of entries since 2019. This is not to say that we don't recognise the concerns on attainment, particularly for the question paper, and we will continue to provide support to centres through our Understanding Standards programme.

We are in the early stages of planning a programme to reform National Courses and their assessments. The Scottish Government has published a timeline for curriculum, qualifications and assessment reform. This means that no immediate changes will be made to Art and Design assessments until the scope of the reform programme is fully defined. Once this programme is in place, we will consult widely to understand what is needed for the reformed Art and Design qualifications.

Examination Exceptional Circumstances Consideration Service

Please can you clarify what centres are expected to send as evidence when a student has been unable to sit the written exam due to illness. Are in class tests and activities to be sent?

For any exceptional circumstances examination request, centres are required to submit alternative academic evidence for the question paper. The following are examples of the types of evidence that could be considered:

- prelims or mock exams
- end-of-topic assessments
- performance
- classwork

Information on the exceptional circumstances examination services can be found on our website. We also provide guidance to centres via the SQA Connect portal.

If only the prelim is considered robust enough evidence of their performance under exam conditions, please can it be explained, how the prelim, marking instructions, and marking of the prelim can be executed in a manner considered robust enough for the evidence to be taken into consideration?

Prelims or mock exams are likely to be the most reliable indicator of a performance in a question paper component, as these tend to reflect the skills, knowledge and understanding assessed in this component. However, other types of evidence as listed above can also be submitted if the centre feels it can help to demonstrate the candidate's knowledge and understanding. The most robust examples of prelims or mock exams will be clearly aligned to the course specification, content, level of demand, and assessment conditions as exemplified in the specimen question papers and past papers.

Is a half prelim acceptable when only expressive or design is included?

If a centre only has a half prelim, such as only the expressive section or design section, they can submit this, and the senior examining team will make a judgement on how well this demonstrates the candidate's knowledge and understanding for this component. Where possible however, prelims that align with past papers and samples across both areas of the course are likely to be the most reliable indicator of a candidate's performance.

When the centre has made their own prelim and marking instructions based upon SQA examples, are there specific features that cannot be adapted thus making it unacceptable to submit as evidence?

Any SQA papers (e.g. past papers or specimen papers) that are in the public domain can be readily accessed by learners. These cannot be used in their entirety as the

only evidence for exceptional circumstances consideration. However, elements of these can be incorporated into prelims, mock assessments or class tests.

If a centre marks their prelim inaccurately, does the student gain zero marks even though an inaccurate mark during the marking of the real exam would have been picked up by a team leader?

Alternative evidence for an exceptional circumstances examination request is not 'marked' in the same way that the externally assessed exam is marked. The evidence is reviewed alongside any externally assessed coursework, so that senior examiners can make a judgement on the overall grade for that candidate. A senior examiner will make a judgement based on the evidence from the candidate, and not the marks awarded by the original teacher.

Useful links

- [Higher Art and Design webpage](#)
- [National Qualifications past papers and marking instructions](#)
- [SQA Academy Art and Design question paper courses](#)
- [Understanding Standards – question paper examples with commentaries](#)
- [Understanding Standards – audio presentations](#)