



Course report 2025

National 5 Art and Design

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. You should read the report with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

We compiled the statistics in this report before we completed the 2025 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 10,337

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 11,227

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	4,803	42.8	42.8	175
B	3,398	30.3	73.0	150
C	2,227	19.8	92.9	125
D	639	5.7	98.6	100
No award	160	1.4	100%	Not applicable

We have not applied rounding to these statistics.

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in the appendix.

In this report:

- 'most' means greater than or equal to 70%
- 'many' means 50% to 69%
- 'some' means 25% to 49%
- 'a few' means less than 25%

You can find statistical reports on the [statistics and information](#) page of our website.

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

The National 5 Art and Design question paper for 2024–25 was updated to reduce the exam duration and the number of marks available. The question paper now has 40 marks, which is scaled to 50 to maintain 20% weighting in the overall course assessment. Feedback from the marking team, centres and candidates indicated that the question paper was received positively and was fair in terms of course coverage and overall level of demand. Marker feedback and the statistical data indicate that all questions generated a wide range of marks from candidates, and discriminated effectively between candidates with different levels of understanding.

In response to the mandatory questions, candidates selected a range of works by historical and contemporary artists and designers. In expressive art studies, Frida Kahlo, Peter Howson, Ken Currie, Wayne Thiebaud, Audrey Flack and Ralph Goings were popular. In design studies, works by Alphonse Mucha, A M Cassandre, Saul Bass and Milton Glaser continued to be popular in graphic design, while in jewellery design, most candidates chose works by René Lalique or Peter Chang.

The most popular optional questions in section 1 were:

- question 4 — ‘Still Life #29’ by Tom Wesselmann
- question 2 — ‘Winter Backgardens, Islington’ by Melissa Scott-Miller

The most popular optional questions in section 2 were:

- question 8 — ‘Poster Design’ by Monet Alyssa
- question 10 — ‘Polaroid Instant Camera’ by Polaroid

The number of candidates answering question 9, which focuses on fashion and textiles, increased from previous years. As in previous years, question 5, which focuses on sculpture, and question 12, which focuses on architecture, were the least answered questions.

Expressive and design portfolios

The marking teams fed back positively on the quality of the expressive and design portfolios presented, and commented on the generally high standard of work submitted.

It is evident that centres understand the national standard for National 5 Art and Design. Markers from both expressive and design teams noted there were only a few portfolios submitted that did not meet the standard required. Overall, most candidates were presented at the correct level, with most of these candidates accessing the high and mid-range mark levels.

The marking teams for both components commented that the evaluations were of a better standard than in previous years. However, many candidates still submitted descriptive evaluations. Some candidates lacked appropriate use of art and design terminology. Markers noted that the quality of some evaluations did not reflect the quality of the candidates' practical work.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

The marking team saw mixed responses to the question paper. The highest performing candidates demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding, and were able to manage their time effectively to make focused, justified comments in response to the questions. In response to the mandatory questions, most candidates applied knowledge and understanding of specific art and design works.

Well-prepared candidates who demonstrated sound knowledge and understanding of art and design terminology were able to access the full range of marks available. These candidates applied relevant, factual information to the questions asked. Many candidates accessed the full range of marks for questions 1(b) and 7(b), identifying two influences on the artist and designer they had studied, and describing how these influences could be seen in the artist's and designer's work.

Some candidates made a good attempt at the optional questions in both sections of the paper, demonstrating a good knowledge and understanding of art and design concepts, and an understanding of the meaning of the question prompts. These candidates were able to apply art and design terminology effectively to make justified comments. The best responses demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of all the prompts in the question.

Many candidates who answered question 3(a), 'Sojourn' by Andrea Kowch, demonstrated a good understanding of the prompts 'subject matter', 'media handling and/or techniques', and 'mood and atmosphere'. Many candidates who attempted question 6(a), 'The Grange, Rottingdean' by Mabel Pryde, demonstrated good understanding of the prompts 'composition', 'pattern', and 'mood and atmosphere'. Many candidates justified their personal opinions well in question 6(b), where they were asked what the painting communicated to them.

Many candidates who attempted question 10(a), 'Polaroid Instant Camera' by Polaroid, demonstrated a good understanding of the prompts 'fitness for purpose' and 'materials'. Some candidates demonstrated good understanding of the prompts 'sources of inspiration', 'visual impact' and 'decoration' when referring to 'Cruella de Vil costume design' by Jenny Beavan in question 9(a). Many candidates made a good attempt at question 9(b), giving justified reasons on what the costume design communicated to them.

Expressive portfolio

Most candidates accessed 10 marks for highly relevant analytical drawings and investigative research appropriate to their selected theme.

There were many personal, interesting and varied themes and choices of subject matter. It was positive to see candidates focusing on areas that were of personal interest to them. It was clear that many candidates had received clear guidance from their teachers on how to approach their portfolios.

Many candidates performed well when they selected their own personal themes using the materials and media that they felt most confident with, and that was most appropriate to their style, technique and/or approach.

Many candidates accessed the highest mark ranges when following the minimum guidance of two investigation studies, two development studies and a final piece for their portfolios. In these cases, the process was streamlined, clear and well presented. Most candidates had clear layout of work across the portfolio. A few candidates mounted their portfolios on A1, which looked streamlined.

Many candidates who used one or two materials, and developed these, were focused, showed refinement of skills and performed well. Many candidates appeared to work in media that connected to their strengths rather than unnecessarily exploring a variety of media.

Material and media handling were impressive at this level, and many candidates demonstrated strong drawing skills, exciting painting techniques and well-executed final pieces.

Most candidates selected an appropriate scale for their final artwork, while playing to their strengths in terms of style and media handling. Strong work was seen in final artworks where candidates worked at varying scales from A4 and smaller through to some A2 pieces.

Evaluations showed improvement this year, with better use of art terminology and reflective comments. However, descriptive, rather than evaluative, language was still evident in some evaluations. Many candidates benefited from using bullet points in their responses.

Design portfolio

Most candidates accessed 10 marks for highly relevant analytical drawings and investigative research appropriate to their design brief and theme.

Most candidates that had a clear design brief could focus on the assessment task, and in turn perform well. Many candidates that experimented and developed confidence with using specific materials and techniques demonstrated their skills well, and presented refined portfolios.

Most candidates had clear and focused design briefs that were achievable. They used clear and relevant inspirational images that allowed them to demonstrate strong visual continuity throughout their portfolios. Most candidates accessed full marks for highly relevant thematic imagery including three pieces of appropriate market research.

Many candidates who showed continuity through a clear single line of enquiry and considered process performed well. 3D projects continued to give candidates more scope for exploring issues of functionality.

Some candidates submitted hand-drawn graphic design, demonstrating an understanding of how to best to utilise their strengths rather than relying solely on digital methods. There was a wide range of more traditional graphics across submissions. Many candidates that used pen and paint to create graphic solutions, in combination with developing scale, lettering, layout and colour, were highly successful.

Some candidates used software such as Photoshop or Procreate, which allowed them to explore surface patterns, colour and text. Some candidates successfully incorporated drawings, collage and printmaking techniques with digital technology to develop designs.

Some candidates made good use of ICT to produce design development ideas in other areas of design. By photographing samples, candidates could explore placement, scale and pattern quickly and effectively.

Pattern creation with a specific brief, and where the portfolio showed strong visual continuity all the way to the solution, performed well. It was helpful to see patterns shown in context at the development stage, especially if it was on a 3D outcome.

Many 3D portfolios continued to perform well, particularly body adornment and ceramics portfolios that demonstrated a high level of skill and consideration of the design issues, particularly function. This was shown through 3D models and skilful presentation of concepts and ideas.

It was impressive to see a range of architecture portfolios inspired by animals, sea life and organic forms. Many candidates made models out of card, understood plans and elevations, and took the best of these developments into a final design solution.

Many candidates used SketchUp to facilitate 3D hand-built models. When used, it was often highly effective as digital surface developments alongside elevations from various angles could be seen.

Many candidates presented creative solutions using paper and card. Paper manipulation appeared in a wide range of portfolios including hat design, lighting and architecture. Paper manipulation and concept models supported development sketches and drawn ideas.

Markers commented that many design evaluations were stronger than in previous years, with clearer demonstration of understanding design, and appropriate terminology. Many reflective comments were well justified rather than just descriptive.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Some candidates did not respond fully to all three prompts in a question, and did not use appropriate art and design terminology. The marking team noted that some responses to question 1(a) and question 7(a) appeared to be memorised, and candidates were not answering the prompts in the questions. Many candidates demonstrated limited knowledge and understanding of how to respond to unseen prompts and images.

In response to the mandatory questions 1 and 7, some candidates gave speculative responses, sometimes containing factually incorrect information. For a few candidates, the selected artworks or designs did not offer scope to answer the question effectively for a candidate at National 5 level. It should be noted that questions 1 and 7 test knowledge and understanding of artworks and designs that candidates have previously studied. It appeared that some candidates lacked the underpinning knowledge to attempt the mandatory questions effectively.

Subject-specific terms that candidates misunderstood or misconstrued included:

- Question 4(a) — ‘composition’ — Demonstrated understanding was limited, with some candidates giving a description of subject matter.
- Question 1(a) and question 2(a) — ‘line’ — Many candidates demonstrated limited understanding of line and could not describe how line defines shapes, creates patterns or textures, and suggests form. Some candidates lacked understanding of the effect of leading lines.
- Question 2(a) — ‘subject matter’ — Many candidates provided a list of what was in the artwork that was not fully explained.
- Question 4(a), question 8(a) and question 10(a) — ‘style’ — Some candidates demonstrated a lack of knowledge and understanding of style.

Question 4 (Still Life #29 by Tom Wesselmann) was the most attempted optional question in section 1. Many candidates demonstrated lack of knowledge and understanding of viewpoint, focal point, perspective and balance in relation to the

composition. Many identified an object as the focal point but did not fully justify why this object was the focal point. The prompt 'colour' has in previous years been answered well, but many candidates did not demonstrate understanding of the effect of warm and cold colours, and complementary colours, in response to this artwork. Most candidates did not access any marks in question 4(b), demonstrating a lack of knowledge and understanding of style.

Question 8 (Poster Design by Monet Alyssa) was the most attempted optional question in section 2. When responding to 'imagery', many candidates listed what they could see in the poster and appeared to have difficulty relating imagery to symbolism. Many candidates did not describe the visual elements used to create the imagery, or the way the imagery appealed to the target audience. Many candidates did not demonstrate understanding of how the imagery created visual impact. Most candidates demonstrated limited understanding of lettering in relation to graphic design. Many candidates referred to sans serif lettering, but did not show understanding of this, or explain the effect. Most candidates did not access any marks in question 8(b), demonstrating poor knowledge and understanding of style.

Many candidates had difficulty accessing marks in part (b) of the optional questions. This part of the question asks candidates to give their opinion on a specific aspect of the artwork or design, and many had difficulty giving valid, justified personal opinions relating to the question. Some candidates did not respond to this part of the question.

Expressive portfolio

A few centres adopted an approach where all candidates followed the same process, using identical materials and techniques, often with very similar subject matter. This 'one size fits all' approach can inhibit personal choice. It can result in candidates working with materials and techniques that they find challenging and gives little opportunity to demonstrate personal choice and creativity.

Some candidates' portfolios would have benefited from being edited in line with the minimum guidance, rather than including additional compositions or developments of

a lesser skill level. The layout of some portfolios made it difficult to identify what was being presented for investigation, development and the final piece.

For a few candidates, the media handling and techniques did not demonstrate the appropriate skill level through the various stages of the portfolio. This could be due to candidates changing the choice of media and/or techniques, selecting media and/or techniques that were too challenging for them, or where they lack confidence or skill to refine them.

The choice of theme hindered some candidates, especially where they had selected and carried out studies of objects that were too challenging, or not fully considered.

For some candidates, the exploration of compositions could sometimes be too similar, with only small changes to the position of objects. Candidates should be encouraged to consider different viewpoints to further develop their theme.

A few final pieces were less resolved than earlier development studies, with candidates regressing in terms of quality, and struggling to achieve a comparable level of finish. This was especially evident in portfolios where candidates had chosen to do larger-scale work.

A few candidates appeared to have issues with time management, resulting in incomplete pieces of work or portfolios, especially in relation to the final piece.

Markers noted that some evaluations were descriptive and contained descriptive information of the subject matter and the techniques used rather than reflecting on decisions made and the success or challenges of the work.

Design portfolio

A few candidates had confused design briefs, for instance, stating in their design brief that they were designing a product, but instead creating a surface pattern for the product.

Some portfolios included unnecessary work, making the 'single line of enquiry' less effective and at times difficult to identify. Some candidates submitted portfolios with a

large amount of thematic imagery, which made the process confusing and less concise.

A few candidates submitted a small amount of market research, which resulted in them not being able to access all the marks available.

A few centres had created a bank of inspiration and market research images for candidates to choose from. This can limit the candidates' choices and creativity.

A few portfolios lacked visual continuity and effective refinement of the design idea, leading to a weak process. In a few portfolios, the final design solution did not relate to the earlier theme or development.

A few digital graphic design portfolios explored more than one line of development, which had a negative impact on the process marks. A few candidates moved through the graphic design development process without clear indication of how the idea evolved, or with very minor changes that did not develop layout and/or scale.

Some graphic design portfolios did not demonstrate consideration of the use of images, layout and typography. In some graphic design portfolios, typography was not fully considered in the design process. A few portfolios that used second hand sources for their graphic design imagery, although permissible, were repetitive and did not demonstrate development of the candidates' design ideas.

Some portfolios with repeat pattern lacked experimentation with scale and a demonstrated understanding of a proper pattern repeat. Where the candidates went through a centre-devised list of instructions or techniques, there was little personal ownership of ideas and development. Some designs became unrecognisable from the original research and theme due to the overuse of IT packages.

A few candidates tackling repeat pattern included too much in their developments, which impacted the marks awarded for process, as the single line of enquiry was lost.

Some design briefs for repeat pattern ask for the same pattern in several different contexts, such as a mug, a t-shirt and shoes. These types of design brief are too ambitious for most candidates at this level.

Some architecture portfolios did not demonstrate consideration of functional elements of the building, such as how it would be accessed or used.

Some candidates did not explore how their 3D design fitted ergonomically to the body, or demonstrate consideration of function, such as how the piece could be taken on and off the body.

A few candidates mounted samples that were not used in any development ideas. A few candidates used software that they were not very proficient with, leading to a final design with poor refinement.

Some candidates presented design solutions that were very similar to developments, or had unclear photos that made it hard to see changes between the developments and the final design. Some candidates selected weaker development concepts to refine for the final design.

Some candidates used simple language in their evaluations, and did not evaluate their work throughout the portfolio. Some candidates repeated the design brief, and evaluative comments did not appear until midway through the evaluations.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

The format for the National 5 Art and Design question paper has been updated from session 2024–25 onwards. Centres can access the updated specimen question paper on the National 5 Art and Design [subject page](#) on our website.

Teachers and lecturers can access the ‘Changes to the 2025 Question Paper — presentation with audio’ on the ‘Understanding Standards’ section of the National 5 Art and Design subject page.

The National 5 Art and Design question paper course on SQA Academy aims to help teachers and lecturers to understand the question paper. The course is free and provides information and guidance, as well as interactive marking exercises. You can access it through the ‘Course support’ section of the National 5 Art and Design subject page.

Candidates should be familiar with the art and design terminology they will encounter in the question paper. The course specification contains a list of terms. Appendix 2 of the course specification gives further detail on how candidates could interpret and develop these subject-specific terms in their responses.

Centres should allocate appropriate time to preparing candidates for the question paper.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to explain where in the work the prompt can be seen, and what effect the prompt has on the work. Candidates must fully justify each point they make, demonstrating their understanding and knowledge of art and design terminology at National 5 level.

Candidates should have opportunities to develop their exam techniques so that they can answer questions effectively and manage their time during the exam.

Teachers, lecturers and candidates can access past papers and marking instructions on SQA's website to help them understand the level of response required, and how the question paper is marked. Examples of candidate responses and commentaries are also available on SQA's [Understanding Standards](#) website.

Responses to questions 1 and 7 should demonstrate that candidates have previously studied the works selected. Comments must be based on factually correct information and show appropriate knowledge and understanding.

Centres should be mindful that the artworks and designs the candidates choose for the mandatory questions give them opportunity to demonstrate enough knowledge and understanding to gain marks. Selecting artworks or designs for which very little information is available could cause issues for candidates.

Centres should consider special arrangements for candidates whose writing is so illegible that it may disadvantage them in a written examination.

General portfolio guidance

Requirements

Centres should reference the current portfolio guidance, focusing on the streamlined minimum guidance. This guidance provides clear approaches that allow candidates to access the highest range of marks.

Portfolios should not include more work than is necessary. A succinct and focused approach is often more effective and less time-consuming for the candidate as it allows them to focus on producing the highest quality work.

Candidates should edit the portfolio to only include the strongest and most relevant work.

Portfolios should include only one line of development. Work that has no connection to the final piece should not be included, as this can impact the candidate's ability to access the highest process marks.

Approach

While it is practical for centres to place some limitations on candidates at this level, very formulaic 'house style' approaches should be avoided. Candidates should have scope for personalisation and choice.

Evaluation

Candidates should use succinct, evaluative language and spend appropriate time working on their evaluations. Centres can consider using a word bank to support the appropriate use of art and design terminology. However, it should be noted that writing frames or model answers must not be used for the evaluations.

Candidates should not change the format of the evaluation template, including reducing the font size, as this makes it very difficult to read.

Candidates should type evaluations if possible, as handwritten text can be difficult to read.

Candidates should check that the correct evaluation is attached to each portfolio.

Layout and presentation

Candidates should present their portfolios in a concise way. Portfolios can be presented in different ways, such as two or three A2 sheets, or one A1 sheet.

There is no need for candidates to fill every sheet of their portfolio or fill out empty spaces on the sheets.

Centres should help candidates ensure that the work is stuck down securely and appropriately. Consider adding paper between sheets to protect work or prevent sheets from sticking together.

Candidates can include I, D, S labels next to each part of the portfolio to identify investigation, development and solution. This clarity can be particularly helpful when work is mounted over one or two sheets.

Benchmark portfolios and commentaries

Examples of expressive portfolios and commentaries are available on the [Understanding Standards](#) website.

You can access examples of design portfolios and commentaries on SQA's secure site.

Expressive portfolio

Approach and investigation

Asking all candidates to produce identical or very similar work with little or no clear candidate choice can disadvantage candidates, as it limits evidence of individual creative responses.

Centres should ensure flexibility within themes to encourage personalisation and creativity.

Teachers and lecturers should encourage candidates to select a clear theme with simple yet effective subject matter.

Media and techniques

Centres are encouraged to let candidates explore media and/or techniques of their choice in more depth. The purpose is to refine skills, rather than use too many different media and/or techniques with little refinement.

There is no requirement to produce a painting as a final piece if a candidate's strength and preference is using dry media. Likewise, there is no need for a candidate to work in colour if their strength is working with tone.

Candidates should be encouraged to play to their strengths. Centres should ensure that they use suitable materials and work at an appropriate scale.

Development

Candidates should explore and vary viewpoint, scale and framing when developing their idea.

Candidates should consider how the background contributes to the composition. For example, does leaving an area blank benefit the artwork and relate to the theme?

Final piece

It is not necessary for a candidate to produce an A2 final artwork if they are more confident working on a smaller scale, for example, A4 or A5.

Candidates should be encouraged to make their final piece their strongest piece of artwork.

Design portfolio

Design brief

Candidates should keep design briefs simple and focus on one thing to design.

Candidates should agree a brief with their teacher or lecturer that is clear and concise, and that highlights aims, requirements and opportunities.

There is often a correlation between the quality of a design portfolio and the candidate's understanding of the design brief.

Approach and investigation

Centres are encouraged to adopt a 'less is more' approach. A clear starting point is often helpful to refine candidate development towards an effective design solution.

Candidates should find their own thematic and market research images.

Over-direction from centres can lead to very similar outcomes between candidates, making the process appear void of candidate voice or creativity.

Candidates can access the full range of marks by including three appropriate market research images. Including fewer than three often shows a lack of depth in research, and can impact the number of marks a candidate can access.

Image banks for investigation images and market research remove candidate personalisation and decision making, and do not encourage creativity — which is the key focus of the course.

Limited colour palettes or colourways can work well for keeping a tight line of development through colour.

Expressive drawing is not a requirement in the design portfolio. Drawing for design can have an important place. This is a different type of drawing that is used to explore shape, form or pattern.

The link between research and development is key, and it is vital that candidates keep sight of their research material. There is a fine line between repetition and one line of enquiry. Considering the questions that a design brief asks helps to combat repetition.

Media and technology

Candidates should play to their strengths. Using technology can be a great tool but candidates should consider if they are able to produce stronger work without it.

There is no need to digitise hand-drawn work for graphics, illustration, textiles or repeat pattern. However, if the candidate chooses to do so, they should take care not to lose beautiful details of handmade techniques.

The use of technology can be inspiring and give candidates the opportunity to develop their skills and understanding of what the design process can be. Centres should take care to ensure candidates are using technology appropriately in their portfolios. For example, digital colouring in may limit candidates' creative potential, whereas layering or developing individual ideas can prove more successful in demonstrating skill and technique.

Development

A clear and sequential process of changing and improving a design idea can help candidates reach a well-resolved final design solution.

A structured process often benefits candidates, but the process should still allow for personalisation and choice. This is particularly important when using IT, as a heavily restricted process throughout the development stage can stifle creativity.

Well-considered developments are usually more effective than numerous subtle changes.

Including photographs of the candidate making the design solution does not count as design development and has no relevance to the portfolio.

Candidates should be reminded to address function, for example, in lighting effects, readability or wearability.

Solution

3D solutions should be shown from multiple viewpoints. If the design is to be worn by a person, candidates could use a model.

Candidates should present their solution clearly, with well-lit photographs where appropriate.

Digital final design solutions should be in a high resolution to maintain quality.

Layout and presentation

Aim for a clear presentation with clearly labelled development to help guide the marker; for example, consider using arrows to help show the process.

There is no need to fill empty space with additional work that is not relevant.

It can be helpful to identify on research images where shapes are taken for motifs.

Appendix: general commentary on grade boundaries

Our main aim when setting grade boundaries is to be fair to candidates across all subjects and levels and to maintain comparable standards across the years, even as arrangements evolve and change.

For most National Courses, we aim to set examinations and other external assessments and create marking instructions that allow:

- a competent candidate to score a minimum of 50% of the available marks (the notional grade C boundary)
- a well-prepared, very competent candidate to score at least 70% of the available marks (the notional grade A boundary)

It is very challenging to get the standard on target every year, in every subject, at every level. Therefore, we hold a grade boundary meeting for each course to bring together all the information available (statistical and qualitative) and to make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Members of our Executive Management Team normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors utilise their subject expertise to evaluate the performance of the assessment and propose suitable grade boundaries based on the full range of evidence. We can adjust the grade boundaries as a result of the discussion at these meetings. This allows the pass rate to be unaffected in circumstances where there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more, or less, difficult than usual.

- The grade boundaries can be adjusted downwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- The grade boundaries can be adjusted upwards if there is evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- Where levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, similar grade boundaries are maintained.

Every year, we evaluate the performance of our assessments in a fair way, while ensuring standards are maintained so that our qualifications remain credible. To do this, we measure evidence of candidates' knowledge and skills against the national standard.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [Awarding and Grading for National Courses Policy](#).