

Course report 2026

Higher Photography, SCQF level 6

We've written this report for teachers and lecturers. We recommend you read this with the published course assessment documents and marking instructions.

The report:

- provides a summary of how each course component performed
- highlights areas of the question paper and coursework where candidates performed well and areas where they did not perform well
- has advice you might find useful when preparing candidates for assessment

We collect and prepare the statistics in course reports before we complete the appeals process.

Statistical and grade boundary information

Course entries

Number of resulted entries in 2025: 2,922

Number of resulted entries in 2026: 2,937

Distribution of course awards (including minimum mark to achieve each grade)

Course award	Number of candidates	Percentage	Cumulative percentage	Minimum mark required
A	470	16.0	16.0	91
B	1,120	38.1	54.1	78
C	1,058	36.0	90.2	65
D	232	7.9	98.1	52
No award	57	1.9	100	Not applicable

We've not applied rounding to these statistics.

In this report:

- 'Most' means greater than or equal to 70%.
- 'Many' means 50% to 69%.
- 'Some' means 25% to 49%.
- 'Few' or 'a few' means less than 25%.

You can find [statistical reports](#) on our website.

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's 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 make final decisions on grade boundaries based on this information. Senior Qualifications Scotland staff normally chair these meetings.

Principal assessors use 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.

- We can adjust the grade boundaries downwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been more difficult than usual.
- We can adjust the grade boundaries upwards if there's evidence that the question paper or other assessment has been less difficult than usual.
- If levels of difficulty are comparable to previous years, we maintain similar grade boundaries.

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](#).

How the course assessment performed

Question paper

The question paper differentiated candidates appropriately and performed in line with expectations. It sampled a broad range of mandatory course content while minimising predictability and provided appropriate demand. The question paper performed as intended. Marker feedback indicated the paper was balanced, fair and in line with the course specification.

Markers commented that the level of demand in the multiple-choice section was the same as in previous years. The images in section 2 provided opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of technical and creative photographic practice.

Project

The project performed as intended and remained consistent with national standards. As in previous years, it provided candidates with opportunities to demonstrate the technical and creative skills they developed throughout the course.

The assessment differentiated effectively across the various sections of the project, particularly in investigative research, critical reflection and evaluation, where stronger candidates were able to demonstrate greater depth of understanding and application.

Candidate responses reflected a broad range of photographic themes and approaches.

How candidates performed

Areas where candidates performed well

Question paper

Candidate performance in the multiple-choice section (section 1) was generally strong. Most candidates attempted all questions, and many candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the mandatory course content.

Many candidates demonstrated confidence in applying their knowledge and understanding of photographic practice when responding to the questions in the analysis section (section 2). Most candidates used accurate photographic terminology when responding to this section of the question paper.

Most candidates responded well to question 11(a) and question 11(d), demonstrating their understanding of the technical and creative aspects of the image provided.

Responses to question 12 were generally more structured than in previous years. Many candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of how to provide extended responses and apply their photographic knowledge to an unfamiliar image.

Project

Candidates' performance in the project was strong. Markers noted stronger planning by candidates, more focused investigative research, and greater personal engagement with selected themes. Many candidates produced well-structured projects that demonstrated a clear line of development from initial planning through to the final images.

Most candidates selected themes and approaches that were appropriate to their level of skill and available resources. Their investigative research was generally relevant to the selected approaches. In many projects, candidates demonstrated their clear understanding of the influences on the work of relevant photographers, identifying and evidencing these influences through specific examples of the photographers' work. Development work was well organised, with many candidates using contact

sheets, edits and reflective comments to demonstrate their refinement process and decision-making throughout the project.

Most candidates produced a technically competent and creative body of photographic work. Their final image selections were generally well presented, and there was a stronger performance in both the technical and creative quality of the final prints. Many projects demonstrated greater creativity, stronger visual coherence and a wide range of photographic approaches.

Areas where candidates did not perform well

Question paper

In question 11(b), many candidates explained the photographer's use of colour appropriately. However, candidate responses relating to pattern were often descriptive and did not fully address the command word 'explain'. Candidates who explained the effect of pattern in relation to the specific image were able to access the full range of marks.

In question 11(c), many candidates identified relevant aspects of the image but focused on composition or visual elements rather than the camera controls specified in the question. Some responses described camera controls accurately but did not explain their effect on the image provided. Candidates who linked their explanation directly to the image demonstrated a greater depth of understanding and were able to access the available marks.

Question 12 continued to provide candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate a broader understanding of technical and creative photographic practice. Most candidates identified relevant technical and creative factors within the image. Candidates who achieved high marks supported each response with a valid justification. Many candidates provided descriptive responses that tended to identify techniques without fully explaining their contribution to the image.

Project

Most candidates selected themes that provided appropriate opportunities to demonstrate their technical and creative skills. However, some themes were too

narrow to support sufficient creative exploration or limited the candidate's opportunities to demonstrate skilled photographic approaches.

Planning and investigative research continued to improve overall. However, some candidates produced generic planning that was not relevant to their project or presented research that described the photographer's biography rather than explaining how specific influences informed the photographer's practice. Candidates who identified a relevant influence and clearly linked it to a piece of the photographer's practice were able to access the higher mark ranges.

Most candidates produced a coherent body of photographic development and a technically competent set of final images. A few candidates' final image selections were repetitive or did not represent the strongest photographic outcomes from the body of work, leading to missed opportunities to access all marks. In a few projects, technical factors such as focus, exposure, white balance, or print quality reduced the overall standard of the final prints. Some candidates chose to print beyond the maximum capability for the file size, resulting in reduced image quality.

The evaluation continued to be one of the more demanding aspects of the project. Many candidates were able to gain marks for evaluating their photographic practice by reflecting on areas such as planning, decision-making and refinement. However, fewer candidates successfully evaluated their final printed images. Many candidates described the process of creating the photographs rather than critically evaluating the final prints. Candidates who achieved the higher mark ranges clearly distinguished between these two aspects of the evaluation and supported their comments on the final prints with relevant photographic justification.

Preparing candidates for assessment

Question paper

You should continue to develop candidates' understanding of photographic terminology and encourage them to apply this knowledge to unfamiliar images. You can use past question papers, the specimen question paper and published marking instructions to help candidates become familiar with the range of question styles and command words used in both sections of the question paper. You can find the past papers and specimen question paper on the [Photography subject page](#) on our website.

You should provide opportunities for candidates to analyse unfamiliar images throughout the course so they can develop the analytical skills required for questions 11 and 12. You should teach candidates to distinguish between the command words identify, explain and discuss.

Candidates should practise developing responses that apply their knowledge directly to an image provided, explaining the effect of technical and creative decisions rather than describing photographic features that are not relevant to the image.

Project

You should encourage candidates to select project themes that provide sufficient opportunity for technical and creative exploration, while also being realistic and achievable within the available time and resources. Effective planning by candidates should focus on the practical and creative considerations that are directly relevant to their selected approach.

Candidates should present investigative research that goes beyond describing the work of photographers by explaining how relevant influences have informed the photographer's own work or photographic practice.

You should provide regular opportunities for candidates to refine their photographic work through reflection, review and informed decision-making. Candidates should be encouraged to select a final set of images that demonstrates both technical

competence and creative variety, ensuring that the images work cohesively as a series and represent the strongest outcomes from their body of work.

You should continue to develop candidates' evaluative skills throughout the course by encouraging them to reflect critically on both their photographic practice and printed images. Candidates who can identify strengths and areas for improvement, supported by relevant justification linked to their final printed images, are better placed to access the higher mark ranges.

From the 2026-27 session, centres will have the option of submitting the project plan, body of photographic work, and evaluation electronically through the digital coursework submission service. Centres may choose to submit all candidate evidence digitally, traditionally by uplift, or a combination of both methods. For instance, some candidates in their class may submit digitally, and some may submit all their evidence as hard copy. Final images must be submitted as hard copies for all candidates, including those who submit the remainder of their evidence digitally. Guidance on digital submissions will be available later this session.