Course Report 2018

Subject	Art and Design (Design) and Art and Design (Expressive)
Level	Advanced Higher

This report provides information on the performance of candidates. 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. It would be helpful to read this report in conjunction with the published assessment documents and marking instructions.

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

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Component 1: portfolio

Summary of the course assessment

After last year's high-water mark of A grades in both expressive and design, it was always likely that 2018 would mark a levelling off in results. This year's percentages, though still impressive, have returned to a more typical level and again we have seen outstanding Advanced Higher Art and Design work with many candidates demonstrating creative energy and ambition. A recently appointed marker commented, 'It is really encouraging to see the subject at Advanced Higher in such a vibrant state'.

Flexible course
From expansive portfolios that showed how candidates could develop ideas in a range of media, to contained schemes of work that reflected what can be done on a smaller scale by maintaining focus on the chosen theme; the course continues to provide opportunities for a diverse range of ambitious approaches while also allowing a more concentrated group of work that develops a singular creative idea.

Fly leaf
Each portfolio at Advanced Higher Art and Design is accompanied by a fly leaf that candidates sign, confirming that they have stayed within the word limit for critical analysis and evaluation. This year the fly leaf was extended to include the two sections of the critical analysis (analysis 15 marks; context 15 marks), and the 10 marks for evaluation. The purpose of including this additional information is to highlight the balance of practical (60%) and written work (40%) that candidates sometimes overlook. There is a discernible improvement in standards of writing in candidates where practical work is borderline. This might in part be attributed to the fly leaf. One marker commented, 'the requirement to tick a box showing that analysis and context have been completed has undoubtedly resulted in a response to both sections'.

The bridge from Higher to Advanced Higher
Some candidates find difficulties in making the transition from the more circumscribed presentations of Higher to the broader and more open-ended portfolio work of up to 16 x A1 sheets for Advanced Higher. This is a big gap that requires a renewed understanding of the creative process. It is encouraging to see how many candidates find a way of bridging these stages. The portfolio at Advanced Higher may look a considerable step up from Higher, but it is just one portfolio, whereas Higher has two. This opportunity to concentrate on a single theme allows some candidates to flourish and others to successfully muddle through.

Combining approaches
This report refers to headings such as fashion, product design, graphics, illustration, jewellery, architecture, still life, figure composition, sculpture or portrait. More portfolios are successfully combining these approaches using, for example, sculpture and fashion or architecture and jewellery together.

General trends in presentation
Detailed observations of the style and character of the work and how it changes from year to year are more difficult to pin down. Trends in presentation are too gradual to be captured in

an annual report. However, an overview of comments made by markers over the past 10 years includes portfolios that show some of the following characteristics:

♦ groups of work that focus on displaying and refining a technique in, for example, drawing, printmaking, painting
♦ portfolios that express the influence of an artist or designer through a personal theme
♦ portfolios that respond to a narrative — such as an event, a traditional story or a musical — as the theme for expressive illustration or associated design
♦ work which celebrates families or friends: the joys and difficulties of relationships
♦ portfolios in both design and expressive that express a love for nature or address concerns about the environment
♦ portfolios about personal issues such as body image, health and wellbeing, peer pressure, depression
♦ more conceptual approaches that explore an individual theme through research and development with less emphasis on finished outcomes and a greater concern for experiment

Variants or combinations of these portfolio types evolve over time and are enriched and enlarged by new developments.

Trends in 2018

Objects: markers commented on the revival of the 'object' as a starting point for portfolios in both expressive and design. 'The idea of beginning the project with first hand drawings of things is hardly new, but the imaginative world that leads on from this in which bottles turn into insects, stationary items become part of an animated film or Cubist guitars are incorporated in textile design shows how some candidates have also developed the traditional still life with flair and outstanding technique.

Female empowerment: in a year that celebrates the achievements of the suffrage movement it was delightful to find highly imaginative portfolios on female empowerment. What might have been a rather worthy theme was treated at times with critical understanding and at other times with humour.

Constructed textiles: the course continues to be a vehicle for candidates to discover the enjoyment of making things. This year saw some outstanding applied textiles: sewing, embroidery, weaving, felting and knitting all handled with fluency and skill so that the work is an ongoing portfolio of experimentation and development of ideas.

Not design or expressive: the headings of design and expressive are important in defining two separate realms of creative work. In one, the portfolio is defined by a brief, while in the other there is an expectation of individual freedom of expression. This year saw more portfolios that successfully cross these boundaries, for example expressive portfolios that respond to a tightly defined narrative and design portfolios that break out into wearable sculpture design. Markers welcome the freedom with which the headings are interpreted. However, centres must ensure that candidates are entered for the subject that they present.

Digital sketching: candidates are making more use of graphics tablets to refine and sketch out ideas. Wacom tablets and apps such as Procreate enable candidates to do outline drawing with fluency and accuracy. This technology is already the stuff of graphic

communication with exciting applications in all areas of the subject. One marker commented, 'experimentation with digital drawing is sensitive and sophisticated'. Though much of what was submitted this year is wonderfully skilful and sophisticated, other images are repetitive and do little more than imitate painting techniques. This is early days in terms of the impact of tablets on creative portfolios; in future this medium has the potential to release a wonderful fluency in developing and refining ideas.

Photography: the broad and flexible nature of Advanced Higher Art and Design is a natural place for candidates who enjoyed Higher Photography and want to take what they have learned into a bigger creative portfolio. This year more candidates took this option and it was good to see the range of subjects and approaches that were developed through the camera lens. The nature of the creative challenge and the process of development at Advanced Higher Art and Design is quite different to Higher Photography. There are currently no exemplars of Advanced Higher photography portfolios, so it is commendable that candidates have so much success in this area.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas in which candidates performed well

Component 1: portfolio

Practical work

Good skills in drawing and painting
Markers commented on the high levels of traditional art skills such as drawing and painting. Portfolios that took on difficult figurative work based around a narrative or specific area of interest were often done with levels of assurance, observation and technical skill that would be impressive by any standards. Since the inception of Advanced Higher, the content of portfolios has become more varied. There was a concern that this diversity might lead to traditional art skills diminishing: this is not the case. It seems that candidates who are interested in drawing and painting are keen to develop this skill.

Mixed media
In the midst of budgetary restraint, some art departments are having to eke out resources and it is unsurprising that candidates are increasingly using mixed media. There were many examples in which markers were impressed by the openness and flexibility with which candidates combined different materials. Drawing, collage and printmaking were most frequently used. However, some candidates combined materials such as latex, cling film, nylon, oil and coffee with more familiar art materials in experimental sketches to develop design or expressive ideas, and in finished compositions.

Concise well-focused portfolios
Markers commented favourably on portfolios that were organised around a precisely defined theme or design brief. A marker's comment on a lighting design portfolio underlines this: 'It is amazing what a concise and well-written brief can do'. Such portfolios were often structured so that experiment and development of ideas was thoughtfully edited: each example of work contributing to the whole scheme. In some cases, these portfolios were not much more than

the minimum sheet number, but the care and clarity of presentation and the annotation and evaluation showed the process of initial ideas becoming resolved.

The influence of artists, designers and visual culture: making visual connections
In the three years since the new course began, candidates have been appreciating the benefits of studying and making connections to the world of art, design or visual culture. Candidates who are conversant with ideas that run parallel to their own have a depth of knowledge that informs their creative imagination and makes the portfolio more independent.

There are 10 marks allocated to 'Evidence of personal applied understanding of artist's/designer's work and practice'. This section is an exercise in finding all manner of visual material, such as photography, film clips, sculpture or examples of art and design related to the theme. Markers were impressed by the way many candidates had extended and supported the portfolio by making connections to discover more visual resources.

Development, development, development
Of all the areas in which candidates performed well, consideration and experiment with visual ideas in a creative process appears to be the most significant. Fluency in making connections, trying out visual elements, experimenting with materials and techniques, and with composition or structure, is central to the course. This involves a flexibility of approach that is perhaps more open-ended and divergent than that used at Higher, and it also demands care and discipline in bringing ideas together. Markers were impressed when candidates with relatively moderate drawing skills wholeheartedly took on the challenge of this kind of development.

Making
Candidates presented some beautifully crafted work this year. In both design and expressive, from sculpted fabric to still life painting, markers were full of praise for things that showed levels of finish and refinement that reflected an involvement and devotion that went far outside class time. The joy in making is not just a prolonged exercise in neatness. It involves an understanding and sympathy with materials, levels of imagination and problem solving that are bound up with the creative process.

Evaluation

Word limit: 300 words
It is exciting to read candidates' reflections on their work. They often clarified areas of confusion in the portfolio by explaining changes of direction or specific difficulties. Some candidates were perceptively self-critical, explaining deficiencies in the work in ways that anticipated the comments markers might make. Markers appreciated such honest self-assessment.

Critical analysis

Word limit: 2,000 words
The word limit for the critical analysis was extended to allow candidates to cover the topic adequately. Few candidates had difficulty in writing both analysis and context within this limit.

Improvements in analysis
In the written submission (which is an essay on a related work of art or design), candidates showed impressive research and writing skills. The analysis part of the critical analysis was particularly well done. Candidates took time and care in deconstructing a work, looking at the way visual elements, techniques, materials and style combine to affect the viewer or user. In some submissions, a single example of art or design was rigorously dismantled, with the candidate showing how each piece of the work contributed to the whole. This kind of writing requires an ability to speculate about the purpose or meaning of a work. This is is difficult for every candidate to achieve. However, markers noted improvements in candidates' understanding of this requirement of the course.

Context: a chain of connections
The second part of the critical analysis is an exploration of the background or context of the work. This related topic could be a discussion of influences on the topic or a review of similar works. The challenge is to find and discuss links from and to the topic. In response to this, many candidates wrote creditable art history, others made a chain of connections through people, places, ideas and things all related back to the original work.

Illustrations and quotes in the critical analysis
In many examples, the written work was well illustrated with captioned images and sketches that illuminated the text and sometimes did much to explain ideas that had not been fully covered. Some candidates made skilful use of quotes from a designer or artist or critic. Markers were often impressed by candidates' efforts to explain quotes or use them as a talking point.

Areas which candidates found demanding

Component 1: portfolio

Practical work

General
Markers reported that candidates lost marks on aspects of the submission that are not actually creative art or design. These areas may seem bureaucratic, but they are important, not just for informing, explaining and reflecting on the portfolio, but for bringing the whole group of work together. Markers made these remarks in the context of commenting on areas that candidates found demanding, such as:

♦ sheet one
♦ personal applied understanding of artist's/designer's work and practice
♦ evaluation
♦ development

Sheet one
This opening sheet (which does not attract any marks) is a preliminary guide to the portfolio and sets the scene for what is to follow. In a design portfolio, it would clearly display all aspects of the design brief and — through sketches, illustrations, diagrams, photographs, annotations and references — would outline the nature and character of what is to follow. An expressive portfolio would contain the same kind of material, showing the thinking, background research, development and experimentation that candidates had already

covered. Markers were impressed by exciting examples of sheet one, but in some portfolios the presentations were no more than a mood board of vaguely related images that did little to illuminate the portfolio.

The influence of art, design and visual culture — evidence of personal applied understanding of artist's/designer's work and practice
From the initial ideas in sheet one to the critical analysis and evaluation, the creative process should be accompanied by a study of art, design or visual culture. This section is an exercise in finding all manner of visual material, such as photography, film clips, sculpture or examples of art and design related to the theme. It helps to deepen and support the portfolio. In some portfolios, the connection to art or design, or indeed any aspects of visual culture was not explored, and markers were unable to award any of the 10 marks available.

Evaluation — not a story
Candidates are asked to respond in 300 words to two aspects of the portfolio:

♦ Turning points in the portfolio. In general, the very specific nature of the question elicited good answers and explanations about how the portfolios developed. However, it seems that some candidates thought they were being asked to tell the story of the development of the whole portfolio. This meant they ran out of words to do this and often forgot to evaluate.
♦ Secondly, candidates are invited to evaluate their first intentions in the light of their completed outcome; how did it turn out? This part of the evaluation was less well done by some candidates partly because they attempted something too long-winded, but also because they seemed unable to make any self-critical comments.

Sustaining development
The central theme of the marking instructions for Advanced Higher is built around the concept of the creative process. This unfolding of a visual idea is seen first in its initial stages and then, as it goes through a progression of try-outs and experimental studies, it begins to evolve into an enquiry.

The developmental work features in different forms in each of the marking instructions:

♦ development of skills and techniques
♦ use of visual elements and experiment in development
♦ the candidate's ability to create coherent development
♦ how the development of ideas is informed by art and design
♦ the candidate's capacity to sustain this development

The last reference in the marking instructions — sustaining the development of ideas — causes the greatest difficulty for most candidates.

Over-ambitious schemes of work
Markers commented frequently on portfolios that are over-complicated, for example, where candidates designed several items or attempted three or four distinctly different expressive pieces within the one theme. This kind of approach may be in response to the difficulty of sustaining the creative process; instead of thoroughly developing an idea, there is a tendency just to start another. The result is a highly ambitious portfolio with a series of rather superficial bits of creative process. It is better to do one thing thoroughly.

Examples of 3D — 'the act of making'
The amount of 3D work presented for Advanced Higher Art and Design increased this year, but it is still at a low level. One of the defining concepts of art and design is the idea of 'making'. Conceiving of something on paper is all very well, but to make it in 3D, even in the form of a model, is to take a step closer to experiencing the diverse questions and possibilities inherent in a creative portfolio. The 'act of making' is also an encounter with the materials and techniques with all their potential for further invention and problem solving. Many portfolios could be improved by the addition of 3D work, even sent in as a photograph, or in the form of a maquette, a papier mâché mock-up, or as a scale model.

Critical analysis

Critical analysis — deconstructing and finding contextual links
The critical analysis which runs parallel to the practical coursework is concentrated on the study of a work or related works of art or design. Candidates are asked to write about two aspects of the work or works:

Analyse or deconstruct features of the work
Some candidates chose too many examples, or attempted too wide a range of visual elements connected to the work, and were unable to look in detail at the effects of technique, content and — in design — function, style or impact. Markers are aware that there is less background information available on specific works, especially if they are contemporary, relatively unknown or obscure. It is clear, however, that some centres are not yet conversant with the new arrangements and are submitting written work that belongs to the old arrangements.

Contextual writing: the weakest area
This part of the critical analysis was the weakest aspect of many portfolios. Contextual writing invites candidates to explore the background to the work they have analysed. This could be a straightforward influence, such as discussing how Mackintosh was influenced by Japanese art and contributed to Art Nouveau, or how he was connected to the Austrian Secession. Or it could look at social or economic factors such as the rise of Glasgow at the turn of the 19th/20th century, the commissioning of new architecture and design, or Mackintosh's influence on Modernism. The list of conceivable areas of connection to any given work of art or design is huge. The course notes list 17 possible aspects of context — from the stylistic categories or movements, to the cultural/historical background, to more unlikely associations linked to the chosen work.

Is contextual writing difficult?
Contextual writing can be academically challenging. Some candidates appeared to find difficulty in doing more than an outline biography of the artist or designer, others added further artists or designers or other works by the same artist or designer in the hope of broadening the topic. Some candidates did not mention context, and so were unable to access any of the 15 marks. This seems to suggest that contextual writing is a higher order skill beyond the reach of some candidates. However, in direct opposition to this, markers felt that those candidates who understood the need to address this part of the course met the requirement comfortably, with impressive connections and some original ideas. The current Higher exam questions make a similar demand for context, and candidates are familiar with the way searches on the internet are set up to make connections. For example, searching on 'Mackintosh influences?' results in a torrent of data. It is tempting to conclude that, with more

information on the demands of the course, all candidates could cope with this part of the critical analysis.

Section 3: advice for the preparation of future candidates

Practical work

Design/expressive portfolio of practical work

Drawing skills
There is a common assumption that standards in art and design can be defined by drawing. 'Drawing', as Ingres memorably commented, 'is the probity of art'. This is also true of Advanced Higher Art and Design, but it is not the whole story. A fluent, flexible approach to drawing allows ideas to form and gives the potential for adjustment, modification and development of the image. A grasp of the visual elements involved in drawing allows the candidate to see ways in which the same motif can be varied, and a further experiment with materials can show the idea in a whole new light.

Developing fluent drawing skills
This approach to drawing is an important step across the divide that separates the precise requirements of Higher from the more open-ended scheme of work involved in Advanced Higher. It would be useful to try out ways of developing fluency in drawing either by:

♦ creating exercises in quick sketching
♦ suggesting ways in which visual elements such as line, silhouette or negative shape might open up other ways of seeing the topic
♦ experimenting with a variety of materials to extend and vary the candidate's approach to drawing

How much work — 8 to 16, a rough guide
It is difficult to define how large a submission for Advanced Higher should be. It depends on so many factors, not least the nature of the portfolio. The guidelines on how many A1 sheets it takes to make a portfolio are necessarily inexact — between 8 and 16 covers a wide range of possible types of presentation or schemes of work.

Centres should also note that work can be presented in many different forms, from sketch books and canvases to sculpture and textiles. The A1 sheet is a notional framework that gives a rough idea of the size of any presentation. The best advice on sheet numbers is not to focus on counting the sheets, but rather consider whether the submission covers all the course requirements in full, particularly those related to development.

Sheet one
The use of sketches, illustrations, diagrams, photographs, annotations and references; outline the nature and character of the portfolio in one sheet. Candidates should arrange this material in a way that exemplifies the style and/or the concepts that underpin the portfolio. Markers referred to this as a vital introduction to the portfolio that has a bearing on the whole

mark. Candidates should annotate everything on the sheet and avoid adding images that have only a distant connection to the portfolio. Sheet one in design portfolios must have a design brief.

Experiment — in many ways
Candidates should include as much relevant experimental work as can be managed in the portfolio, even if it is very small. Whatever material they use, candidates should try out different effects with it: explore ideas, new techniques and formats, looking all the time to extend the ways in which they can represent a visual idea. They should use a range of cheap materials to explore mark or shape-making — such as collage, mono-printing, drawing on top of other images — to look at the theme in a new light.

Ask candidates to document work — illustrate what they are doing
Centres should encourage candidates to use such things as photographs, sketches, a diary, diagrams, Photoshop, or Google SketchUp, to explain their ideas and how they have developed/taken the theme in new directions.

Encourage annotations — explain ideas
Candidates should explain and fully annotate their development sheets and reference material. This does not count as part of the evaluation word count unless specifically stated. It helps to amplify the thinking behind the work, showing the purpose of visual ideas that may look less connected.

Sheet numbering
Candidates should ensure that the final portfolio has sheet numbers so that it can be viewed and understood in sequence. The numbered sheets can then be referred to in the evaluation.

Evaluation — refer to sheet numbers
Centres should encourage candidates to be self-critical in answering the following questions:

♦ What was the effect of creative decisions or turning points on your portfolio?
♦ How effective is the response to the initial idea/creative intention/design brief in the final portfolio? How did it turn out?

Critical analysis

Encourage candidates to choose a topic carefully — one that can be analysed and offers plenty to write about
Before candidates choose a topic, it is useful for them to do some wider research into the background of the whole field of interest. If they find that their chosen example offers too little available information, it is possible to enlarge the subject. For example: a single drawing of a ballet dancer by Degas might become all Degas' studies for a particular painting such as 'The Rehearsal'. Equally, a single fashion design by Iris van Herpen might become part of a collection by van Herpen such as the 'Micro' collection.

A broad subject offers more to write about but is less easy to analyse or deconstruct. A precise subject provides a straightforward analysis but may have to be broadened to create the context.

Encourage candidates to use a subheading — broaden the subject
Candidates should use a precise title for their analysis and a broader subheading for their context.

For example:

Title: The Ballet Rehearsal
Subheading: 'The influence of photography and Japanese art on the work of Degas', or 'Paintings of the dance'
or
Title: The Micro Collection
Subheading: 'Wearing sculpture in contemporary fashion' or 'Fashion design from new materials'

Edit out biographies
Candidates should not include biographical summaries of artists or designers. Candidates can only use biographical information if it is linked to the topic to show how it is part of the context.

Finding contextual connections
The contextual part of the critical analysis can begin as a kind of search-engine assignment — experience shows that candidates do not need help to gather information on a topic.

The subject of the work may give rise to diverse connections. For example, the reference to Degas' Ballet Rehearsal can offer up large amounts of context, such as: the ballet in 19th-century Paris; the dancers; where the dancers came from; the operas the dancers performed; where Degas got the idea of the composition; why was he interested in photography or Japanese prints.

Similarly, in design, van Herpen's use of contemporary technology that describes movement — such as laser cutting, new materials, macro photography and 3D printing — or her interest in body sculpture, her connections to inspirational photographers, the effect of her work on high street brands.

Quotes — a way of exploring meaning
As candidates research the topic, they should look for quotes that they can refer to in their critical analysis. These can be quotes by the artist/designer or about the artist/designer. For example:

♦ 'No art is less spontaneous than mine.' (Degas)
♦ 'Everyone can have their body scanned and have clothes that fit perfectly.' (van Herpen)

Candidates should explain or discuss what artists and designers meant when they said these things.

Speculate — candidates should give their opinion
Much of the writing about context and influence is a matter of opinion. Candidates should aim to have part of their analysis that is guessing about why artists or designers might have been influenced by, commented on, or created something.

Illustrations — illustrate every aspect of the topic
Candidates should aim to use many illustrations of details of the chosen works, or contextual links, which explain particular points. They should add other illustrations that further illuminate points made or extend ideas that they do not have space to fully address.

Captions — a useful way of extending points
Illustrations should have captions that explain the point of the picture. Captions and headings need not add to the word count.

Grade boundary and statistical information: Art & Design (Design)

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	490

Number of resulted entries in 2018	540

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	%	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	28.0%	28.0%	151	70
B	28.0%	55.9%	151	60
C	34.8%	90.7%	188	50
D	6.7%	97.4%	36	45
No award	2.6%	-	14	-

Grade boundary and statistical information: Art & Design (Expressive)

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2017	818

Number of resulted entries in 2018	920

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

Distribution of course awards	%	Cumulative %	Number of candidates	Lowest mark
Maximum mark				
A	27.7%	27.7%	255	70
B	30.0%	57.7%	276	60
C	32.7%	90.4%	301	50
D	6.2%	96.6%	57	45
No award	3.4%	-	31	-

General commentary on grade boundaries

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.

SQA aims to set examinations and create marking instructions which 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. SQA holds a grade boundary meeting every year for each subject at each level to bring 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 SQA's management team.

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. 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.

Grade boundaries from exam papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year to year. This is because the particular questions, and the mix of questions, are different. This is also the case for exams set by centres. If SQA alters a boundary, this does not mean that centres should necessarily alter their boundary in the corresponding practice exam paper.