



Course report 2022

Subject	Photography
Level	Higher

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. 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 appeals.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2022	2705
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	20.1	Cumulative percentage	20.1	Number of candidates	545	Minimum mark required	81
B	Percentage	32.3	Cumulative percentage	52.4	Number of candidates	870	Minimum mark required	68
C	Percentage	29.7	Cumulative percentage	82.1	Number of candidates	805	Minimum mark required	55
D	Percentage	12.4	Cumulative percentage	94.5	Number of candidates	335	Minimum mark required	42
No award	Percentage	5.5	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	150	Minimum mark required	N/A

You can read the general commentary on grade boundaries in appendix 1 of this report.

In this report:

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

You can find more statistical reports on the statistics page of [SQA's website](#).

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper

Overall, the question paper performed as expected. Feedback from markers indicated that the paper sampled the course content fairly and provided a suitable level of challenge for candidates. Questions followed a variety of formats, and a range of suitable imagery was selected to engage and challenge candidates.

This year's question paper followed the structure of the 2019 past paper, and the specimen question paper.

Project

The project did not perform as expected. Candidates generally found the project more challenging than anticipated, which was addressed when setting the grade boundaries.

Most candidates produced eight final images in line with the modifications to assessment for session 2021–22. Projects were generally more streamlined as a result of this modification.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

Overall candidates were well-prepared for this assessment and attempted most, or all, questions. Candidates appeared to have sufficient time to complete the question paper. There was evidence that centres had practised exam techniques with candidates, and it was clear that candidates were familiar with the structure of the question paper.

Generally, candidates demonstrated a good understanding of photographic terminology and were able to apply this effectively to the questions and given images.

Section 1: multiple choice

Most candidates performed very well in this section and applied their knowledge and understanding of photography in a variety of contexts. Most candidates attempted all questions.

Section 2: analysis

Question 11(b)

Overall, candidates responded well to this question and demonstrated knowledge and understanding of camera controls and their effects. Most candidates explained how these camera controls were used for effect by demonstrating a clear understanding of cause and effect.

Question 11(c)

Most candidates performed well in this question and identified relevant compositional techniques and explained their creative effect on the image. Responses generally demonstrated an understanding of cause and effect and related to the image in question.

Project

Most candidates selected an appropriate topic. Candidates selected a range of genres and styles that mostly suited their understanding, ability and level.

The overall presentation of candidate projects was similar to previous years. Most candidates submitted a printed digital file, such as a PowerPoint or Word file. Fewer candidates presented their project in a traditional sketchbook format. Markers noted an improvement in presentation layouts by many candidates, which helped to highlight their skills, knowledge and understanding. Projects were generally streamlined, succinct, and focused.

Section 1: planning, research, and investigation

Most candidates produced a body of research work that was focused and relevant to their selected theme and approach. Visual imagery linked well to the style of candidates' own photographic work. Many candidates provided additional shoot-specific research throughout their development work, which kept them on track and aligned with their earlier research.

Section 2: development and production

Most candidates produced a body of photographic work that explored their theme in depth. Most candidates demonstrated a range of creative and technical photographic skills in their work that was relevant to their selected approach.

Generally, candidates structured this aspect of their project very well. Most candidates broke their theme down into sub-sections or photoshoots, which gave them scope to be creative and minimise repetition. Candidates presented their body of work in a variety of formats, however, the majority produced contact sheets, edits, and test images as a means to develop their work.

Many candidates demonstrated strength in their critical reflection, refinement, and decision-making skills, showing an ability to reflect on their work effectively through shoot reviews and mid-point reviews. Candidates also showed refinement in the thought processes they used to decide on their final images.

There was a reduction in the amount of irrelevant annotation this year. This helped candidates to focus their creative decision-making in shoot reviews or ongoing critical reflection.

Overall, the print quality of final images was very good. Most candidates printed their images externally. Where candidates printed their images internally on high-quality laser jet printers, some were of a good standard.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

Section 1: multiple choice

Question 4

Some candidates found this question challenging. It was evident that candidates did not have enough knowledge on this part of the course to answer the question effectively.

Question 10

Some candidates found this question challenging and did not demonstrate effective knowledge and understanding of the relationship between f numbers and aperture and the impact of this on shutter speed.

Section 2: analysis

Question 11(a)

Most candidates were able to access 1 mark for this question by correctly identifying a lens that the photographer could have used. However, many candidates found explaining the effect of the lens choice on the image challenging, demonstrating a poor understanding of lens types and their effects.

Question 11(d)

Many candidates used composition and visual elements interchangeably in this question. A list of visual elements and compositional techniques is available in the course specification.

Question 12

This question asked candidates to demonstrate a broader understanding of photography by discussing relevant technical and creative factors that the photographer would have considered when setting up the shot. Most candidates identified relevant factors but did not discuss them in detail. Many candidates listed points but did not fully explore them or link them to the given image. Many candidates provided generic responses that were irrelevant or incorrect for the given image.

Candidates who did not perform well in this part of the question paper did not make valid discussion points.

Project

Most candidates selected project topics that were appropriate and suitable for their skill level and available equipment. Some candidates selected project topics and/or approaches that were very limiting and this affected their ability to access the full range of marks.

Many candidates presented their projects appropriately, however, some lacked clarity and an understanding of how to present their work effectively.

Section 1: planning, research, and investigation

Producing a plan explaining the selected approach and demonstrating their planning skills

Candidates presented their plans in a variety of formats, such as mind maps, paragraphs of text, or text broken into different headed sections.

The standard of most planning was good, however, some candidates failed to highlight key aspects relevant to their project. Some candidates focused too much on telling the story of why they wanted to do their project. The focus of the plan should be logistical planning, for example how the candidate will undertake their project and the relevant considerations.

Producing and compiling relevant investigative research

Some candidates submitted irrelevant research evidence, such as basic photographic properties or class learning exercises that had no relation to their project topic and/or approach. Candidates should consider how relevant their evidence is before they include it as part of their submission.

Impact of social, cultural, historical and scientific influences on relevant photographers' work and practice from their investigative research

Candidates continue to struggle with this aspect of the project, although performance has slightly improved since 2019. Some candidates failed to complete this part of the project.

Rather than explaining the impact of influences on relevant photographers' work and practice, some candidates related the work of their chosen photographers to their own photography.

Some candidates selected photographers that proved more difficult to find relevant and reliable research on. A few candidates chose photographers who were irrelevant to their project topic, genre, style, or approach.

Section 2: development and production

Selecting from their development work to print and present a series of eight technically competent images

Technical quality

Overall, the quality of photographic work was lower than in previous years. Many candidates presented images that had issues with focus, exposure, white balance, composition, and lighting.

Many candidates made poor selections for their final images, often not choosing their strongest images from their body of work.

A few candidates submitted more than the required eight images for their final selection. A few produced final images bigger than A4, which often affected print quality.

Creative quality

Many candidates did not demonstrate a suitable level of creativity in their images, often submitting images that looked like snapshots. In these instances, the images did not visually link to the creative and dynamic research that they had included in their investigation.

Many candidates' final images were repetitive and lacking in creativity. Final images should work well together as a set and link to the candidate's planning and research.

Section 3: evaluation

Candidates adhered to the 500-word limit; however, the overall quality of evaluations could be improved.

The evaluation has two parts:

- ◆ critically evaluate the effectiveness of their photographic practice (5 marks)
- ◆ critically evaluate the strengths and areas for improvement in their final prints with reference to the project topic and selected approach (5 marks)

Most candidate evaluations were not critical in nature and did not highlight the issues that were evident in their body of work.

Most candidates did not critically evaluate their final images and were not able to access the 5 marks available. Instead, many candidates continued discussing decisions they made during their shoots and in post-production. Many candidates did not identify any areas for improvement despite including clear evidence of issues.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper

Centres should continue to broaden candidates' knowledge and understanding of photographic terms, techniques, styles, and genres. This will ensure that candidates are fully prepared for any images or scenarios in the question paper. This will also help to develop their understanding of photography for their project.

Centres should continue to support candidates by developing exam technique through timed responses and opportunities to complete practice questions and papers. The 2019 past paper and specimen question paper with associated marking instructions are available on the Higher Photography subject page of SQA's website. The 2020–21 question paper and marking instructions are available on SQA's secure website in the NQ assessment materials section.

Section 2: analysis

To further prepare candidates for answering questions in section 2: analysis, centres could use marking instructions from the 2019 past paper, and the specimen question paper. Examples of candidate evidence with marker commentaries are available on the Understanding Standards section of SQA's secure website.

Centres must ensure that candidates know that a supplementary sheet is issued in the final exam. Candidates should refer to this sheet when responding to section 2.

Centres should ensure that candidates are prepared for a variety of genres and subjects, particularly in this section. Candidates should understand that if the question asks about visual elements, they should not respond by explaining the effect of composition and vice versa. A list of acceptable visual elements and compositional techniques is available in the course specification.

Some candidates provided generic responses to these questions, for example giving a dictionary definition of a tripod or lens. To access the full range of marks, candidates must demonstrate an understanding of cause and effect (question 11) and cause and effect with valid justification (question 12).

Project

Many centres have a strong understanding of the requirements of the project assessment task and prepare candidates effectively.

Centres could give candidates experience of undertaking a similar type of project. This can help candidates to understand their limitations and what is achievable.

Centres should give candidates 'Appendix 1: instructions for candidates' from the project assessment task. This information will support them at each stage of the process.

Candidates should have the relevant skills before starting the project. Having the opportunity to explore image-making techniques, styles, genres, and creative effects should help them to select an appropriate topic for their project.

Candidates should select a topic that is achievable for their level of skill, resources, and available equipment. The topic should be agreed with the teacher or lecturer.

This year, a few candidates selected project topics that were inappropriate for their age group and this raised issues of legality, welfare, and child protection. Centres must guide their candidates closely in the early stages of the project to ensure they select a suitable topic that will give them the opportunity to access the full range of marks.

Topics should be broad enough to give scope for creative exploration and minimise repetition, but not so broad that the candidate struggles to maintain coherence across the project.

Section 1: planning, research and investigation

Project plans should focus less on storytelling and more on logistical planning. They do not need to be lengthy, however, they should address the key issues that the candidate expects to encounter in their project. Centres should encourage candidates to keep their planning focused and relevant.

The question paper assesses candidates' ability to respond to different genres and styles of photographic work. Candidates do not need to repeat this in their project, except for identifying and explaining social, cultural, historical, and/or scientific influences on the work and practice of two photographers.

There are no marks available for including a generic biography on each photographer. Candidates should relate the influences they have identified to the selected examples of work.

Section 2: development and production

Candidates should ensure that they include only relevant evidence in their project. Candidates should edit the evidence that they choose to submit to ensure that it is in line with the requirements of their selected topic and approach.

When exploring an idea in a photoshoot, candidates should give themselves scope to explore different ideas and techniques. Centres could encourage candidates to document their learning and exploration of techniques, detailing how they arrived at their conclusion. This should give them an understanding of what constitutes an effective photoshoot.

Candidates must produce eight final images. These should be no smaller than A5 and no larger than A4. Centres should remind candidates to take account of file sizes when deciding on print size. There are many instances where A5 would be a better choice for print quality. Marks are not awarded based on the size of the prints.

Section 3: evaluation

Candidates must be able to identify valid strengths and weaknesses in their photographic practice and final images. Candidates may find it helpful to use subheadings in their evaluations to ensure they cover both their practice and final prints.

As well as evaluating their practice, candidates must evaluate their final prints, for example by considering the print quality, how well the images work as a set, and how well they link to their topic.

The evaluation has a maximum limit of 500 words. Centres should make candidates aware that they do not have to discuss each image at length. They can approach the evaluation in a holistic manner, focusing on key issues relating to their practice and final prints. Candidates may find it helpful to include thumbnails of their final images to refer to in their evaluation.

Appendix 1: general commentary on grade boundaries

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

For most National Courses, SQA aims 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, SQA holds 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 SQA's 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. SQA 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.

Grade boundaries from question papers in the same subject at the same level tend to be marginally different year on year. This is because the specific questions, and the mix of questions, are different and this has an impact on candidate performance.

This year, a package of support measures including assessment modifications and revision support, was introduced to support candidates as they returned to formal national exams and other forms of external assessment. This was designed to address the ongoing disruption to learning and teaching that young people have experienced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, SQA adopted a more generous approach to grading for National 5, Higher and Advanced Higher courses than it would do in a normal exam year, to help ensure fairness for candidates while maintaining standards. This is in recognition of the fact that those preparing for and sitting exams have done so in very different circumstances from those who sat exams in 2019.

The key difference this year is that decisions about where the grade boundaries have been set have also been influenced, where necessary and where appropriate, by the unique circumstances in 2022. On a course-by-course basis, SQA has determined grade boundaries in a way that is fair to candidates, taking into account how the assessment (exams and coursework) has functioned and the impact of assessment modifications and revision support.

The grade boundaries used in 2022 relate to the specific experience of this year's cohort and should not be used by centres if these assessments are used in the future for exam preparation.

For full details of the approach please refer to the [National Qualifications 2022 Awarding—Methodology Report](#).