



Course report 2024

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 2024 appeals process.

Grade boundary and statistical information

Statistical information: update on courses

Number of resulted entries in 2023: 10,823

Number of resulted entries in 2024: 10,337

Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including minimum mark to achieve each grade

A	Number of candidates	4,271	Percentage	41.3	Cumulative percentage	41.3	Minimum mark required	175
B	Number of candidates	3,122	Percentage	30.2	Cumulative percentage	71.5	Minimum mark required	150
C	Number of candidates	2,142	Percentage	20.7	Cumulative percentage	92.2	Minimum mark required	125
D	Number of candidates	655	Percentage	6.3	Cumulative percentage	98.6	Minimum mark required	100
No award	Number of candidates	147	Percentage	1.4	Cumulative percentage	100	Minimum mark required	N/A

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 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

Feedback from markers and statistical data indicates that the components effectively differentiated between candidates of different abilities and levels of understanding.

Performance in all components was broadly in line with last year.

Question Paper

Modifications in place for session 2022–23 were removed in 2024, with a return to the full question paper.

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. 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, Vincent van Gogh; S.J. Peplow; Pablo Picasso; 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 and Peter Chang. In fashion and costume design, Thierry Mugler, Iris Van Herpen and Alexander McQueen were popular, with candidates who had studied pattern design often choosing works by William Morris and Timorous Beasties.

Most candidates performed better in the mandatory questions (questions 1 and 7) than the optional questions. Most candidates responded well to questions 1(b) and 7(b).

The most popular optional questions in Section 1 were:

- ◆ question 2 — ‘A Sunny Day in Winter’ by Fritz Müller-Landeck
- ◆ question 4 — ‘Red Table’ by Morag Stevenson

The most popular optional questions in Section 2 were:

- ◆ question 8 — ‘Cogheart’ book cover by Becca Stadtlander
- ◆ question 9 — ‘Electric scooter’ by Vespa

The number of candidates answering question 12, which focuses on fashion and textiles, has declined in recent years.

The marking team noted mixed responses to the paper. Some candidates did not respond fully to all three prompts in a question and did not always use appropriate art and design terminology. Some candidates structured their responses very well and fully explained the impact for each prompt they discussed.

Expressive and design portfolios

Marking teams for both expressive and design commented on the high standard of work that candidates submitted. There were not quite as many portfolios presented at the highest levels as compared to previous years.

Markers fed back that there was more work that met the standard required for National 5 than in previous years. Most candidates were presented at the correct level, with most of these candidates accessing the highest and mid-range mark levels. However, there was an increase in incomplete portfolios that were missing development, the final piece or design solution, or evaluation work.

The marking teams for both portfolio components commented on the descriptive nature of candidate evaluations. The markers noted that many candidates did not provide evaluative comments and justification for decisions made in their portfolio work. Some evaluations lacked appropriate art and design terminology, and a few evaluations appeared to be rushed, or not completed at all. It was also noted that the quality of the evaluations did not reflect the quality of the candidates' practical work in many portfolios.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Areas that candidates performed well in

Question paper

The marking team saw very good responses to all questions. 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 were able to apply 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. Some candidates showed very good knowledge of compositional methods, as well as an understanding of how artists used colour in their work. The best responses demonstrated a sound knowledge and understanding of all the prompts in the question.

Many candidates responded very effectively to part (b) of the mandatory questions and were able to give clear and succinct explanations of the impact of particular influences on the work or practice of an artist and designer.

It was encouraging to see that many candidates who attempted question 9 ('Electric scooter' by Vespa) demonstrated an understanding of the prompt, 'style', as candidates in the past have struggled to demonstrate an understanding of this prompt. Candidates answered question 11 well, and they demonstrated understanding of the prompts, 'sources of inspiration'; 'materials and/or techniques'; 'colour'; and 'wearability' in relation to the 'Capsule Necklace' by Mariko Kusumoto.

Many candidates made a good attempt at the optional questions in both the 'expressive' and 'design' sections, 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.

Expressive portfolio

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

Some very personal, interesting and varied choices of themes and subject matter showed individuality amongst the portfolios this year. This indicated good guidance from teachers, allowing pupils to work from areas that interest them.

Candidates performed well when they appeared to have chosen their own themes and if allowed to select the media they felt most confident using, rather than using prescribed techniques and/or media across a cohort.

Many candidates submitted beautiful work, and there were many standout portfolios across genres showcasing high levels of media handling. Many still-life and portraiture portfolios were completed to a high standard.

Many candidates adhered to the portfolio guidance of two investigation studies, two development studies and one final piece. This allowed many candidates to access the highest mark ranges with a streamlined, clear and well-presented process. Most candidates had clear layout of work across the portfolio. Some chose to submit their work on one A1-sized sheet, which worked well in most cases.

Many candidates used one or two materials, and developed these. This helped them maintain focus, showed refinement of skills, and they often performed better as a result. Many candidates appeared to be working in media that connected to their strengths rather than unnecessarily exploring a variety of media.

Material handling was strong this year, particularly with acrylic painting. Markers noted great drawing skills, high quality painting techniques, and well-executed tonal (graphite) final pieces.

Markers reported varied creative techniques that were used to explore themes, with many candidates using printmaking; biro pen; pointillism; collage, to create different background textures and effects; and watercolour. Some candidates used strong contrasting tone and form, which created visual impact. Some still-life portfolios with reflective items, such as mirrors or glass, demonstrated strong skills. There were some highly effective experimental techniques, showing a mature response at National 5 level.

Many candidates demonstrated confidence in selecting an appropriate scale for their pieces to suit their skills, style and media handling. Many smaller-scale compositions were very effective, and strong work was seen in final artwork where candidates worked at A4- or A3-size, and even smaller.

Candidates' evaluations were generally good, with many providing evaluative comments. Many candidates structured their evaluations with bullet points, which helped them in demonstrating their evaluative skills.

Design portfolio

Most candidates had clear and concise design briefs that were achievable. Having a clear brief helped candidates to perform well. Allowing candidates to use materials they are skilled with supported strong portfolios.

Most candidates accessed full marks for highly relevant thematic imagery, including three pieces of market research. Where clear and relevant inspirational images were used, the candidates could demonstrate strong visual continuity throughout their portfolios.

Many candidates followed a clear and focused step-by-step approach to the process. It was noted that most three-dimensional projects seemed to give more scope for exploring issues of functionality. Most graphic design portfolios that used digital manipulation performed well when markers could see personalisation from the candidate, and a focused approach to selecting pieces for development.

Markers noted a breadth of different responses to graphic design. Many candidates who used traditional materials, such as pen and paint, to create graphic solutions — accompanied by development of scale, lettering, layout and colour — were often highly successful. Equally, layers of Photoshop concepts or the use of Procreate often allowed some candidates to explore surface patterns, colour and text. Some candidates successfully incorporated drawings, collage and printmaking techniques with digital technology to develop designs.

Many candidates who chose pattern creation that had a specific brief were able to show strong visual continuity throughout their portfolio. It was helpful to see patterns shown in context at the development stage, especially for a three-dimensional outcome like a package.

Many three-dimensional portfolios performed well. There was a marked increase of body adornment and ceramics portfolios presented, where many candidates demonstrated a high level of skill and consideration of the design issues, particularly function. This was demonstrated through three-dimensional models and skilful presentation drawings. High-quality drawings of three-dimensional outcomes helped candidates describe the design solution, as did the use of digital technology to visualise three-dimensional models.

There was a range of approaches to body adornment, where many candidates were able to demonstrate a range of developed skills using limited inexpensive materials. Creative three-dimensional paper manipulation worked well for body adornment, as did portfolios that explored the more functional considerations, such as wearability and fastenings.

Some candidates made architecture models out of card and demonstrated an understanding of plans and elevations, turning their developments into a final solution. These candidates understood the purpose and setting of the building design, and often included these factors in their research.

It was encouraging to see so many creative solutions using paper and card. Paper-folding ideas were absorbed into a variety of briefs, including hat designs, lighting, furniture and architectural models. Some candidates included small development sketches and drawings from initial conception through to refinement with paper models, and performed very well. New and inventive recycled materials were seen in some portfolios, including the use of recycled plastics, boxes and different surface patterns found in recycled materials.

Markers noted that candidates approached many design evaluations better than previous years, with candidates making stronger evaluative comments. Candidates performed well when the evaluative comments were well-justified rather than just descriptive.

Areas that candidates found demanding

Question paper

The question paper continues to present a challenge for many candidates at this level. At times, candidates' comments were general and lacking in detail. A few candidates could not recall the names of their selected artists or designers, or confused them. Some candidates stated the names of their artists and designers, but were unable to name the works.

Subject-specific terms that candidates often misunderstood or misconstrued included:

- ◆ composition — understanding was sometimes very limited, with some candidates giving a description of subject matter
- ◆ tone — often confused with mood and atmosphere in expressive art, for example, ‘a gloomy tone’. Many candidates had limited understanding of tone as how light or dark something is, and the effects created by this
- ◆ subject matter — some candidates provided a list of what was in the artwork that was not explained in relation to art and design terminology
- ◆ function — candidates did not fully understand this, and struggled to show understanding of the main objective of the design. They didn’t always understand what the design was intended to do, and whether it did this well

In response to the mandatory questions 1 and 7, some candidates gave speculative responses, sometimes containing factually incorrect information. At times, the selected artworks or designs did not offer much scope to answer the question effectively for a candidate at National 5 level.

Some candidates based their mandatory question responses on examples of artworks and designs from past papers. It should be noted that questions 1 and 7 test knowledge and understanding of artworks and designs that candidates previously studied. It often appeared that these candidates lacked the underpinning knowledge to attempt the mandatory questions effectively.

In response to question 1(a), some candidates showed a limited understanding of how their selected artists had used composition. Some candidates made statements about focal point, leading lines, or rule of thirds without any justification. Many candidates simply stated an object was the focal point, as in the middle of the artwork, without giving any further detail and justification to gain a mark.

Some candidates showed only a limited understanding of colour and struggled to comment effectively in relation to their learned artworks. Candidates in previous years answered this prompt better.

Many candidates did not respond to the personal opinion part of both the mandatory and optional questions, and many repeated points previously made.

A number of candidates who attempted question 8 (the ‘Cogheart’ book cover) demonstrated little or no understanding of graphic design issues.

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 approach can result in candidates working with materials and techniques that they find challenging, and reduces the opportunity to demonstrate personal choice and creativity.

Some candidates included additional compositions and/or developments that demonstrated a lower skill level, and would have benefitted from being edited in line with the portfolio

guidance. Some portfolios featured ineffective layout, making it difficult to identify what was being presented for investigation, development, or the final piece.

A few candidates did not demonstrate a progression in their media handling. At times, the media choice changed throughout, or the standard of the media handling regressed.

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.

Some candidates presented repetitive exploration of compositional changes, which made it difficult for these candidates to access the highest range of marks.

A few final pieces were less-resolved than earlier development studies, with some candidates struggling to achieve a comparable level of finish, especially in larger-scale work.

Time management appeared to be an issue in a few portfolios, with a few incomplete pieces of work, or portfolios containing a minimal amount of work.

Markers noted that many candidates' evaluations contained a descriptive account of the subject matter and the techniques they used, rather than reflecting on decisions they made and the success of the work.

Design portfolio

Some candidates presented confused design briefs. For example, their design brief stated that they were designing a product, but they proceeded to create a surface pattern for the product instead.

Some candidates submitted a large amount of thematic imagery, which made the process confusing and less concise. Some portfolios included unnecessary work, making the 'single line of enquiry' less effective, and at times difficult to identify.

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

A few digital graphic portfolios explored more than one line of development, resulting in lower marks for the process. A few candidates presented very minor changes without much meaningful development with layout and scale. A few candidates jumped ahead with the development process without clear indication of how the idea evolved.

Some repeat pattern portfolios included little experimentation with scale or understanding of how repeat pattern is developed. Some candidate designs appeared disconnected from the original research and theme due to the overuse of software. A few candidates appeared to use a house style or list of instructions to use set techniques. In these instances, there was little personal ownership of ideas or development.

A few candidates submitted architecture portfolios where the function of the building was unclear, or design issues were not considered, such as how the building is accessed or used. A few candidates used software they were not very proficient in, leading to the design solution not being well-refined.

Some candidates did not explore how their three-dimensional body adornment design fitted ergonomically to the body or did not fully consider function. It was noted that some candidates mounted samples that were not used in any development ideas.

Some candidates presented final design solutions that were very similar to their developments, or included unclear photos that made it hard to see developments and changes between them and the final design. A few candidates selected a less-effective development concept and refined it for their design solution.

Some evaluations repeated the information from the design brief, and candidates' evaluative comments did not appear until mid-way through the evaluation.

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.
- ◆ Candidates should be familiar with the art and design terminology which 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.
- ◆ Candidates should be encouraged 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 examination.
- ◆ 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 the [Understanding Standards website](#).
- ◆ Responses to questions 1 and 7 should demonstrate that a candidate has 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 recommend special arrangements for candidates whose writing is so illegible that it may disadvantage them in a written examination

General portfolio guidance

General guidance

- ◆ Centres should reference the current portfolio guidance. This guidance provides clear approaches that allow candidates to access the highest range of marks by submitting concise, streamlined portfolios. A succinct and focused approach is often more effective and less time-consuming for the candidate.
- ◆ Candidates should edit their portfolios 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 or design solution should not be included, as this can have an impact on the candidate's ability to access the highest available marks for process.

Approach

- ◆ While it is practical for centres to place some limitations on candidates at National 5 level, very formulaic 'house style' approaches should be avoided. Candidates should have scope for personalisation and choice.
- ◆ Themes and design briefs need not be overly complicated. Portfolios that have a clear theme and design brief, with simple subject matter, can be effective in accessing the full range of marks.

Evaluation

- ◆ Centres are encouraged to spend appropriate time working on evaluations, to use more succinct, evaluative language, and to support the appropriate use of art and design terminology.
- ◆ The format of the evaluation form should not be changed, and centres should ensure that candidates do not reduce the font size, as it becomes very difficult for markers to read.
- ◆ Handwritten evaluations should be legible, as these can be very difficult for markers to read.
- ◆ Candidates should check that the correct evaluation has been attached to each portfolio.
- ◆ As stated in the course documentation, centres must not provide candidates with writing frames or model evaluations.

Layout and presentation

- ◆ The portfolio should be presented in a concise manner — there is no need to use three A2-size sheets. Centres should consider using fewer sheets, for example two A2-size sheets or one A1-size sheet (portrait format).
- ◆ Streamline portfolios are acceptable, and candidates do not need to fill each sheet in the portfolio.
- ◆ Centres and candidates should ensure that work is stuck down securely and appropriately, and should consider adding paper to protect work, if necessary.
- ◆ Candidates can include labels or annotations next to each part of the portfolio to identify investigation, development and solution. This clarity is helpful when work is mounted over one or two sheets.

Benchmark portfolios and commentaries

- ◆ Expressive exemplar portfolios and commentaries are available on the [Understanding Standards website](#).
- ◆ Design exemplar portfolios and commentaries are accessed on SQA's secure site (due to copyright considerations).

Expressive portfolio

Media and technology

- ◆ Centres should let candidates explore media and/or techniques of their choice in more depth to develop skills, rather than use too many different techniques and/or media.

- ◆ There is no requirement to produce a painting as a final piece if a candidate's strength and preference is in using dry media. Likewise, there is no need for a candidate to work in colour if their strength is in working with tone.
- ◆ Centres should encourage candidates to play to their strengths and ensure 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 the background blank benefit the artwork and relate to the theme?

Layout and presentation

- ◆ It is not necessary for a candidate to produce an A2-size final artwork if they are more confident working on a smaller scale, for example A4 or A5.
- ◆ There is no need to double-mount the artwork; simple mounting of work is suitable.

Design portfolio

Design brief

- ◆ Centres can keep design briefs simple, focusing on one thing to design.
- ◆ The key objective is that candidates should agree a brief with their teacher/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, and the process appears void of candidate voice or creativity.
- ◆ Thematic and market research images should be relevant to use as a starting point, and will support a common thread throughout the portfolio.
- ◆ Limited colour palettes and colourways can work well for keeping a clear line of development through colours.
- ◆ Expressive drawing is not a requirement in the design portfolio. Drawing for design can have an important place; however, this is often a different type of drawing 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 delivers helps to combat repetition.

Media and technology

- ◆ Candidates should play to their strengths. Technology can be a great tool, but they should consider if they are able to produce stronger work without it.
- ◆ There is no need to 'digitise' hand drawn work for graphics, illustration, textile, or repeat pattern. Details of handmade techniques are sometimes lost when digitised.
- ◆ The use of technology is helping to create and inspire our new designers of the future, and gives candidates the opportunity to develop their skills and understanding of what the design process can be. For example, digital colouring in will never fulfil National 5 candidates' creative potential, but layering and developing individual ideas could.

Development

- ◆ A clear and sequential process of changing and improving a design idea can help candidates reach a well-resolved outcome.
- ◆ A structured process often benefits a candidate, but should still allow for personalisation and choice, particularly when using software, as a heavily restricted process throughout the development stage can stifle creativity.
- ◆ Well-considered developments are often more effective than numerous subtle changes.
- ◆ Candidates should remember to address function, for example in lighting effects, readability, or wearability.
- ◆ Including photographs of the candidate making the design solution does not count as design development, and has no relevance to the portfolio.

Solution

- ◆ Three-dimensional solutions should be shown from multiple viewpoints, and, if possible, on a model when it is something to be worn by a person.
- ◆ The solution should be clearly presented with well-lit photographs, where appropriate.
- ◆ Digital outcomes should be in a high resolution, where possible, to maintain quality.

Layout and presentation

- ◆ Candidates should aim for a clear presentation, and clearly labelled developments are encouraged to help guide the marker. For example, candidates can consider using arrows to help show the process.
- ◆ Candidates should clearly identify on research images where shapes come from for a motif(s).

Appendix: 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.

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.

During the pandemic, we modified National Qualifications course assessments, for example we removed elements of coursework. We kept these modifications in place until the 2022–23 session. The education community agreed that retaining the modifications for longer than this could have a detrimental impact on learning and progression to the next stage of education, employment or training. After discussions with candidates, teachers, lecturers, parents, carers and others, we returned to full course assessment for the 2023–24 session.

SQA's approach to awarding was announced in [March 2024](#) and explained that any impact on candidates completing coursework for the first time, as part of their SQA assessments, would be considered in our grading decisions and incorporated into our well-established

grading processes. This provides fairness and safeguards for candidates and helps to provide assurances across the wider education community as we return to established awarding.

Our approach to awarding is broadly aligned to other nations of the UK that have returned to normal grading arrangements.

For full details of the approach, please refer to the [National Qualifications 2024 Awarding — Methodology Report](#).