



Course report 2022

Subject	English
Level	Advanced 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	2770
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Statistical information: performance of candidates

Distribution of course awards including grade boundaries

A	Percentage	27.9	Cumulative percentage	27.9	Number of candidates	775	Minimum mark required	65
B	Percentage	29.4	Cumulative percentage	57.3	Number of candidates	815	Minimum mark required	55
C	Percentage	26.7	Cumulative percentage	84.0	Number of candidates	735	Minimum mark required	46
D	Percentage	13.3	Cumulative percentage	97.3	Number of candidates	370	Minimum mark required	36
No award	Percentage	2.7	Cumulative percentage	N/A	Number of candidates	75	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](https://www.sqa.org.uk).

Section 1: comments on the assessment

Question paper: Literary Study

This course component performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team indicated this was a fair and accessible paper with a suitable range of questions that allowed candidates to display the skills and knowledge acquired during the course. Candidates chose questions from all parts of the paper. The six most popular questions were:

- ◆ Drama, question 24: Compare and contrast the dramatic presentation of characters that challenge conventional expectations in two plays.
- ◆ Poetry, question 4: Discuss the thematic exploration of aspects of change in three poems.
- ◆ Drama, question 23: ‘Characters are weighed on the scales of justice: some are redeemed, and some are punished.’ Discuss the exploration of redemption and/or punishment in two plays.
- ◆ Poetry, question 1: Discuss how ideas of solitude or loneliness or being alone are explored in three poems.
- ◆ Prose fiction, question 9: Compare the presentation and development of aspects of love in two novels.
- ◆ Prose fiction, question 13: Compare and contrast the exploration of suffering in two novels.

Although only a few candidates chose a prose non-fiction question, the most popular question from that part of the paper was:

- ◆ Prose non-fiction, question 17: Discuss the effectiveness of at least two non-fiction texts in conveying the experience of others to the reader.

There was no evidence that any particular question in the Literary Study question paper was more or less demanding than expected. A specific revision support arrangement for the 2022 Literary Study exam meant that candidates were allowed access to one page of their own pre-prepared revision notes.

Question paper: Textual Analysis

This course component performed as expected. Feedback from the marking team indicated that the paper was fair and accessible for candidates at this level.

Prose fiction was the most popular option chosen by candidates (the Katherine Mansfield short story, *Miss Brill*), followed by poetry (*The Cyclist* by Louis MacNeice). Compared to the figure for 2019, there was an increase in the percentage of candidates who opted to answer on prose non-fiction (*The Sea and the Wind That Blows* by E. B. White).

There was no evidence that any particular question in the Textual Analysis question paper was more or less demanding than expected.

Portfolio-writing

This year candidates were required to submit one piece from any genre. This course component performed as expected.

Prose fiction was once again the most popular genre for submissions, followed by persuasive writing and then reflective writing. There was a reduction in the number of poetry submissions received (as a percentage of all pieces submitted) compared to 2019.

Project-dissertation

This course component performed as expected. Most candidates chose prose fiction texts as the subject of the project-dissertation. Feedback from the marking team indicated that many candidates had chosen appropriate texts for study at this level and had formulated specific and manageable accompanying topics.

Section 2: comments on candidate performance

Question paper: Literary Study

While many markers reported that overall candidate performance in this paper was about the same standard as in previous years, some markers reported a reduction in the number of candidates demonstrating grade-A type performance. Some markers also reported an increase in the number of candidates demonstrating grade-C type performance.

There were reports from markers of some candidates writing at greater length than in previous years.

Areas that candidates performed well in

- ◆ In addition to the popular questions referred to in 'Section 1: comments on the assessment', there was evidence of high scoring essays in response to questions 3, 10, 11, 25 and 28.
- ◆ As in previous years, essays on Shakespeare were often very good (including some excellent responses on *Anthony and Cleopatra* and *Othello*; *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*).
- ◆ Playwrights such as Arthur Miller, Henrik Ibsen, Liz Lochhead, Samuel Beckett, Oscar Wilde, and the classical tragedians (Sophocles and Aeschylus) were handled well.
- ◆ Responding to authors that might be considered out with the traditional canon, for example Toni Morrison, Colson Whitehead (*The Nickel Boys* and *The Underground Railroad*), Chinua Achebe, and Nella Larsen (*Quicksand* and *Passing*).
- ◆ Responding to 'discuss' type questions rather than the 'compare and contrast' ones.
- ◆ Writing about new combinations of familiar texts (for example pairing Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* with Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*).

Areas that candidates found demanding

- ◆ A number of candidates relied on giving summaries and assertive comments rather than analysis supported by textual evidence.
- ◆ Some candidates had difficulty linking the analysis of a text to the specific demand of the question.
- ◆ A few candidates found difficulty with Drama question 27: Compare and contrast the exploration of evil or malice in two plays. Some candidates selected a character like Blanche Dubois and said she was 'evil', a reading difficult to substantiate, and one which suggested that candidates did not fully understand what 'malice' means.
- ◆ Some candidates misunderstood what 'conventional expectations' meant in Drama question 24.
- ◆ A few responses (especially on poetry) were written in almost an extended bullet point style rather than a properly constructed critical essay and this stopped candidates from creating cohesive responses.
- ◆ A few candidates struggled to offer an appropriate level of analysis required at Advanced Higher, for example writing about *Valentine* by Carol Ann Duffy in much the same way as a typical National 5 or Higher response.

Question paper: Textual Analysis

Although there was clear evidence of a few candidates achieving high marks (16–20) in this paper, there was some evidence that the overall candidate performance was of a slightly lower standard than in previous years. Markers reported a reduction in the number of candidates demonstrating grade-A type performance and this was accompanied by some markers reporting an increase in the number of candidates demonstrating grade-C type performance.

Areas that candidates performed well in

- ◆ There were instances of candidates achieving high marks in response to all four genres.
- ◆ Understanding how Miss Brill's isolation was portrayed through the symbolism of the fox fur and the cake, the music of the band, the dialogue of other characters, and the use of pathetic fallacy to create a mood that communicated these ideas.
- ◆ When candidates grasped the central concerns of Louis MacNeice's *The Cyclist*, then analysis and evaluation were done relatively well.
- ◆ Those candidates who did well in responding to the drama text were able to focus effectively on the question to show Leo's arrogance, pomposity and inability to listen, evident in his interactions with both Martin and Sheena.
- ◆ Those candidates who did well in responding to the drama text were able to discuss the use of stage direction and dialogue as a means to reinforce the distance between father and son.
- ◆ Identifying theme (and writer's intent) in all four genres.

Areas that candidate found demanding

- ◆ Some candidate responses (in all four genres) were structured as bullet points. However, more often than not this did not help the candidate create a cohesive and developed response to the text. Instead, it often created a fragmented response in which candidates struggled to evaluate their chosen text.
- ◆ A lack of understanding of some of the elements and important symbols in each text (for example the fox fur in *Miss Brill*; the significance of the chalk horse in *The Cyclist*).
- ◆ Misunderstanding the character of Leo in the drama text.
- ◆ A few candidates offered, in every genre, no more than a summary with comments on the text rather than actual analysis of features and techniques.

Portfolio-writing

Areas that candidates performed well in

- ◆ A wide range of writing on a wide variety of topics.
- ◆ Some excellent reflective writing (including essays on isolation and introspection).
- ◆ Some very high-quality poetry.
- ◆ Persuasive writing that dealt with contemporary social, political and environmental issues (including such diverse subjects as rewilding, cruelty culture as exemplified by The Jeremy Kyle Show, and the arguments for and against HS2).

- ◆ Reflective writing that dealt with the writer's own experiences and sense of identity in extremely mature and considered ways.

Areas that candidates found demanding

- ◆ Some confusion in the labelling of discursive submissions, for example a candidate would select argumentative, yet the piece would be strongly persuasive in its structure and tone.
- ◆ Prose fiction submissions that lacked the complexity and sophistication required at this level and displayed only a limited ability to use the conventions of the genre, for example short stories that included lots of description but little in the way of effective use of techniques and features such as structure, imagery, symbolism and characterisation.
- ◆ A large number of poetry 'collections' rather than a candidate submitting their single best poem, which meant, for example a group of four poems having to be assessed holistically as a single entity (often to the detriment of the mark awarded because of any unevenness in quality across the pieces).
- ◆ Problems with technical accuracy and an apparent lack of careful editing and/or redrafting.
- ◆ Drama submissions which showed a lack of understanding of the conventions of the form.

Project-dissertation

Markers noted the continuing popularity of topics with feminist and gender-related themes. While many candidates continued to submit project-dissertations on classic authors and popular genres such as the dystopian novel, markers reported an increase in the overall variety of texts being studied.

Areas that candidates performed well in

- ◆ Many project-dissertations displayed clear knowledge and understanding of the chosen text or texts.
- ◆ In some cases, there was evidence of sophistication of thought and engagement with primary and secondary texts.
- ◆ Many project-dissertations had a clear, specific focus that allowed candidates to engage effectively with their chosen texts.
- ◆ Detailed analysis of a single text (for example *Crime and Punishment* by Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov, *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe, and *Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka) often achieved a high mark.
- ◆ In many cases, clear evidence of personal engagement with the chosen texts.
- ◆ Evidence of structured approaches with good use being made of teacher or lecturer support.
- ◆ Interesting choices of texts and writers (including works such as *Shuggie Bain* by Douglas Stuart, *Faces in the Water*, *Scented Gardens for the Blind* by Janet Frame, *Lady Oracle* by Margaret Atwood, *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller).
- ◆ Studies of traditional classics (for example Jane Austen, the Brontës, Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf, Herman Melville) that allowed candidates to offer in-depth analysis and reference to a wealth of secondary sources.

- ◆ Studies of genre-based fiction that analysed texts of suitable complexity and sophistication (for example Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* novels).

Areas that candidates found demanding

- ◆ Some dissertations were overly reliant on re-telling the story of the chosen text(s).
- ◆ Choices of text or texts (often contemporary genre-based fiction) which lacked sufficient literary content and so prevented the candidate from constructing a dissertation that could achieve the higher mark ranges.
- ◆ Inappropriate microanalysis including analysis of individual examples of word-choice and isolated images (rather than focusing on broader concerns such as setting, characterisation and theme in a novel).
- ◆ Some dissertations showed evidence of inappropriate or vague topics (Mental health in *The Bell Jar*; The American Dream; Gothic themes in *Dracula*).
- ◆ Literary analysis that lacked any critical depth – often where a candidate had chosen to focus on an issue (such as mental health) rather than offering analysis of the literary features of the text(s).
- ◆ A small number of dissertations put a greater emphasis on secondary sources, which resulted in candidates analysing the sources more than the core literary texts.
- ◆ Some dissertations lacked an effective structure.
- ◆ A number of dissertations showed little evidence of editing and/or redrafting and consequently displayed problems with expression and technical accuracy.

Section 3: preparing candidates for future assessment

Question paper: Literary Study

For the Literary Study question paper, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates are:

- ◆ offered an experience of literary study of sufficient depth and breadth to allow reasonable choice in the context of an unseen examination
- ◆ thoroughly prepared in the skill of critical essay writing
- ◆ given sufficient practice in making effective use of the time available
- ◆ reminded to read all the questions before making their choice
- ◆ provided with strategies for understanding and addressing the terms of the question and for appropriate planning of their responses
- ◆ equipped with a precise and extensive critical vocabulary
- ◆ reminded that 'analysis' need not always be 'inserted' (often inappropriately) in the form of extensive quotation that is then subjected to microanalytical comment on individual words and phrases
- ◆ shown how valid analysis may well reside (often by implication) in a permeating thread of relevant critical comment that informs an emerging argument
- ◆ made aware of the exemplar Literary Study essays available on SQA's Understanding Standards website

Question paper: Textual Analysis

For the Textual Analysis question paper, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates are:

- ◆ developing close and essential familiarity with the conventions of a range of literary genres (including the more common forms and structures of poetry) through guided reading
- ◆ experiencing texts from a range of time periods in English literature
- ◆ prepared to answer on more than just one genre in the examination, where possible
- ◆ given sufficient practice in making effective use of the time available
- ◆ acquiring the critical apparatus necessary for the analysis and evaluation of complex texts through focused teaching and extensive practice
- ◆ prepared to analyse more than just word-choice and imagery when discussing poetry
- ◆ reminded that a response consisting of only brief, unconnected bullet points is unlikely to score high marks
- ◆ made aware of the exemplar Textual Analysis responses available on SQA's Understanding Standards website

Portfolio-writing

For the portfolio-writing, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates are:

- ◆ reading the work of other writers (including their peers) to familiarise themselves with genre conventions and the range of approaches that might be taken in their own writing
- ◆ shown how the techniques analysed in the Literary Study and Textual Analysis components of the course could be incorporated in their own writing
- ◆ recommended to submit only **one** poem, if submitting poetry, rather than a group of unrelated (or even loosely related) poems
- ◆ made fully aware of the conventions of the different discursive genres available to them and to take care when labelling these submissions
- ◆ made aware of the exemplar pieces of writing on SQA's Understanding Standards website

Project-dissertation

For the project-dissertation, teachers and lecturers should ensure candidates are:

- ◆ selecting texts of appropriate substance and quality
- ◆ avoiding groupings of disparate texts
- ◆ constructing specific and manageable topics
- ◆ incorporating the analytical focus of each study into the wording of the title or topic
- ◆ aware of the word limits set by SQA
- ◆ providing footnotes and bibliographies as recommended in the course specification
- ◆ avoiding plagiarism
- ◆ made familiar with all of the advice and technical requirements provided by SQA,

The importance of the topic specified by the candidate in the project-dissertation cannot be overstated. In specifying topics, candidates and centres should be aware that candidates are, in effect, selecting and defining their own individual instruments of assessment. It should therefore be emphasised that vague, generalised and unfocused topics are unlikely to enable candidates to demonstrate attainment of the standards against which their project-dissertations will be assessed. Further guidance on the selection of topics is available on SQA's Understanding Standards website.

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](#).