Anonymous Submission

Please find below my comments on the development, implementation and assessment by the SQA of the new National and Higher Art and Design courses. I am an Art and Design teacher with 8 concurrent years of experience working full time on a permanent contract in Secondary Schools in Scotland.

The introduction and further development of the National and Higher Art and Design Courses has been very poorly managed by the SQA leading to high levels of confusion about requirements and resulting in a huge amount of stress being placed on both teaching staff and pupils. The material released from the SQA is vague and lacks clarity, often being contradicted in the Course Reports. SQA Sharing the Standard meetings are run well into the term meaning pupils need to change their work at a late stage. These meetings have limited places meaning that not all centres can attend and they are often not fairly spread in locations across the country.

The assessment of portfolio work is hugely inconsistent leading to wildly varying marks between candidates in any given year and from one year to the next. Centres are finding when comparing work that achieved strong marks in year 1 of New Higher with similar work in year 2, that the results in year 2 are significantly lower. Centres are also struggling to understand the rationale for results between individual candidates in the same year. These appear to lack any consistency. The fact that appeals are now charged for means that Centres cannot afford to appeal many of the results.

For some reason design always achieves lower marks than expressive for most centres- this needs to be addressed rather than just accepted, it affects overall marks.

Another issue is that work that is subtle and mature performs less favourably than work that is gimmicky. It seems the more ideas, techniques and materials that are thrown at a folio (as recommended in the Markers Report) the better it does. This is not reflective of the industry at large and as such does not prepare candidates for this (or further education).

The amount of work required, particularly for National 5 is unachievable meaning candidates are having to choose quantity over quality. Pupils are not allowed to use perfectly valid material from S3 which further compounds the problem. Also, different schools offer different amounts of contact time in the Art Department - in some schools pupils have 3 periods of Art, in others, pupils have 4. In most schools, S4 candidates (typically National 5) are given significantly less time than S5/6 candidates (typically Higher) despite having to complete the same quantity of work (National 5 requires the same quantity of work as Higher). This also means that
pupils sitting National 5 in S4 are significantly disadvantaged over those sitting it in S5/6.

The exam paper in both National 5 and Higher does not give set categories to choose from i.e. Still Life, Portraiture, Fashion, Jewellery, meaning candidates have to learn about answering on subject matter across the massive spectrum of all Art and Design material ever created. There is not suitable time for this over the year. In the Higher paper, the question in this element is also unhelpfully split; rather than pupils answering in full responses they have to split their response between parts (a) and (b) inevitably leading to repetition which does not achieve marks.

At this point in time, based on the many Art and Design teachers I have spoken to, the ones I work with, and my own personal experience, I believe most are on their knees and seriously questioning their future in the profession due to the whole scale incompetence of the SQA in developing, managing, implementing and assessing the new National 5 and Higher Art and Design courses.