

Examiners' Report Summer 2010

GCE

Edexcel Advanced Subsidiary GCE in Art and Design
(8AD01/8FA01/8TD01/8TE01/8PY01/8GC01/8CC01)

First examination 2009

Edexcel Advanced GCE in Art and Design
(9AD01/9FA01/9TD01/9TE01/9PY01/9GC01/9CC01)

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1. ADVANCED SUBSIDIARY GCE IN ART AND DESIGN

Units 8AD01/8FA01/8TD01/8TE01/8PY01/8GC01/8CC01

1.1. Performance Overview

Now the specification is fully bedded in, candidates in most centres are benefiting from excellent course structures that are designed to enable them to achieve their maximum potential. The format of Edexcel's specification continues to be extremely popular, with factors such as simple unit structures, clear assessment procedures, stimulating exam papers and realistic deadlines for mark entries being quoted as very practical and positive features.

It is observed that mainly two types of candidates are entered at this level:

1. Those with limited or no previous experience of art and design practice
2. Those coming from strong Edexcel GCSE courses or similar backgrounds

Both of these present different challenges and the most challenging is a mix of both types of candidates in one teaching group. Frequently students with little experience of art have chosen the subject to make up the centre's required quota of five subjects at this level. Obviously the issue for centres are time limitations and how to bring the skill levels of the inexperienced students up to those of the experienced ones.

The dichotomy of the two groups often manifests itself in the Externally Set Assignment and accounts for the discrepancies often seen in the marks awarded in this unit when compared with the coursework Unit 1. It is unrealistic to expect the two groups' final performances to be equal in the time frame available and it is important that this is recognised. Generally it is observed that the candidates with the longest experience of art and design practice and those who have prior knowledge of the assessment objective criteria consistently perform better in their final assessment. It is interesting to note that this appears true across all of the endorsements including Photography, Textiles and Graphics.

This is slightly unusual in that most of the candidates opting for these endorsements have little or no prior experience of the unique processes and skills required in these disciplines. This alludes to the possibility that it is familiarity with the structure of

the specification and the presentation of the candidate's portfolios in relation to the assessment criteria that advantages the candidates, as much as the knowledge of the core skills needed for each specific endorsement.

Consistently moderators have been impressed by the diversity and quality of candidates' responses to the wide variety of projects, techniques and media employed. They also continue to pay respect to the dedication, enthusiasm and passion of the teachers delivering this specification. Their efforts are seen to be stretching and challenging students universally resulting in outstanding exhibitions of candidates' work, nationally and internationally.

1.2. Assessment Overview

Centres are now using the assessment tools very effectively to establish rank orders for their candidates (apart from some areas which are dealt with later in this report). Issues are arising, however, where positioning of the rank order is out of step with the National Standards observed at this level.

One of the problems noticed, occurs when centres use the Assessment Grid as a shopping list and design courses that treat it as such (as opposed to producing a holistic course which takes the student on a creative journey then uses the assessment grid as a final appraisal document). As each student acquires an item of the shopping list they are awarded maximum marks in that particular category. The end result is a final score that bears little relationship to the visual qualities of the work produced or the candidate's real standard.

There is also the issue of using the assessment grid out of context with accurate archived visual reference materials. It is essential that these are available and represent the guide statements at the level the candidates are targeting. It also highlights difficulties of using text alone to define the characteristics of visual material.

For example this statement from the Advanced Subsidiary "confident" category in AO1:

"Wide range of ideas explored with exciting and imaginative developments producing purposeful ideas independently with perseverance and enthusiasm"

As this statement could apply to candidates at any level from Key Stage 1 through to GCSE it is essential that centre assessors are familiar with the actual visual characteristics of this statement related to the level at which they are marking. In this case GCE Advanced Subsidiary. They can only do this through prior experience of this level and/or cross referencing to a visual archive of material that has been marked as displaying these characteristics at this level.

Logically then it is essential that a visual archive of the National Standards forms part of every centre's preparation prior to marking their candidates and that reference is made to it during their internal assessment and standardisation. Centres that do not do this are more likely to need adjustment to bring them into line with National Standards.

Internal standardisation across endorsements continues to be an issue. It is important that all centres appreciate that the National Standards for each level apply across their submissions and all endorsements must be brought into line with them. External moderators are dispatched to check centres' accuracy of marking when compared with the National Standards, not the individual departments within that centre. The consequences of inefficient internal standardisation can be severe and this is why this message is repeated many times in all the assessment instructions and is being strongly re-enforced in this report.

A combination of the factors above contributed to a general leniency in the application of the assessment criteria across all of the endorsed areas. Moderators worked very hard to bring centres submissions into line with the National Standards, whilst being fair to the candidates affected. Their feedback was greatly appreciated by centre representatives and will considerably help them in their internal assessments and application of standards next year.

This year moderators were under mandatory instruction to randomly sample outside of the pre-selected asterisked sample. This proved to be a very useful exercise to support their decision making, especially where the asterisked sample was not seen to cover a wide enough range of the candidate's marks. Centres were most helpful in making the extra samples available and having them readily accessible. It is intended to carry on with this practice in the 2011 series.

It must also be mentioned that greater care needs to be implemented with applying the standards to candidates falling in the 0 to 45 mark range. Moderators have noticed generally that less accuracy is applied to these candidates. There is a natural tendency to raise every candidate entered into the 35+ mark band, ignoring the marks below. This is fraught with danger, as the knock on effect is that of raising the whole rank order. This pushes the mid range candidates to levels of performance that are not substantiated by their portfolios.

2. Report on Unit 1

Unit 1 is the foundation unit for the specification and most centres use it to train their candidates in the formal elements of their chosen disciplines. Candidates who perform well in this unit come from well structured courses that systematically deal with the skills needed to develop and realise the creative intent of each individual. These centres plan carefully to divide the time allocated for the delivery of the unit. This is split between set exercises to develop control and less structured phases to allow the candidates to develop ideas based on an over-arching theme. Many Centres are now using the past examination papers as project briefs to set this theme and provide guidance to the student's individual journeys. This extract from the Principal Examiners report, responsible for this unit, raises some interesting points:

"There was certainly clear evidence of a more lively and meaningful engagement with the visual language and in general terms there was a steady increase in the standard of response to stimuli and the attainment of personal expression. The feeling of candidates jumping through hoops has gone, although in some centres there can be too much written analysis and decorative book filling. There is in evidence often much superficial, descriptive, "what I will do next" annotation in sketchbooks rather than in depth, critical analysis and evaluation."

The last point demonstrates that critical appraisal of others and indeed the candidates own work must be informative and pertinent. There is strong evidence to show that the majority of students at this level need considerable help and guidance in understanding the nature of true critical analysis. It is appreciated that there is no mandatory requirement in the specification for written analysis at Advanced Subsidiary level, however, there is for candidates intending to carry on to Advanced level. To ignore the opportunity to prepare and practice for this seems reckless, as their next project in Unit 3 has this mandatory written element.

It is also more difficult (although not impossible) for students to critically deconstruct and appraise others' work using a purely visual format. Where it is observed this method is more often successfully implemented by high achievers than weaker candidates.

3. Report on Unit 2

The theme this year "Rhythms and Cycles" was well received and promoted some exciting, personal and unique responses.

The Principal Examiner responsible for this unit raised some interesting and pertinent points in her report which I shall list below:

Candidates clearly enjoyed the titles this year. They seemed to find a degree of freedom in the double themes and as a result sketchbooks were often extended in comparison to the coursework submissions.'

Most centres evidenced good examples of first-hand recording, sustained enquiry and relevant contextual research. Weaker candidates lacked a sense of focus and as a consequence had little sustained development along with a lack of appropriate research which stunted the final outcomes to some extent.

Centres encouraged candidates to pursue their own ideas but interestingly few seemed to directly respond to the given starting points in the paper. This could perhaps be because the starting points provide too big a challenge to some centres? Some ignored starting points completely in favour of their own stage-managed packages. Such centres were often backing into predictable outcomes rather than embracing the diversity of contemporary practice offered by the published paper.

Candidates that lacked skill or creative refinement placed an emphasis on personal expression but were frustrated by inappropriate use of media or the ability to articulate them visually. One moderator stated he noted a preponderance of closely copied ideas belonging to conceptual artists, without much understanding of the concept.

Centres that had arranged a gallery visit at the outset of the ESA generated some good ideas that lifted the responses and provided a variety of opportunities for final outcomes. Centres that did not organise site visits, gallery trips or use the suggested starting points allowed candidates to generate their own initial research, some of which reflected personal circumstances. Left to their own devices in the ESA, the intrinsic value of candidates' recording observations seemed to diminish when centres did not reinforce the importance of primary observation. This led in many cases to work purely concerned with 'an idea' with no appreciation of formal elements or understanding of aesthetics.

Some centres had to balance their subject's time against other examinations and whilst the ESA is published early and there is no overall statutory time for the preparatory investigations, signs were that this Unit was sometimes finished at the last minute and contained considerably less work than for Unit 1.

The leap of scale and change of medium and support from sketchbook to large sustained work was found to be a particular problem when tackling the final outcome for the Unit under examination conditions. Weaker candidates became more involved in the issues themselves, reached a late focus and failed to fully develop the theme in terms of making literate visual statements.

Some of the key issues in these observations highlight the problems faced by weaker candidates. It is disappointing to see them still relying on second hand visual research and ignoring the guidance provided in the examination paper. These are two areas where firm guidance might prove beneficial. It is essential that the preparatory time for this unit is used wisely. Some of the strongest outcomes were witnessed where centres throughout the preparation time, had maintained the same disciplined structure as they had implemented in the coursework Unit 1. Here they had carefully balanced the freedom of the development of ideas with structured exercises experimenting with a wide variety of media.

4. Conclusion to the AS report

It is now a widely held belief across many centres that the GCE Edexcel Advanced Subsidiary course motivates and establishes sound working practices for the majority of candidates and pushes their performance to impressive levels. Many of the final outcomes seen this year had exceeded the expectations of this level and those candidates must be commended for their enthusiasm, work ethos and maturity.

5. ADVANCED GCE IN ART AND DESIGN

Units 9AD01/9FA01/9TD01/9TE01/9PY01/9GC01/9CC01

5.1. Performance Overview

The format of Edexcel's specification across both Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced level continues to be extremely popular. As mentioned in the advanced subsidiary report, factors such as simple unit structures, clear assessment procedures, stimulating exam papers and realistic deadlines for mark entries being quoted as very practical and positive features. The demands of the specification are now fully understood by most centres and their course structures reflect this. The consequences are resulting in some outstanding achievements by the candidates entered this year. Moderators universally have reported seeing work that exceeds the requirements of the specification, with standards generally improving annually. This is a product of refined course structures, dedicated delivery and a stable and successfully established specification. The few centres observed not following this trend tended to work in isolation, with little contact with other centres using Edexcel or limited access to official Edexcel Inset training meetings. This illustrates how valuable these types of contact can be and it is recommended that centres make provision for them.

The majority of candidates entered at this level have completed the Advanced Subsidiary specification, their familiarity with its structure and the nature of its requirements provides them with an excellent foundation for the Advanced Level with its greater rigour and higher standards. There are still aspects, however, that raise concern and possibly need targeting by some centres. The written personal study in Unit 3, candidates control over the formal elements in Units 3 and 4, critical analysis generally, development of ideas and adequate first hand research, have all presented issues this year and are dealt with in the relevant sections of this report.

5.2. Assessment Overview

All the assessment issues highlighted in the Advanced Subsidiary report have been observed to be equally pertinent to the Advanced level. They are repeated here for

any centre assessor that only receives this section of the full GCE Art and Design report:

Centres are now using the assessment tools very effectively to establish rank orders for their candidates (apart from some areas which are dealt with later in this report). Issues are arising, however, where this rank order is out of step with the National Standards observed at this level.

One of the problems noticed, occurs when centres use the Assessment Grid as a shopping list and design courses that treat it as such (as opposed to producing a holistic course which takes the student on a creative journey then uses the assessment grid as a final appraisal document). As each student acquires an item of the list they are awarded maximum marks in that particular category. The end result is a final score that bears little relationship to the visual qualities of the work produced or the candidate's real standard.

There is also the issue of using the Assessment Grid out of context with accurate archived visual reference materials. It is essential that these are available and represent the statements on it at the level the candidates are targeting. It also highlights the problems raised when text alone is used to define the characteristics of visual material.

For example this statement from the Advanced Subsidiary "confident" category in AO1:

"Wide range of ideas explored with exciting and imaginative developments producing purposeful ideas independently with perseverance and enthusiasm"

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Logically then it is essential that a visual archive of the National Standards forms part of every centres preparation prior to marking their candidates and that reference is made to it during their internal assessment and standardisation. Centres that do not

do this have are more likely to need adjustment to bring them into line with National Standards.

Internal standardisation across endorsements continues to be an issue. It is important that all centres appreciate that the National Standards for each level apply across their submissions and all endorsements must be brought into line with them. External moderators are dispatched to check the centres accuracy of marking when compared with the National Standards, not the individual departments within that centre. Personnel issues and internal politics are not and should not be the concern of visiting moderators. The consequences of inefficient internal standardisation can be severe and this is why this message is repeated many times in all the assessment instructions and is being strongly re-enforced in this report.

A combination of the factors above contributed to a general leniency in the application of the assessment criteria across all of the endorsed areas and moderators worked very hard this year to bring centres submissions into line with the National Standards, whilst being fair to the candidates affected. Their feedback was greatly appreciated by centre representatives and will considerably help them in their internal assessments and application of standards next year.

This year moderators were under mandatory instruction to randomly sample outside of the pre-selected asterisked sample. This proved to be a very useful exercise to support their decision making, especially where the asterisked sample was not seen to cover a wide enough range of the candidate's marks. Centres were most helpful in making the extra samples available and having them readily accessible. It is intended to carry on with this practice in the 2011 series.

It must also be mentioned that greater care needs to be implemented with applying the standards to candidates falling in the 0 to 45 mark range. Moderators have noticed generally that less accuracy is applied to these candidates. There is a natural tendency to raise every candidate entered into the 35+ mark band, ignoring the marks below. This is fraught with danger, as the knock on effect is that of raising the whole rank order. This pushes the mid range candidates to levels of performance that are not substantiated by their portfolios.

Concerns raised last year about applying the Assessment Grid across both the written and practical elements of Unit 3 did not materialise and centres found little problem assessing this unit.

The revised Assessment Grid is now being used universally and is welcomed as a valuable tool in appraising the performance of candidates.

There were no specific issues relevant to Units 3 and 4 that were not applicable to Units 1 and 2, apart from the observation below.

The rigour of the Advanced level is reflected in the performance descriptors and some centre assessors struggle to implement these accurately. Phrases like “insightful review and refinement, sophisticated concepts, sensitive from conception to realisation” must be understood and placed in context by referencing a visual archive. It is these statements from the “Fluent” performance level that help raise and separate this level from the Advanced Subsidiary. To place candidates in the top of the “Fluent” category there must be clear evidence to support these descriptors. Moderators frequently reported that they found candidates placed in this category, yet they struggled to find visual evidence to justify their position.

6. Report on Unit 3

The written personal study continues to raise issues and some observations are made regarding this aspect of the unit.

Good course structures integrate the written elements completely with the candidates own practical art work and creative intentions. There are some, however, that do not. In these cases they end up as bolt on essays that have only passing reference to the candidates own work, it is slightly alarming to see these practices increasing, as it they have been diminishing rapidly over the previous years. One explanation for this may be the large increase in centres new to Edexcel and their unfamiliarity with the relationship between the written and the practical work. It is highlighted here for their benefit and any centre that finds comments relating to this issue in their moderators report, should refer to the online support materials relevant to this unit at www.edexcel.com.

Another explanation may be due to the revised format of the Assessment Grid. In this the references to written work are less specific and are diffused through the performance descriptors. It would be a mistake to assume, however, that their importance has diminished. Consensus of opinion continues to put great emphasis on the constructive nature of critical analysis. When this is done with conviction this is known to feed and inform the candidates own art practices. Where it is done to simply fulfil the criteria, it is of limited value and this is often apparent in the candidate's final outcomes. In this case two scenarios tend to manifest themselves. In one the candidates simply mimic the artist/s they have studied producing ill informed pastiche. In the other, no evidence of any influence can be found whatsoever, the contextual research existing in a vacuum and irrelevant to any direction or journey the candidate takes.

Good practice is seen in centres that start their candidates on a clearly identified personal journey at the very beginning of the unit, possibly started at the end of the Advanced Subsidiary year before the candidates break for their summer vacation. The high achieving candidates often seek out pertinent contextual references during their vacation and are then in a strong position to start Unit 3 the following academic year. Moderators have been greatly impressed by the enthusiasm of some of these candidates who have often sought interviews with relevant artists, curators or relatives during their vacations.

Critical analysis of the candidates own work and other artists is also an area of concern. It is often difficult to find true critical deconstruction, of the work selected to illustrate their points. Candidates are writing reams of text that is either, downloaded biography, purely descriptive, or lists processes and states intentions. Obviously some of this information is necessary but it should form a minor part of the study not the bulk of it. It is obvious in many of these cases that the word count is more important than the content. Centres that focus upon getting their candidates to identify a personal focus or mission at the beginning of Unit 3 consistently perform better as they have a strong anchor to orientate the study around. These centres often use some form of critical analysis formula to steer the candidates in the right direction. Moderators frequently see pro-formas being used that list a series of questions that encourage the candidates to answer in a way that provokes personal and intuitive responses. These then provide frameworks for the candidates to build their personal studies.

Candidates' practical work in this unit usually starts to flourish as they capitalise on their experiences from the previous year. Due to the nature of this unit being driven by the candidates rather than the course tutors a wide range of expressive, unique and highly personal work is evidenced. It has been noticed, however, that some candidates' ambitions run beyond their capabilities. Good centres recognise this and retain a formal course structure that periodically tops up the candidates' skills and control over the formal elements. This is an important issue because in the centres that do not, candidates can often flounder in Unit 4 as their skill level does not allow them to realise their creative intent.

However, important though these issues are, moderators consistently report witnessing work that is breathtaking in its ambition and inspiring in its insight and depth. Candidates that really embrace the ethos of the specification are presenting work that demonstrates outstanding levels of personal enquiry and sensitivity.

7. Report on Unit 4

This year's theme "Passions and Obsessions" was well received by all centres and initial fears of it producing clichéd teenage responses did not materialise. This is reflected across the reports sent in by moderators, team leaders and assistant principal moderators.

Here are some extracts from these:

"The theme of Passion and Obsessions was very popular, and the exam paper very helpful as a spring board to creative responses. As at unit 2, the ESA was on the whole approached with vigour, energy and confidence. A plethora of media was used to personal and imaginative effect".

"The ESA titles were taken on enthusiastically by all and had allowed all to respond according to ability. On asking the HODs, all were complimentary of the papers. All centres had used past papers as themes for unit 1. Some for unit 3."

"Responses by centres to the themes of "Rhythms and Cycles" at AS and "Passions and Obsessions" at A2 were generally positive. Students' interpretations of the themes were often very imaginative, especially at A2 where students based their

work on their passion for a loved one or for an interest or based it on issues such as OCD, gambling, or religion etc”.

It is interesting to see the past exam papers being used as project briefs for the coursework in both AS and A2 qualifications. Comments were also made about the paper’s structure facilitating delivery of all four assessment objectives and the useful list of references provided at the back of each paper.

Many of the comments made in the Unit 3 report are pertinent to Unit 4. For example candidates in centres that do not teach development and true critical analysis struggle with the ESA. They often produce outcomes that are too ambitious, or a pastiche of the artist looked at in their contextual studies. Here their weak control over the formal elements frustrates their attempts to realise their creative intent. They then retreat to copying the style of one of their chosen artists.

Jenny Saville, Georgia O’Keefe, Tracy Emin and Jean-Michel Basquiat are some of the current favorites, repeatedly mimicked by candidates because these artists’ works are perceived to have vague visual elements similar to the candidates own. For example any candidate with a passion for flowers will include a reference to O’Keefe, regardless of the point the candidate is trying to make about this subject. It is quite common to see a candidate studying an Abstract Expressionist without any understanding of the ideology that lies behind their work. This results in superficial responses that are ill-informed and primarily decorative. The considered selection of contextual references is an important factor in the candidate’s development of their personal response.

Moderators have also noticed that the amount of time allocated to the preparation period is crucial to the success of the candidates. The structure of this time is also of key significance as many candidates are seen to flounder in their development of ideas and then spontaneously produce a final outcome for the timed test. These often have tenuous links to the preparatory studies.

Unit 4 is the synoptic conclusion of the Advanced level course and moderators consistently report on the excellent outcomes seen across all endorsements. Most centres are now producing a high percentage of candidates whose control over the formal elements and understanding of art and design issues are commendable. The

many exhibitions of work that feature in the final outcomes of this unit display the remarkable standard that some candidates manage to achieve.

8. Conclusion to the Advanced Level report

Moderators have also frequently commented on the hospitality and assistance offered to them whilst conducting the moderation. This is greatly appreciated and enables the process to be completed with efficiency and accuracy. Accuracy is the key, because only by maintaining a uniform National Standard can candidates be fairly rewarded for their endeavour.

It would be sad if the issues raised in this report overshadowed the amazing achievements of the majority of candidates taking this qualification. These cannot be praised highly enough and all of the Art and Design assessment team have witnessed some outstanding exhibitions of candidates' work this year. The tremendous amount of effort given by centre staff to nurture, stretch and support students must also be acknowledged. The moderation team in unison, comment upon what a great privilege it is to be allowed access to see this work and all of them view it as one of the high points of their moderation duties.

9- STATISTICS

GCE2008 AS Unit Grade boundary

Unit 1 Coursework (6AD01 - 6CC01)

| Grade | Max. Mark | A | B | C | D | E |
|-----------------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Raw boundary mark | 80 | 71 | 62 | 53 | 44 | 35 |
| Uniform boundary mark | 120 | 96 | 84 | 72 | 60 | 48 |

Unit 2 Externally Set Assignment (6AD02 - 6CC02)

| Grade | Max. Mark | A | B | C | D | E |
|-----------------------|-----------|----|----|----|----|----|
| Raw boundary mark | 80 | 71 | 62 | 53 | 44 | 35 |
| Uniform boundary mark | 80 | 64 | 56 | 48 | 40 | 32 |

GCE2008 A2 Unit Grade boundary

Unit 3 Coursework (6AD03 - 6CC03)

| Grade | Max Mark | a* | A | B | C | D | E | N | U |
|-----------------------------|----------|-----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| Raw mark boundary | 80 | 75 | 71 | 62 | 53 | 44 | 35 | 26 | 0 |
| Uniform mark scale boundary | 120 | 108 | 96 | 84 | 72 | 60 | 48 | 36 | 0 |

Unit 4 Coursework (6AD04 - 6CC04)

| Grade | Max Mark | a* | A | B | C | D | E | N | U |
|-----------------------------|----------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|
| Raw mark boundary | 80 | 76 | 71 | 62 | 53 | 44 | 35 | 26 | 0 |
| Uniform mark scale boundary | 80 | 72 | 64 | 56 | 48 | 40 | 32 | 24 | 0 |

a* is only used in conversion from raw to uniform marks. It is not a published unit grade. The a* boundary (or 'conversion point') is normally an arithmetical calculation based on the distance between the A grade and the maximum marks. However, if the percentage gaining A* at qualification level is more than the regulator/inter-awarding body agreed 'tolerance' of 2% in either direction from the statistical indicator value for that specification, Awarding Bodies, in line with regulator requirements, have needed to adjust these A* conversion points to bring the percentage within tolerance.

Notes

Maximum Mark (Raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme.

Boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.

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