

Moderators' Report

June 2011

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

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

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

1.1. Performance overview

Reports from all the senior examiners highlight the outstanding quality of much of the work encountered by their moderation teams in the June 2011 examination series. Outcomes are often seen that far exceed the requirements of the specification, across all of the endorsements. This is an accurate reflection of the high standard of teaching and excellent course delivery being executed both nationally and internationally. This was recognised in last year's report, and it is heartening to see the consistency of this high level of achievement being maintained year-on-year.

The Edexcel specification, with its emphasis on individual development and personal exploration, focuses on stretching motivated candidates to realise their full potential. Centres that recognise this construct courses to build on these aspects and their candidates consistently perform well in their coursework and externally set assignments.

It is worth remembering that each of the units has its own distinct characteristics which govern their delivery and assessment. The generic assessment matrices must be applied with this in mind. For example, Unit 1 may have several outcomes and consist of several projects as centres use this unit to teach essential skills. Development of ideas therefore may not be present in the same depth as would be evidenced in Units 2, 3 or 4. This is just one example to emphasise the general point; other unit-specific aspects will be dealt with below in the respective sections of this report.

1.2. Assessment Overview

Concerns continue with the assessment criteria generally being applied too leniently in the Advanced Subsidiary units. One of the endorsements is now presenting particular concerns and is therefore given special attention in this report: Photography — Lens and Light-Based Media.

It is noted that the shift from film to digital cameras has presented several issues in recent years and it is important to give these special focus when applying the assessment criteria. This year the issues have had a significant impact on assessment, and it is important that they are addressed before the next examination series.

The latest generation of digital cameras and associated software can apparently offer major advantages to candidates.

Many of the skills that were needed to produce high quality images in film-based cameras are now dealt with by contemporary equipment's internal computer systems. These, when coupled to electronic printers and sophisticated computer software packages, are assisting the candidates in rapidly and easily producing vast quantities of images that are enhanced by automatic procedures and pre-programmed refinement, rather than their own control, analysis and decision-making. The random chance of one or two of these images accidentally being of high quality is considerable.

Automatic printing processes that enable these images to then be blown up to large scale can result in an impressive exhibition of final outcomes. The initial impression can heavily influence an assessor's objectivity and effectively disguise the candidate's true ability and understanding of the processes that created the images. It is possible that the seduction of these images may be colouring the judgement of centre assessors and may be one of the causes of mark inflation in this specific endorsement.

It is essential that candidates being awarded high marks demonstrate a clear sense of purpose and control in their image gathering and that the

analysis of the images they are collecting reflects the sophistication required at this level.

Candidates need to demonstrate that they are controlling the equipment, and not vice-versa. Cameras should be put on manual settings and the resulting experiments and images discussed. Printing software should be understood and manipulated manually and evaluated. Likewise image enhancing software should use manual settings to adjust images and any adjustments quantified and evaluated. And all this needs to be accompanied by evidence that it is the case. Only by doing this can candidates demonstrate that they are in control of the processes and it is they who are making the aesthetic and technical decisions that are producing these final images, rather than automatic machines or software programmers. Candidates should be able to demonstrate these skills equally, regardless of the centre's level of investment in technology or materials.

All these elements were present in the process of film photography; therefore candidates should demonstrate an equal understanding of them when using the current technology.

The assessment criteria remain just as pertinent to the new processes as they are to the old, and it is therefore important to apply them with the same rigour to maintain consistency and establish equality across the specification.

It is essential that centres and candidates embrace this message as photography has recently become an extremely attractive option. For many centres their Photography department's candidate entry numbers are similar to their Unendorsed or Fine Art. Whilst the enthusiasm for this discipline is to be applauded, the above observations must be embraced by centre staff. Any anomaly in standardisation across the endorsements could have serious consequences for all of a centre's candidates. Put simply, over-rewarding Photography candidates may well have an adverse effect for the entire cohort.

Photography is obviously not alone in the exploitation of contemporary technology. Unendorsed Art and Design, Textiles, Graphics and Three Dimensional design all exploit its sophistication to varying degrees. It must be understood its use is not the issue; in fact its use is to be applauded and encouraged. It is the way that it is used, as mentioned before. There is little doubt that with the current speed of advances in technology, robotic devices will soon be available that could complete an entire unit independently of any human involvement. However, the key ingredient being measured in this qualification will always be the human intervention and interaction, and this needs to be clearly evidenced wherever the technology is implemented. It is the candidate's abilities we are appraising not the competence of the software programmers; the student's input must be obvious and accessible to any assessor.

2. Report on Unit 1

Unit 1 continues to be the foundation unit for the qualification and most centres are using it extremely effectively to instil knowledge and control of the formal elements of their respective endorsement. The characteristics observed in this year's delivery of this element have been effectively recognised in the report prepared by the Principal Moderator responsible for the unit so it is copied here:

The majority of centres visited offered broad and balanced courses, often as a foundation unit to develop good working practices and develop skills. This worked well generally but when badly delivered responses were affected. Centres offering Edexcel GCSE benefited in the transition to GCE as there was already an established system and understanding when addressing Assessment Objectives.

Candidates start the AS course with a range of different prior experiences. Some unfortunately have little or no previous art and design experience; such candidates are disadvantaged immediately. Moderators have generally reported an improvement in the submissions in Unit 1.

Centres who gain most success are those where a solid foundation and structure is in place, encompassing a wide range of ideas, concepts and approaches, while still allowing them to develop a strong personal response. The imposition of a 'house style' can sometimes inhibit the candidates' ability and achievement. Many centres use past externally set assignment question papers to generate a themed approach with much success.

Generally the flexibility that the Coursework unit offers was welcomed by centres as it gave them time to instil good working practices and develop basic skills. Moderators commented favourably on the Coursework Unit, that this had produced a more coherent, higher quality body of work. Overall, moderators are reporting on a marked improvement in the standard of work.

Coursework themes proved to be appropriate, interesting and challenging. Courses were well constructed showing a real understanding of the requirements of the Specification. At best candidates completed extensive visual studies, using both primary and secondary sources. They researched relevant artists using a range of different source material. The highest achieving candidates made good analytical and evaluative judgements with insightful comments about artists' work. For some others however this is continued to be an area where language barriers were problematic and further development is needed. When educational visits were possible it was clear that they had a positive and important effect on candidates' work and ideas. It was also evident that candidates were keeping themselves informed of current exhibitions. Candidates presenting work in the endorsed areas often showed high skills and good technique particularly in Textiles, Graphics and 3D Design.

The Photography endorsement is growing in popularity.

Many centres actively encourage the use of digital imagery to support investigation and for use as a creative tool. The possibilities are very extensive and, when used well, very exciting. Most centres that presented photography focused on the use of digital recording and manipulation by software. In these centres candidates were encouraged to try to make their own 'journey'.

The best courses were well-structured and offered more than a 'tick list' to enable candidates to merely cover the assessment objectives. Unfortunately too many centres are still 'ticking all the boxes' without realistically assessing the ability of the candidate.

Moderators reported the need for more emphasis in reviewing and refining work. There is a tendency, particularly in the middle range of ability, for candidates to 'decorate' the pages in their journals as a substitute for in-depth enquiry. Many candidates leap from conception to realisation.

3. Report on Unit 2

Whilst the format of the externally set assignment is still received with great enthusiasm this year's title 'Mystery and Imagination' received a mixed reception. Some candidates relished the freedom to explore the mysteries of the real world surrounding them others struggled with clichéd second-hand images of others' fantasies. In the following extract from the report prepared by the Principal Moderator responsible for this unit, this year's findings are succinctly summarised:

Some centres refer to Unit 2 as 'the test' and seem to abdicate responsibility for the Unit, resulting in work which evidences lack of structure, development and planning.

Centres where candidates performed well retained 'control' and supported their students by providing contextual material, inspirational sources, gallery visits and fields trips — just as they had done for Unit 1. Where centres had promoted a developing degree of independence and self-confidence in Unit 1, candidates were able to deal with the demands of Unit 2 more successfully. These centres researched the Externally Set Assignment thoroughly and planned its delivery, allocating an adequate amount of time in the preparatory stages. Students were monitored throughout this period and advised re the direction for their final outcomes, taking into account the restrictive time allowance imposed for this Unit.

Interestingly some moderators reported that very few centres seem to use the starting points provided in the paper. This was not a problem in stronger centres but it was felt that weaker candidates could have been helped by the choice of one or more of the suggested starting points – thus avoiding a prosaic and predictable approach to the theme.

Some moderators reported that centres had responded well to the theme, others indicated that many candidates had pursued literal, predictable lines,

without exploring any of the thematic or contextual possibilities proposed in the guidelines.

Weak responses focused on the theme in the simplest terms with heavy reliance on secondary source material — fairies, vampires, wizards and imaginary animals; exploding eyeballs, skulls and horror images. Final outcomes in these submissions were often pastiches, and in many cases involved complicated compositions which were impossible to execute within the timed test period.

Good centres embraced the potential of the theme and encouraged candidates to pursue interests developed in Unit 1 or guided them towards avenues such as the mystery of the sea, place or human body to 'ground' the work — providing sound evidence for A03.

Overall there was a wide range of responses to the theme : e.g. dreams; shadows; jewellery, skin scarification; fear; feelings and emotions; fashion and masks; distortion; fairy tales; deformities; schizophrenia; bipolar disorder and pollution.

Many of the strengths and weaknesses in candidate submissions for Unit 1 were again evidenced in Unit 2. In those centres where direct observation is encouraged, outcomes tended to be stronger. However, where candidates had produced a very lengthy Unit 1 they sometimes appeared to have run out of steam when attempting Unit 2.

There would seem to be an increase in centres prepared to arrange appropriate extra mural activities to aid first hand research for this Unit , as well as Gallery visits etc to help in the developmental stages of the work. Where the unit was treated as a 'taught' project results were appreciably better than those in which candidates were simply left to themselves, and marking tended to be more secure.

Unit 2 was, in some centres, of lesser quality than the coursework unit but had in some cases been marked at the same level for visibly less developed and refined work. In the lower and middle mark ranges many candidates

would have benefited from narrowing down their final ideas sooner, so that they could have achieved sustained investigation and development towards the final outcome. Moderators reported that over-remuneration was largely due to weaknesses in visual language and the formal elements along with lack of depth in analysis.

Many moderators reported that the weakest objective for this Unit was often A04. Candidates often seemed unable to achieve what they had planned for their final outcome and these then fell horribly short of expectation. The unaided piece of work was often the best indicator of actual skills and understanding and although the submission is looked at holistically for A04, it was often leniently rewarded.

4. Conclusion to the AS Report

It appears that two key factors influence the performance of candidates in the Advanced Subsidiary qualification. These are:

- a. The time constraints of the academic year.
- b. The natural varying rates of development of maturity in candidates in the predominant age range taking this qualification.

a. The 'time constraints' issue focuses around how to divide the year to enable effective delivery of the two units. Bearing in mind the weighting of 60% for coursework and 40% for externally set assignment dividing the year proportionally becomes difficult. The spring and summer terms become eroded by many different factors, such as academic re-sits, modules, mock exams and floating public holidays. These interruptions make continuity of delivery a major issue. Also the end of the AS exam series leaves an awkward gap at the end of the summer term. At this point students have mentally finished the year, but are expected to whip up the enthusiasm to embark on Unit 3 of their Advanced level, whilst peers who are not continuing to Advanced level hang around like spare parts, distracting the committed students. Even with the strongest discipline and best

organisation, the end of the year often ends up being relatively unproductive especially for the weaker candidates.

b. The 'maturity' issue manifests itself in many ways. Many students do not really grasp the complexity and demands of the full four-unit qualification until they are well into their second year. These students, no matter how well they perform in Units 3 and 4 will always be penalised if they have performed poorly in the first year, especially if their scores are very low in Units 1 and 2. This is demoralising for many candidates and centres often report a significant drop in numbers of students progressing to the full Advanced level because of their performance at the Advanced Subsidiary level. Although there is the potential to re-sit Units 1 and 2 the time constraints (reported above) often make this impractical.

5. ADVANCED GCE IN ART AND DESIGN

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

5. 1. Performance Overview

It was heartening to see centres taking heed of the issues highlighted in last year's GCE Examiners report. Significant improvements across both units had been reported by the moderation teams. It is important that these factors continue to be given the necessary attention and focus for the stability of the qualification.

As with the Advanced Subsidiary the general quality of the submissions of candidates in the upper mark bands is outstanding. Here again it is quite common to see candidates exceeding the requirements of this specification. Moderators have consistently reported that the wealth and vibrancy of the submissions makes their tasks a pleasure rather than a duty.

As mentioned in last year's report isolated centres still find course delivery and assessment an issue and it is recommended that they invest time and resources in making contact with other practitioners who are using this specification, or ensure they attend official in-service training.

Also carried over from last year is the important issue of internal standardisation which still presents problems for many centres, although (as mentioned above) definite improvements have been observed and some progress made. As all centres are aware, inefficient internal standardisation can have serious implications for the entire cohort.

5. 2. Assessment Overview

A greater use of the full mark range was observed this year with centres taking more care to place their weaker candidates in the correct mark bands. A degree of leniency in application of the assessment criteria across the whole specification was still recorded; however, consensus of opinion

was that in the Advanced level qualification it did not reflect the excesses of previous years.

Many centres are now starting to establish their own personal archives of previously marked work, combining Edexcel's exemplars with samples of their own from previous examination series. They are using these to standardise their own staff prior to assessing the current series submissions. This practice is highly recommended as it is the only truly effective way of establishing a consistent year-on-year national standard. It also replicates the training procedures undertaken by the external moderation team. This was dealt with in great detail in last year's examiner's report and those centres embracing the points highlighted in it reported that they had found their assessment this year easier and more accurate. It is recommended that any centre which did not manage to obtain last year's report download a copy from the Edexcel website for reference, as many of the assessment recommendations contained within it are still pertinent. Even though improvement was seen this year, complacency will rapidly undo any of the progress made.

Leniency in the application of the assessment criteria does nothing but harm. It may give the illusion of short term gain, but the long term consequences damage the credibility of the qualification for all its candidates, past and present.

6. Report on Unit 3

Unit 3 continues to be seen as the odd one out, being a coursework unit with two separate elements, written and practical, but marked with a holistic assessment grid. Generally this aspect has now been embraced by centres and most have structured courses that deliver it successfully. The best of these completely integrate the two elements by each candidate having their own individual focus or theme that drives both. The Principal Moderator responsible for this unit has made some insightful and constructive observations this year. I include them here for your consideration:

The practical work for Unit 3 was largely project-based, sometimes using the theme of a past Externally Set Assignment. Whilst this approach did help candidates to prepare for Unit 4, perhaps a better one would have been to provide them with advanced batteries of skills, knowledge and understanding so that they could more easily cope with the unit when it came along. One consequence of this approach was to make Unit 4 look a little like a shortened version of Unit 3, with its own personal study, etc., thus reversing the intended effect. In a sense the practical work for this unit can and should be the visual climax of the A2 qualification, as there are no time constraints on the production of finished work; and so it frequently proved, with some high quality work, especially in Graphic Communication. It was encouraging to see in some centres a less traditional approach to photography involving video and animation; also it was noted that photographic processes and outcomes were frequently used in unendorsed and Fine Art programmes.

A range of approaches and responses to the unit was noted: in some cases the Personal Study bore little or no relation to the practical work. In others there was a deep and intimate relationship between the two elements. A significant trend was for candidates to produce material which was in effect an account and extended evaluation of their own work, with reference to the work of others where it was deemed relevant. This development

seemed quite widespread and is rather worrying, as it can take the focus away from the intended 'investigation into a selected aspect(s) of others' art, craft and design.' This in turn is more difficult to assess, as it can be very well written, thorough and seductive, but still not meet the demands of the specification.

Candidates chose from a very wide range of themes, often looking at their own personal preoccupations, political ideas and testing critical issues. At the other end of the scale, biography and narrative were common. It is possible that centres need to give closer guidance to their candidates on the choice of themes and titles as well as advice on studies as they develop.

Centres seemed largely unaware of the references in the specifications and the assessment grid to Quality of Written Communication, with the result that bad spelling, grammar and punctuation often went unremarked and uncorrected, to say nothing of inept, primitive and infantile writing, and content that focused on biography and shallow, unsupported personal opinions, with large portions directly copied from internet sources. Fortunately, many centres treated the study with great seriousness, despite some reservations about its content. Sometimes centres presented two versions of the personal study: the first as simple typescript and the second with the written work split into sections and pasted with the visual work. This dual approach is extremely helpful for assessment and is to be recommended. What may be called the 'annotation' approach is, however, more of a problem. Written material is spread through work journals and sketch books alongside visual work in such a way that the study is fragmented into captions, and loses its character as a genuine piece of writing.

In this unit, where there was lenient assessment it often tended to gravitate towards AO3. Frequently candidates' ambitions were not equalled by their technical ability, control of technical resources and manipulation of formal elements. They seemed to know what they wanted to do, but lacked the ability to do it. I imagine they found this frustrating. This was not always recognised by centre assessors, some of whom seemed to want to give

marks for the ambition rather than the accomplishment. Whilst photography was often used as a means of gathering and recording visual information, many candidates seemed to think that subsequent drawing or painting from the photographs— seemingly for its own sake—was a worthwhile activity. Centre assessors didn't always seem to disagree with this estimate.

It can be seen from these observations that there may be many reasons for over-rewarding candidates, especially if one is working in isolation without a full understanding of the specification requirements or the national standards. A useful guide is to remember that grade-for-grade the work presented must compare with that of any of the other academic qualifications at this level.

7. Report on Unit 4

The universal response to this year's set theme 'Mystery and Imagination' was extremely positive and the breadth of opportunity it provided for personal interpretation was welcomed by the majority of centres.

This extract from an Assistant Principle Moderator was typical of many of those received in the E10 reports:

Mystery & Imagination and Exploration & Discovery were well received and encouraged varied and highly individual responses and outcomes. The number of centres who use our ESA papers as a basis for the coursework units bears testimony to their popularity. This is still cited as a major reason for choosing Edexcel.

Candidates generally seized the opportunity to develop and produce highly personal and unique outcomes from their investigations. Here again this extract typifies the reports received:

In unit 4 there was a range of responses to the exam theme 'Exploration and Discovery', e.g. other cultures, masks, decomposition & deconstruction, architecture, memories, mental disorders and nostalgia. In the top mark range there were some skilful outcomes with relevant links to artists; the work often went beyond expectations at this level, resulting in mature bodies of work that had personal identities.

This year again issues were encountered where students had been left to develop their ideas independently without guidance. Here over-reliance on second-hand source material continues to be a major factor. This is primarily with weaker candidates, and one is forced to ask whether the maturity levels of these individuals would result in this practice, even if they were given precise direction to do otherwise. It has been the natural evolution of the assessment criteria that included and recognised this as a characteristic of these candidates.

Another concern highlighted was the disparity between the coursework (Units 1 and 3) and their outcomes and those of the externally set assignments (Units 2 and 4). As a generalisation it was observed that in some centres the ESA and the timed test outcomes were weaker and did not display the equivalent competence in control of the formal elements as those shown in the coursework. This difference is often very apparent when comparing the student's marks for their coursework with their marks for their ESA especially in AO3 and AO4. It must be stated that this is a generalisation, however, as many exceptional final outcomes were observed both nationally and internationally.

Unit 4 as a synoptic evaluation of the candidate's abilities after completing the two-year course continues to display an impressive breadth of skill, imagination and energy. A vast majority of candidates acquire a comprehensive suite of essential skills. Edexcel's focus on developing cognitive abilities equips students to cope with independent learning, individual reflection, analysis, lateral thinking and problem solving. There can be little doubt that the development of these attributes assists candidates in their future careers in many different ways. They also support and enhance the other subjects that are being studied simultaneously during key stage 5, regardless of their nature.

8. Conclusion to the Advanced Level report

It is important that this report is placed in context and not seen as a catalogue of all the concerns and issues raised in the 2011 examination series. This would undermine the tremendous achievement of all of those candidates and teachers who have worked so hard to produce yet another astounding collection of work. It is a shame that the true perspective of this is only gained by a handful of moderators who visit a large number of centres. It must be appreciated that this report is a detailed analysis of the issues that are raising concern amongst the examining team. Obviously the comments and observations included do not apply to all centres or all candidates. It is for individual centres to sift out any relevant details that

might be relevant to their own practises. Only if the issues apply to them do they need to reconsider their approach. Recognising them and acting upon them will ensure the next body of students in their care have the best chance of achieving their personal optimum performance levels.

The qualifications from Edexcel's suite of GCE Art and Design endorsements are prestigious awards that continue to be respected by both employers and further education institutions nationally and internationally.

9. Awarding and reporting

The grading, awarding and certification of this qualification follows the processes outlined in the current GCSE/GCE Code of Practice, which is published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

The AS qualification will be graded and certificated on a five-grade scale from A to E. The full GCE Advanced level will be graded on a six-point scale A* to E.

A pass in an Advanced Subsidiary subject is indicated by one of the five grades A, B, C, D, E of which Grade A is the highest and Grade E the lowest. A pass in an Advanced GCE subject is indicated by one of the six grades A*, A, B, C, D, E of which Grade A* is the highest and Grade E the lowest. To be awarded an A* students will need to achieve an A on the full GCE Advanced level qualification and an A* aggregate of the A2 units. Students whose level of achievement is below the minimum judged by Edexcel to be of sufficient standard to be recorded on a certificate will receive an unclassified U result.

The mark bands used for internal assessment do not relate to pre-determined grade boundaries. Following each examination and moderation series, Edexcel will set the grade boundaries for internally and externally assessed units at an awarding meeting. Grade A/B and E/U boundaries are set using professional judgement. The judgement reflects the quality of candidates' work, informed by the available technical and statistical evidence.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link: <http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx> Grade boundaries apply to all of the endorsements (Art, craft and design, Fine art, Three-dimensional design, Textile design, Photography – lens and light-based media, Graphic communication and Critical and contextual studies).

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