

Chief Moderator's Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

ADVANCED SUBSIDIARY GCE IN ART
AND DESIGN

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

AND

ADVANCED LEVEL GCE IN ART AND
DESIGN

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

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Introduction

The June 2012 examination series for GCE Art and Design has been a difficult one for centres and candidates, due to the very short second half of the summer term. Many have had to condense eight weeks work into six, or in some cases six into four. Whilst on paper this may not sound significant, moderators have observed that the consequences of this loss of time created serious difficulties for many centres. This was mainly because this part of the academic year was already near breaking point from the normal demands of the curriculum. Centres struggling to fit in teaching, school trips, taster days, national sports week, internal marking, standardisation, end of year reports, exams, controlled assessments and exhibitions.

It is important to bear in mind that the GCE Art and Design specification is one of few that require centre staff to mark and standardise all of the candidates' submissions — both the externally set assignment and the coursework. It has been observed that this is rarely factored in to centres' timetables, but left to teacher examiners to 'fit in' amongst the multitude of other commitments they have at this time of the year. Many teacher examiners have complained that any observed inaccuracies in both their assessment and standardising are a product of this ad-hoc marking system. Effective and considered use of the assessment materials and exemplar samples are essential to accurate marking and inadequate provision for their use will inevitably lead to poor assessment decisions.

It has been generally noted that the greater the size of the cohort and the wider the range of endorsements, the larger the inaccuracies. Another issue, observed over many years, is that some large centres delivering several endorsements can find it difficult to reach a consensus of agreement regarding the national standards across the different disciplines. This year's time constraints can have only exacerbated this problem.

Whether or not the above factors have resulted in this year's anomalies between endorsements is debatable. Based on the assessment criteria, the quality of visual outcomes across endorsements are similar, and therefore achievement levels should be comparable. During the June 2012 examination series, we have found significant discrepancies between endorsements during the awarding process; this

has required the implementation of changes to how the endorsements are approached. Therefore, we have addressed grade boundaries for GCE Art and Design separately for each endorsement in order to address this disparity without unfairly affecting some candidates' results.

It may be that at first glance these changes could appear detrimental; in reality, however, their effect is likely to be very positive. This will become apparent when the practical application of them is fully appreciated.

The main concern requiring attention is of course cross-endorsement standardisation, and this will come as no surprise to centres as it has been mentioned repeatedly in previous reports.

Lack of it, or irregularities in it, make fair assessment difficult, if not impossible. It is this issue of fairness to candidates that is of primary concern to all examination boards and is the primary influence on any executive decisions made. It will be clearly obvious that the current changes are motivated by this factor.

These observations introduce this report as they have been the most significant aspects of the 2012 GCE Art and Design examination series. It is essential they are accorded the seriousness they deserve and are fully considered in centres' planning and approach for the 2013 series.

It would, however, be wrong to focus on these elements alone. This is because moderators have yet again unanimously reported on experiencing an amazing wealth, variety and quality of candidates' responses for both the coursework and externally set assignment submissions.

Every year, it is difficult to imagine how the next cohort of individuals can match or surpass the performance of the previous one, but again this year, it is observed to be the case. The evidence points to this being achieved through candidates' and teachers' passion and enthusiasm for a continuously evolving subject. This year we have yet again witnessed an incredibly high standard of achievement, with many candidates far exceeding the expectations of their respective qualifications. It has been noted that control over the formal elements and the imaginative exploration of personal and unique viewpoints have been the key elements of successful submissions both nationally and internationally.

Units 6AD01-6CC01

The longevity of the qualification has enabled many centres to establish highly successful course structures that enable candidates to lay down the foundational skills necessary for their chosen endorsements. Most centres use Unit 1 for this purpose and disciplines that are brand new to some candidates, such as Photography and Graphic Communication, concentrate on technical exercises to develop candidates' understanding of processes and materials. It has been observed that some of the most successful deliveries of this unit have directed these exercises using a generic theme. Some even use past exam papers and their titles for this theme. This has resulted in them teaching how to develop ideas alongside the technical exercises and think about how they can be used to realise creative intentions relating to the chosen theme. It has also encouraged lateral thinking and experimentation. This idea of teaching development of ideas at such an early stage in the course has been seen to have really positive results. It has helped deal with a common problem that has been observed across all endorsements and is outlined below.

It has been noticed that some centres leave the development of ideas to the latter part of the autumn term after they have dealt with a series of separate technical exercises to develop candidates' skills. For example, in Fine Art these could be: mark making, colour theory, composition, perspective, proportion, texture, figure studies, abstraction, etc. They will then give the candidates a theme to develop towards the end of the term. It is frequently seen that candidates in these circumstances over-run with their individual projects and often have to revisit them after the externally set assignment has been completed. Many, by this point, have lost interest in their original ideas or have tacitly decided that, after their examination, the year is over, and are distracted by the other end of term events taking place at this time. Weaker candidates are seen to particularly struggle in these situations. One of two scenarios usually develops:

- They continue with Unit 1 into the prep time of Unit 2, so reducing their scores in AO1, AO2 and AO3 in this second unit.
- They rush the conclusion of Unit 1 and lose marks in AO1 and AO4.

These observations highlight the importance of the delicate balance of timing in Unit 1. Whilst appearing a straightforward coursework unit, in practice it is often more complex, especially when the variables of individual centres' timetables and interruptions in the academic year are brought into play.

The mention of interruptions raises another point that may be of interest to centres when designing their courses. The disruption of academic mock examinations, usually held around the conclusion of Unit 1, has often been put to good use by many centres. These have timed their delivery of Unit 1 to conclude with a final outcome conducted under mock examination conditions. Here the candidates may have been given 8 hours split over two or more days, under controlled examination conditions to conclude their Unit 1 projects. In these centres it was noticed that candidates greatly appreciated the opportunity to complete a final outcome over a sustained period of time rather than trying to fit it in piecemeal during their normal lessons. They also appreciated time to complete a final outcome protected from the distractions of their peers — especially those candidates who had not taken GCSE and therefore had never had the opportunity of a sustained focused work period in centres.

Finally for Unit 1, although it is relevant to the other units as well, mention must be made of the use of copies of second-hand source material, copies of photographs and copies of other artists' work. Again it has been observed that some centres are not taking control of these aspects and candidates, especially weaker ones, are losing marks because of the misuse of them.

Of course it goes without saying that all of these can make valuable contributions to a students' development of a unit. However, predominance of any of them will waste time and drive the unit towards predictable and weaker outcomes. Endless copies of second-hand source material frustrate idea development and lose marks in AO1, AO3 and AO4. Units solely constructed of copies of photographs (even if they are the candidates' own), lose marks in AO3 and AO4. In this case development of control over the formal elements is thwarted, as the candidates never really achieve understanding of three-dimensional forms. A portfolio consisting solely of reproductions of others' work hinders understanding of both and takes the candidate down the route of pastiche, losing marks in AO1, AO2 and AO4.

It is important that distinction is made here between analytical studies of sections of artists' works, to understand them and explore techniques, as opposed to painstaking faithful reproductions with little insight or empathy. The former, of course, can have tremendous value; the latter almost inevitably ends up with the candidate producing a predictable final outcome in the 'style of' one of the artists copied.

Units 6AD02-6CC02

The theme for this year's externally set assignment, 'Encounters, Experiences and Meetings', was well received and many centres commented on the wide platform it gave candidates to explore their ideas and creative intent. Moderators universally commented upon the impressive quality of the outcomes and diversity of responses seen.

As mentioned in the report on Unit 1, it has been observed that the inter-relationship between Unit 1 and Unit 2 is fundamental to the successful delivery of Unit 2. It is essential that the preparatory supporting studies for the externally set assignment must have enough time to enable ideas to be fully explored, refined and resourced. This period must be guided to prevent candidates falling into bad practices and going of at tangents that have nothing to do with their personal focus. Weakest submissions commonly come from candidates who are unsupported during their preparation.

It is also noticed that many candidates attempt final outcomes of a scale that is beyond their ability. These pieces are either unfinished or rushed in a clumsy manner. Here again the preparation period should be used to establish exactly what the candidate is capable of achieving successfully in the 8 hours available for the timed test. All this demonstrates the candidates' ability to self-analyse and refine their work. Scale may often be immaterial as all the assessment objectives can be fully met in a small final outcome. Arbitrarily choosing to do a massive piece simply for the impact of scale actually demonstrates a lack of critical judgement, especially when its completion is beyond the capabilities of the candidate.

Centres that had launched the externally set assignment to coincide with a gallery visit had found this to be of great benefit to their candidates, as can be seen from this extract from the Principal Moderator's report:

'Many centres used museums and galleries as well as trips to support the Unit – David Hockney and Grayson Perry were particular favourites this year. This sort of input has a very positive benefit and should be encouraged even in centres that

do not have access to good galleries - getting out of the classroom invariably adds another dimension to candidate work.

Course structures that offered candidates more guidance, specifically in terms of contextual referencing, supporting their early practical developments with visits to galleries and public spaces, performed better. This supportive approach was well timed with release of the Unit 2 theme and encouraged progression; which formed an important base for further contextual research.'

Whilst this approach may not be possible for all centres, it illustrates the importance of an evocative and inspiring launch of the theme, and guidance from the very beginning of the assignment.

Units 6AD03 - 6CC03

These are the coursework units for the advanced level and it is worth mentioning at this point that the written elements of these units should compare in quality with those of any of the other suites of qualifications at this level, in terms of analytical and critical language, presentation and grammar.

The written element is mandatory and the specification clearly states that it should be presented separately. It is being reported that all too often the written element is being disseminated amongst the practical work, or being presented in such a way as to be barely legible; printed on to translucent fabric, written in silver ink or reproduced badly on transparencies. In many cases this is a genuine attempt to create a visually interesting presentation, but in many cases what it actually demonstrates is that the candidate has failed to appreciate that it is primarily a vehicle to efficiently communicate their own personal viewpoint and ideas. Often in cases where it is legible it consists of little more than biographic details of artists, descriptions of techniques or art works and other information transcribed directly from the internet. In the worst case scenarios it simply documents and analysis the candidate's own art work with superficial references to other artists along the way.

Another aspect of the written element that needs to be considered is its relationship to the practical work of this unit. In some cases its focus is the development of a philosophic argument, or a documentary of the candidate's holiday, having little or no relationship to visual art concerns at all. It must be remembered that this is primarily a visual art and design coursework assignment. In light of this the critical analysis should always relate to the visual deconstruction of the reference works studied, demonstrating that the candidate understands the motivation and issues that the artist/designer referenced, is trying to address. These issues should then relate to the candidate's own art practices, whether they are political statements or technical issues that are being exploited by the candidate. Centres that have veered too far away from the demands of the specification would benefit from revisiting it, as it clearly defines the role and presentation of this element.

The written work in this unit just like the written work in any of the other units is designed to feed and inform the candidates' own art practices and their wider

understanding of art and design issues. It must therefore have direct relevance to their individual creative intent and personal focus.

Practical components for this unit seem to have benefited greatly from the foundation work laid down in Units 1 and 2. Many students show great control over the formal elements and produce highly sophisticated and personal responses to their individual assignments.

Weaker candidates often try to compensate for their lack of practical art and design skills with excessive amounts of text, with contextual studies that go way beyond the word count requirement of the specification and sketchbooks that are full of transcripts and cuttings. Here, on thorough investigation, there is nearly always a correlation between the insight shown in the candidate's own writing and the sensitivity demonstrated in their practical outcomes. Centres must take care to bear this in mind when assessing such candidates and avoid over-rewarding them for zeal and quantity, with the danger of using their encyclopaedic production of text to compensate for their weaker practical performances. Centres are reminded that any second-hand source material should be clearly marked and acknowledgement given to the source. A worrying amount of material is being seen intermingled with the candidates' own work leaving room for confusion as to who actually produced it. This has been particularly noticed in the Photography and Graphic communication endorsements.

Guidance also needs to be given regarding the candidates' choice of personal focus for this unit. Whilst the freedom afforded by it is to be relished some candidates are seen pursuing ideas that are unsuitable to visual outcomes in the endorsements that demand them. The aim should always be to refine ideas into realistic pathways that can provide candidates with a fruitful exploration of visual art and design concerns. Access to first hand visual source material is a key ingredient to success here.

Units 6AD04 - 6CC04

This year's Unit 4 theme, 'Combinations and Alliances', proved very popular with both candidates and centres. Its breadth allowed for each centre to make optimum use of their local and in-house resources and candidates to explore a wide range of personal ideas.

Some astounding outcomes were witnessed by many moderators with candidates using a huge range of materials with a wide variety of scale.

As seen in Unit 2, centres familiar with the specification have now formulated a very successful system of delivery for this unit, many use past examination papers for structure and stimulating ideas in the coursework units and this prepares the candidates very well when approaching Unit 4.

Rarely do moderators come across submissions deficient in single aspects of the assessment criteria. When they do it is usually the product of an individual candidate who refuses to follow the centre's guidance. These rogue elements cannot be factored in to any general observations.

Issues of concern in this year's series follow those of the past and may have been mentioned in other areas of this report, though it is worth repeating them again as they have significant impact on candidate's performance:

- Over-reliance on second-hand source material.
- Superficial analysis of contextual references.
- Irrelevance of contextual references to candidate's personal focus.
- Over-reliance on software generated imagery.
- Superficial visual recording (e.g. creating a portrait from one, poor quality, full-face, mobile phone photograph).

- Ignoring the exam paper and responding to first idea stimulated by the generic theme.
- Unsuitable personal focus.
- Misunderstanding the preparation period (dry runs and irrelevant research).
- Over-ambitious timed test pieces (no time to finish).
- Experimenting with new techniques in the timed test.

As with Unit 2, a good launch of the theme has been seen to be of great benefit to candidates. Visits to exhibitions, sites of visual interest, slide shows, visiting speakers and contextual handouts with coloured illustrations have all been employed to good effect. The most beneficial support, however, is positive guidance from the very beginning of the assignment, steering the candidates away from blind alleys and ideas that are impossible to resource.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT ISSUES

The illusion that it is possible to consistently improve candidates' performance (and the pressure to do so) without any ceiling or realistic acknowledgement of weaker candidates' limitations, continues to fuel mark inflation (mark inflation is the process by which marks progressively lose their value), along with several other factors highlighted in this report, including misinterpretation of the assessment criteria.

Many centres award excessive marks for idea development, analysis and control over the formal elements that are unsupported by the candidates' submissions. Yet again this year moderators have had to adjust a large proportion of the marks seen to bring them into line with the national standards. There are many genuine reasons why this mark inflation is taking place but centres must be aware of the phenomenon and take active steps to prevent it. The consequences of not doing so will be to undermine the achievement of the very candidates they seek to applaud. It may help if they were to take a step back after their final marking, look at the visual characteristics of the work and ask the question: 'Are the marks we have awarded truly reflected in the standard of the work exhibited?' If the answer is 'no' then re-visiting the work with exemplar marked samples may help resolve the problem.

In the Textiles endorsement, for example, we see multitudinous test pieces and experiments with fabrics being awarded as development of ideas (AO1) rather than experimentation (AO2). They may score highly in AO2 but this mark cannot be shared across to AO1. Here the paucity of ideas usually manifests itself in a finished outcome that is resolved hurriedly at the end of the assignment with little relationship to the artists studied or experiments done. Candidates here are credited with ideas where in reality there are few. Usually the result is that the final outcome is a pastiche of a textile designer's piece that has been studied earlier in the contextual references. Frequently these candidates are being seen awarded with marks high in the 'confident/fluent' criteria for AO1.

In Photography a similar pattern emerges. In this endorsement candidate portfolios consisting of endless copies of photographer's techniques and subject matter. 'Here is my attempt at producing Bill Brandt's abstract landscape nudes' for example. With these candidates the final outcome is usually a super slick print

of another photographer's idea or viewpoint. Whilst emulating established photographers is a laudable element of understanding their methods, these pieces cannot form the entire portfolio of a candidate's journey. This approach will display yet again no evidence of development of a personal idea, but candidates who have undertaken it are frequently seen to be awarded a mark in the 'confident/fluent' range for AO1. Even more worrying (as mentioned before) is the integration of other photographers' work amongst their own, without clearly labelling it as being someone else's.

In the Unendorsed Art and Design, where candidates are focusing on the above disciplines for their final outcomes, the combined effect of lenient application of the assessment criteria can have even greater impact and can seriously push the final mark away from a realistic assessment of the candidate's abilities.

These are three commonly observed examples, but they illuminate how the assessment criteria are often misunderstood and misused.

Exemplar material is placed on the Edexcel website for reference of the national standards and this is freely available. This is updated regularly with samples and advice and it is recommended that centres periodically visit this site to familiarise themselves with current issues and visual examples of the mark ranges. There is also a national training programme, an extremely helpful 'Ask the Expert' service and customised training available for any centres having difficulties interpreting the assessment criteria.

The final but very significant point is that centres are extremely reluctant to use the 0 - 35 mark range on the assessment grids. There is a tendency to withdraw any candidate that falls into this mark range, or artificially inflate their mark to take them above it. This is probably due to centres predicting the grade the candidate is going to get and withdrawing them to preserve the centre's status on national league tables. Unfortunately the impact of this is to create an artificial benchmark which inevitably inflates the marks above it. Moderators frequently report seeing candidates on marks of 45 when they are realistically 35 or lower. The avoidance of placing candidates on perceived grade boundaries has been observed universally and the attempt to avoid them always results in candidates being placed above them (never below) to the tune of 1 or 2 marks. The consequences of this on mark inflation are obvious, but combined with all the

other factors are exacerbating and pushing an already serious issue to a critical level.

SUMMARY

As stated last year 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 2012 examination series. This would undermine the tremendous achievement of all of those candidates and teachers who have worked so hard to produce yet another impressive 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 practices. 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.

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