

Moderator's Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2013

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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Table of contents

Introduction	4
Units 6AD01-6CC01	5
Units 6AD02-6CC02	6
Units 6AD03-6CC03	8
Units 6AD04-6CC04	10
General assessment issues	12
Summary	13
Grade Boundaries	14

Introduction

This report is a comprehensive overview of the performance of candidates in the 2013 GCE Art and Design examination series and is compiled from observations made nationally and internationally by the whole assessment team. It is important therefore that the practitioners who are delivering this qualification receive copies of it, and examination officers in centres relay it immediately to the relevant personnel, as it may help to inform their procedures for the forthcoming examination series.

The general opinion expressed by most moderators was that many candidates performed exceptionally well across all of the endorsements with many high achievers exceeding the standards expected at both AS and A2. Some outstanding final outcomes were reported at both levels and these stand as testimony to the quality of teaching, and the enthusiasm and motivation of both candidates and tutors. The evidence observed by the moderation team indicates that candidates are performing to a comparable standard as previous years. The current qualification demands a rigour of intellect and depth of analysis of candidates' own and other's work.

In last year's report particular consideration was given to the endorsements of Photography and Textiles. These appeared to have fallen out of synchronisation with national standards through various issues, including misunderstandings about what constitutes the development of ideas. I am pleased to report that tutors delivering these courses seemed to have embraced the messages in the report, and this year they generally achieved more accurate assessment of their candidates' achievements. Whilst this is welcomed, they are advised to look carefully at the assessment overview at the end of this report, as they are still falling foul of the same issues as the other endorsements.

Here are the issues pertinent to each unit, this year being condensed with the individual unit issues presented as bullet point lists. This should make it much easier for centres to quickly highlight and mark issues that are relevant to their own courses, whilst ignoring those are not. The observations are generic and must not be seen as blanket lists of criticism or praise for individual centres.

Units 6AD01-6CC01

Unit 1 offers centres opportunities to structure programmes of visual study that encourage breadth and depth in the development of students' visual language, development of ideas, experimentation and analysis of their own and others' work. The unit is project-based and teacher-led.

- Many centres use trips and gallery visits to inform and help develop skills in critical analysis with very positive results.
- Some centres do not allow enough time for candidates to refine and develop their final outcomes, as the pace and exuberance of the exploration and development of techniques fills the entire course.
- Sometimes the wide range of contextual references covered does not allow time for proper critical analysis and understanding.
- Development of ideas, as well as development of techniques needs to be demonstrated and taught, as many courses still consist of a sequence of tasks with many, sometimes random, unlinked outcomes.
- Many centres are avoiding traditional direct first-hand observational methods, such as drawing (many are using purely digital media to record). This frequently affects students' ability to control the formal elements when it comes to realising their creative intent, both in Unit 1 outcomes, and in final outcomes at the end of the Externally Set Assignment for Unit 2.
- Very structured and prescriptive programmes are seen to assist weaker candidates to achieve better marks.
- Over-structured and prescriptive courses, however, can restrict candidates when it comes to pushing and developing ideas. This really manifests itself when candidates have to respond independently to the following Unit 2. A careful balance should be maintained.
- It appears that strong house-styles have become less dominant this year.
- Standardisation across endorsements is still an issue and can cause great problems at moderation. Centres are urged to resolve inter-departmental problems and work together to develop a consistent assessment programme.
- Timing of the units is crucial. Many centres are still over-running with Unit 1 and leaving little time for proper development and experimentation in Unit 2.
- Better use of INSET training and familiarisation with marked exemplars from Edexcel would help centres' accuracy of marking.
- Proper allocation of official time for marking would be of great benefit. Centres are frequently expected to 'fit marking in' around a multitude of other school duties which can have the effect of disturbing focus and concentration on what is probably one of the most important tasks of the academic year.

Units 6AD02-6CC02

This Unit is assessed through an externally set assignment which consists of one broad based theme – this year's theme was 'Covert and Obscured'

- The theme was well received and inspired exciting and genuine engagement from a majority of candidates.
- As mentioned in Unit 1, candidates approaching this unit from extremely structured courses split into two types of response: extremely able candidates pushed ahead with excellent personal investigations and outcomes; however, the majority of less able candidates struggled. They were unable to push and develop independently focused ideas.
- Starting points in the ESA paper were often ignored in favour of self-directed ideas that resulted in predictable outcomes. These emerged from repetitive supporting studies and outcomes that had been fixed before any form of developmental journey had really been undertaken. This was common amongst lower achieving candidates where more firm guidance may have been constructive.
- Brain-storming and mind maps are still prevalent, with the inherent dangers of producing pathways that lead to blind alleys, needing sources that can only be obtained from magazines or the internet.
- Gallery visits and research expeditions to launch the theme proved extremely valuable with the cautionary observation, however, that 'one-person shows' often led to a large percentage of the cohort producing pastiches of the artist visited.
- Linked to these observations was the issue of a single cohort all using the same starting point or focus. Where this happened it was very difficult to establish individual development of ideas and candidate ownership over the assignment.
- It was observed that several centres were not allowing a large enough lead-in time to Unit 2, probably due to Unit 1 overrunning, as previously mentioned.
- Scale of the final outcomes was seen to be a more serious issue than in previous years. For high-achieving candidates it was not a problem, but many lower achievers were seen to struggle with canvases that were beyond their capabilities, rushing to finish them in the prescribed time of eight hours with a resultant loss of refinement. Those who did finish had worked up smaller sketches into huge pieces in the belief that this demonstrated refinement, when in actual fact it tended to demonstrate the opposite, as the smaller pieces had sensitivity and understanding that was lost when they were scaled up. It is important that the message 'bigger is not necessarily better' is circulated before next year's series.
- Candidates using mood boards with collages of second hand source material need to be monitored carefully, and students guided individually. These can also often lead to blind alleys and predictable outcomes with the worst case scenarios ending up in direct copies of second hand sourced photographs.
- Good results are seen where time is dedicated in the supporting studies to individual guidance and discussion with tutors regarding the candidate's focused idea and its development.
- Political issues and their messages are often seen to take precedence over

control over the formal elements with aesthetic concerns sacrificed on the journey. This is partly due to misunderstanding of the term 'understanding of complex issues' in the assessment grid. The complex issues referred to in the grid are those of artistic concerns, rather than general political and ethical problems.

- Textile students were observed to be less inclined to throw all the techniques they had learnt in Unit 1 into the outcome for Unit 2. Here idea development was influencing the project more strongly, and more selection and refinement was evident. Previously this outcome was often little more than a collection of small experiments and swatches arranged as a garment or wall hanging.

Units 6AD03 - 6CC03

This is a coursework unit which has two requirements: Practical work and Personal Study (an investigation into a selected aspect(s) of others' art, craft or design). They may be approached in any order, or progress alongside each other. They must be presented as 'separate final outcomes'. Because this is coursework, centres are completely free to determine their own content and delivery, so long as candidates are given opportunity to produce work which may be assessed using the four Assessment Objectives. As this Unit is constructed of two distinct components the issues relating to them are listed separately. These points are taken directly from the Principal Moderator's individual report for Unit 3.

Personal Study

- There has been a slight improvement in the quality of Personal Studies in this series. Whereas a significant number of centres have previously taken the Personal Study to be a written account of candidates' own work, rather than a study of others' work, that tendency now seems to be waning. Possibly centres have taken to heart the message from the 2012 Chief Examiner's report. It hasn't completely gone away, however: some moderators report that this tendency is alive and well. Others (including myself) have found that Personal Studies have sometimes been padded out (or even mainly filled) with justifications as to how the chosen objects of study link with candidates' own work.
- Again, moderators have reported, confirmed by my own experience, that frequently the level of analysis is low, comprising biographical detail, material clearly copied from the internet, and little sense that candidates have seen the actual works on which they are allegedly commenting. Even where comments are descriptive, they miss out essentials, particularly scale. There is rarely any mention of the original purpose of works.
- Frequently, the connection between candidates' own work and that which they have selected for study is subject matter: 'I am doing paintings of animals, so I have decided to study artists who have done paintings of animals.' These may be mixed with different periods jostling together, or established artists rubbing shoulders with amateurs who happen to have their own web sites. There is often a lack of any sort of discrimination, any sort of historical awareness, any in-depth visual analysis.
- Spelling, punctuation and grammar seem to have been improved slightly.
- In the main centres are providing the Personal Studies as separate presentations from the practical work, which is a welcome improvement. Frequently the Personal Study turns out to be a compilation of annotations separately presented in work books, or maybe it is the other way round.
- Word counts suggest that the minimum has usually been presented, so there is a real sense that the Personal Study is there to satisfy the content requirements of the unit rather than to fulfil a genuine educational need. Nearly all the studies reported on and seen by me have bibliographies, as required by the specification, but they are nearly all lists of URLs.

Practical work

- In most cases the practical work was substantial and showed a very distinct step up in quality from AS. Many centres managed to get more than one project into this unit, although a few stuck to the previous Externally Set Assignment paper approach for the whole content.
- Regrettably a very common approach, especially in Art, Craft and Design and Fine Art was to lean very heavily on chosen artists as a source for what was often little better than pastiche, showing minimal understanding of the artists cited and leading to very superficial work. Often there were 'transcriptions' — frequently a euphemism for bad copies done using inappropriate materials. This is a growing orthodoxy and, though warned about in previous Chief Examiner's Reports, is becoming more widespread. It is sometimes hard to see what educational purpose it serves. In Photography I saw a variation on this, which was called 'Emulation'. In this, candidates were encouraged to make photographs in the style of their chosen source.
- In some design-oriented endorsements (e.g. Graphic Communications) Unit 3 provided high-quality, well-researched, thoroughly developed and highly finished projects. Whilst it is true that some digital technology can seem to provide candidates with easy ways out, it seems more to be the case that such resources have added a great deal of value, especially where they accompany and enhance traditional mark-making.
- Unfortunately, in Art, Craft and Design and Fine Art there sometimes seems little awareness of the need to develop and learn real visual skills. For instance, not infrequently candidates are provided with life drawing classes. Not only do these seem to provide nothing towards the projects they accompany, but, more concerning, there is little, if any, evidence that any teaching has taken place. Measuring, proportion anatomy, etc., seem to be largely absent. The perceived benefit seems usually to be that the students have done some life drawing which they can include in their portfolios. It is rare to find evidence of the teaching of painting skills. Printmaking is popular, but teaching seems often to be limited to very basic technology: this is how to cut a block; this is how to use the press, etc. But no sense of the need to conquer and refine the techniques, to make technically better prints.

Units 6AD04 - 6CC04

As with Unit 2 the theme for Unit 4 is set by Edexcel in the form of an examination paper. This was available for students to respond to from the 1st February. They have an unrestricted amount of time after this date to prepare for a timed test of 12 hours. The start of this preparation time and the date of the concluding timed test are set by the centre. Most centres start in February or March and give the timed test in mid-May depending upon their academic calendars and the corresponding holiday dates such as Easter and the half-terms on either side. These vary from year to year. This year Easter was early, facilitating the development of comprehensive supporting studies, and resulted in a high standard of achievement amongst the stronger candidates. They are required to provide a set of supporting studies and a final timed test outcome/s for assessment. This year's theme was 'Inside, Outside, In Between'.

- Candidates generally seized the opportunity to develop and produce highly personal and unique outcomes from their investigations.
- This year's ESA theme was well received by most candidates and some exciting developments and outcomes came to fruition; on the whole submissions showed a sequential development of the journey with examples of inventive and intuitive outcomes.
- Personal themes were pursued with vigour, dealing with more complex issues such as anatomical structures/ landscape and geographical structures/ mental illness and psychological conditions.
- There were still examples of research being too wide and unfocused — gathering too many artists to begin with, and some candidates giving far too much biographical information.
- Final outcomes in this unit invariably drew together all the assessment objectives but many candidates often worked too large in the timed period and would have made a more successful piece if it had been smaller. This was a common observation in many of the centres visited. This is an interesting observation as it repeats the same point made in Unit 2 which indicates it is endemic to the externally set assignments.
- The largest and most noticeable area of weakness within the assessment objectives, as reported by moderators and seen throughout the session in many centres, was in the use of visual language and understanding of the formal elements. This continues to be a concern.
- The use of digital photography continues to supersede more traditional recording methods with a consequent decline in true visual analysis and understanding. The worst case scenarios are where candidates are using mobile phone cameras to take poor grainy images that are then used for large paintings.
- The Photography endorsement seemed very popular again this year with an improvement in the course content in line with assessment criteria. It was more evident this year that most centres had acted upon previous E9 feedback and structured their courses considering the requirements of the assessment criteria in line with national standards.
- Moderators reported that most centres had engaged in the gathering of information and development of ideas with energy and relevance. The majority of candidates fully understood the purpose of visual research and the development of ideas.
- However, there still seems to be a prevalence of pastiche taking place amongst the weaker candidates as they try to replicate the work of others. Whilst this may be an appropriate teaching device in the early stages of

development of technique, it is disappointing to see candidates carrying this approach right through to their final outcomes in Unit 4.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT ISSUES

It appears that many centres still struggle with bringing their assessments into line with the National Standards, and it is essential that their assessment teams access and refresh their knowledge of these with the exemplars published by Edexcel. Comparison with these exemplars combined with substantial experience of previous standards continues to be the most effective way of establishing the correct levels of performance of candidates. It is important that NQTs and teachers new to the specification appreciate this. Whilst the assessment grids are proven to be an effective way of establishing candidates' rank order, fine tuning must be accomplished with knowledge of the visual qualities of the descriptors used in these documents. This is especially true now that the descriptors for 'Fluent' candidates embrace the three highest grades. The following extract from last year's report is as relevant now as it was last year, and it appears that its message may not have been fully embraced. It may well be that not all practitioners were able to access it, so it is important to repeat the salient aspects here (the full 2012 report is still available on the Edexcel website; please note that many other aspects of it are still relevant):

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.

As mentioned above, the quality of work produced by this range of candidates is astounding and moderators continuously comment on the wide range of superb outcomes experienced during their visits to centres. It is obvious therefore that the qualification provides an excellent platform for candidates to flourish and work expressively and independently.

SUMMARY

As stated for the last two years, it is important that this report is placed in context and not seen as simply a catalogue of all the concerns and issues raised in the 2013 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 concerns amongst the examining team. Obviously the comments and observations included do not apply to all centres or to all candidates. It is for individual centres to sift out any relevant details that might be apposite to their own practices. Judicious use of a highlighter on the bullet points may help here. Only if the issues apply to them do they need to reconsider their approaches. 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 integrity of our approach to assessment is widely acknowledged and reflects our mission to maintain standards and reflect the performance of our candidates with accuracy and honesty. Training of the assessment team is now extremely rigorous and any recommendations for mark adjustments are made with serious consideration and reflection.

As mentioned many times 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.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwant to/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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