

Moderator's Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2014

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

This report is a comprehensive overview of the performance of candidates in the 2014 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 2014 examination series provided a glowing testament to the abilities of the candidates who entered for both the AS and A2, GCE Art and Design qualifications. Glowing with colour, expression, individuality and energy. The whole assessment team continue to be impressed with the quality and diversity of the outcomes witnessed during their moderation visits. These exhibitions of work are visible evidence of the hours of commitment given by both staff and students during the academic year. It is a privilege to be able to come and view their efforts first hand, and on behalf of the assessment team I would like to say a massive thank you for the hospitality they have been shown during their visits.

In some cases centres have marked leniently and are encouraged to refer to exemplar on the website. Pearson are aiming to supplement existing exemplar material available on the website to aid centres in their assessment of candidates work in line with national standards.

Here are the issues pertinent to each unit, and again they are bullet pointed for clarity. As mentioned last year the observations are generic and must not be seen as blanket lists of criticism or praise for individual centres. Close scrutiny will permit you to view quickly any points that may be applicable to your own centre or candidates. The bullet points have been taken directly from the moderator's reports and collated and edited to avoid duplication. It was interesting to note, however, that many similar observations were being made by different moderators both nationally and internationally. Therefore some of the points listed in each unit may be generically pertinent.

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.

- The majority of Centres visited offered broad and balanced courses often as a foundation unit to develop good working practices and develop skills. This approach was found to develop the understanding candidates needed to develop their subsequent personal work.
- Centres with an Edexcel GCSE Art Design background benefited in the transition to GCE as there was already an established system and understanding when addressing Assessment Objectives.
- Most centres used the coursework unit at AS level to introduce the basic language of their endorsement. With Art and Design and Fine Art this focuses on drawing and painting, whilst in endorsements such as Photography and Textiles this is more concerned with the introduction of technical skills.
- Numerous centres actively encourage the use of digital imagery to assist in investigation, document progress and for use as a creative tool. It was noticed that this is an extremely effective tool when used with discretion.
- The digital camera is a welcome new tool for use in the recording of evidence and must be rewarded appropriately.
- Most centres delivering the Photography Endorsement are now focusing on the use of digital media and Photoshop software. Moderators have generally reported an improvement in the submissions in Unit 1.
- Moderators have made numerous comments about the quality of candidate work. Good Centres appeared confident in their interpretation of this extensive, coursework unit and the assessment objectives generally had been fully addressed in mainly coherent, well-structured courses. The most successful examples built in a degree of flexibility to allow students the independence to produce exciting, innovative and creative work. This approach tends to suit the more able candidates.
- In some centres the work is more closely led by the teacher. This system is more sequential and is less successful where students are not given sufficient creative freedom. However this does provide security to the less able by providing a clear structure.
- Centres performing less well tended to be somewhat formulaic and prescriptive in their approach. Contextual references tended to be imposed by the centre, rather than explored with a sense of genuine enquiry. In some cases the work journals and supporting studies take the form of retrospective accounts rather than being proactive and ongoing
- Success at A2 depends on the practices established in Unit 1 as one builds on the other. Often our past ESA Themes are used as their inspirational starting points.

- Moderators reported that work journals usually demonstrated an understanding of the AOs and illustrated the creative journey. This approach was found to develop the skills and understanding candidates needed to develop their subsequent personal work.

Units 6AD02 - 6CC02

This Unit is assessed through an externally set assignment which consists of one broad based theme – this year's theme was 'Earth, Air, Fire and Water'

- The theme was generally well received, although some moderators reported that a few centres observed that it was not sufficiently challenging.
- Some centres had encouraged an early focus on one element. This was found to be more successful than those that did a bit of each and combined them with little or no consideration of composition or aesthetics.
- Whilst some centres appreciated the challenge and freedom of the AS ESA theme, other centres found it rather vague, which made some of the candidates latch on to the likes of "Harry Potter" and Chinese dragon imagery for their final submission. Some candidate's work had an unconvincing link to the ESA question, and they had simply "attached" an element such as fire or water loosely to their interpretation of a standard portrait or landscape. These candidates produced work which lacked real consideration for the potential and challenge of the theme.
- The most interesting responses came from water, particularly from within photography and textiles, with students picking up on the work of a range of quite interesting and appropriate artists to explore, including Alban Grosdidier, who produced interesting pictures of submerged figures.
- In a series of centres, less able students mistakenly chose to focus upon fire but then were unable to develop their ideas further.
- It is difficult to gauge the extent to which the starting points are being used and it would appear that self-directed starting points are still prevalent – these are often lacking in scope with predictable outcomes.
- As in past years brainstorming and mind maps were still prevalent and usually did not initiate meaningful ideas – in fact most appeared to be a form of space filling. Some of the best results were found in centres that used a gallery visit or research expedition to an appropriate location to initiate ideas, but it was noted that one-person shows often lead to a lack of individual responses and inevitable pastiche.
- The most creative approach to both coursework and exam units seems to be to find the difficult balance between structured exercises and allowing the students freedom to explore ideas independently. This is not quite the same as the most successful approach in terms of assessment and is the cause of much tension – teachers are often worried about giving students freedom if they do not have a pre-existing foundation of skills – particularly in terms of an understanding of how to control the expressive potential of the formal elements.
- Some centres tended to use a very prescriptive, 'tick box' approach, and sometimes even several weeks down the line in the ESA. This approach often hindered the candidate's personal development of the theme.

- There seems to be an increasing tendency for students to produce multiple outcomes in the photography ESA, sometimes demonstrating that the candidates have been unable to sustain a coherent line of enquiry for the full period.
- Marks tend to drop for this Unit compared with Unit 1 when this should be the summit of the first year. It raises the issue of whether centres have been too prescriptive in guiding students and raises the possibility that they struggle when left to think independently.
- Work that is issue based comes with its own problems – formal elements, general aesthetics etc, are often ignored in favour of “making a point” – and this ‘point’ often involves a lot more writing than visuals – resulting in a rather weak final outcome.
- Textile sketchbooks continue to be packed full of samples, making them almost impossible to look through. It may be that they would be far better presented as A1/A2 design sheets. Samples are also entirely random in some centres and therefore difficult to assess against the Assessment Objectives, other than for experimentation with media and materials. There is still a lot of evidence that candidates are using every learnt technique for their final outcome rather than selecting appropriately.
- ‘Understanding of the more complex issues’ tends to be mostly demonstrated through writing, missing the opportunity to explore it visually. It is also often interpreted to mean more of a social/historical understanding than an artistic appreciation using visual language & critical vocabulary.
- Sketchbook work can be problematic especially in encouraging the development of ideas. Most candidates had used their sketchbooks as lively collection tools and had clearly enjoyed the journal aspect of the sketchbook. However many candidates had paid less attention to the developmental process and as a result often leapt towards final outcomes without reviewing and refining their ideas. Some centres overcome the sketchbook problem by encouraging compositional and mark making studies on a larger scale before attempting final work and this is an approach that could be encouraged.
- Sketchbook habits continue to be an issue in some centres, with sketchbooks following a formula that does not drive the project forward with any real sense of purpose. Instead they follow a formula of collections of weak biographies and pastiches followed by unresolved ideas pages then jumping to a poorly considered outcome.

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. The nature of Unit 3 with its two elements means the observations made by the moderation team are quite expansive, careful analysis of their findings, however, will be very rewarding.

- There was evidence of some tremendous Unit 3 work in some centres. In the best practice students are guided and supported but also given the freedom to explore their own ideas, takes risks and craft genuinely personal lines of inquiry. The best work seen had the confidence and maturity, the sophistication and sensitivity and the drama and excitement that would be expected in highest level performances of this qualification.
- Significant over marking was evident, however, in all of the endorsements in Unit 3. Many students simply had not made the requisite step up in performance to warrant marks defined by the fluent band. Centres need to recognise that a high confident performance may deserve marks between 64 and 80 at AS but will merit marks of 44-60 at A2.
- Pastiche is the most worrying prevailing tendency in Unit 3 and copying exercises, described and justified in sketchbooks as 'transcriptions' or 'responses', are rife. Although this is common in all endorsements, it is endemic in photography where students and centres appear to value exerting considerable effort to simply copy the ingredients of a famous photograph. Having seen Rodchenko's Pioneer with a Trumpet, one can pose the question whether there is any creative purpose to finding a model and a trumpet and taking a low angle shot that replicates the contents and the composition of the original? There may be some purpose to these types of exercise in the early stages of a course when students are learning the craft skills of an endorsement, but in Unit 3 work should be driven by the creative personality of the student. Of course students should be encouraged to look at and be inspired by the works of others but this inspiration should stimulate conceptual ideas, challenges and opportunities that can be grasped and developed by the personal approaches of the students.
- Personal studies should define an inquiry around a suitable theme or focus. Often a question is devised to allow this inquiry to be a structured and sequenced response. The breadth of the best choices of topic is gauged to allow for in depth personal analysis and interpretation. The main thrust of the Personal Study must be independently driven response, and overview, historical and biographical information should support this response rather than getting in the way of it.
- Students who structure their personal studies by sequentially documenting artists who they have been influenced by sometimes fail to demonstrate the depth of conceptual understanding that would be expected at higher

performance levels. This is not to discourage students from focusing their studies around artists who have influenced them; indeed this relationship between practical work and personal study is integral to unit 3. The issue relates to the differing creative intentions of the student and the artists they study and refers back to the point made about pastiche.

- Centres should encourage students to extend enquires beyond descriptive analysis of technique and wrestle with the deeper and ultimately more challenging conceptual issues, differentiating between their aims and those of the artists who inspire them.
- Personal studies were mostly in essay form – which established a focus and level appropriate for the specification – the best were analytical and informed with clear impact on candidates' own responses and outcomes – but others were really not understood or developed fully as written components and were the weaker elements in some submissions
- Some Personal studies dipped below 1,000 words. They were always candidates placed in the competent assessment band, sometimes worryingly nearer to the top of that performance level than they should have been.
- Candidates who submitted structured essays produced stronger and more mature critical and contextual analysis than candidates who just produced written commentary within the workbooks of their practical work.
- Excellent, inspirational work continues to be done in many centres. However in some centres the balance between practical work and writing in sketchbooks continues to shift further towards writing – as teachers and in turn students seem to become more wary of observational recording, and less confident in using the formal elements – more and more journals become padded out with – 'writing'. This is measured by the kilo, and is often highly descriptive and does not move the creative journey forwards.
- Many unit 3 submissions focused on a critique and diary of the candidate's own work with only cursory mention of others' work. This was often the most inaccurately marked unit of the whole specification. In many centres the quality of the written word, language and fluency of description belied the centre mark awarded.
- Students who structure their personal studies by sequentially documenting artists who they have been influenced by sometimes fail to demonstrate the depth of conceptual understanding that would be expected at higher performance levels.

Units 6AD04 - 6CC04

As with Unit 2 the theme for Unit 4 is set by Edexcel/Pearson 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-Term's either side. These vary from year to year and influence the preparatory time. They are required to provide a set of supporting studies and a final timed test outcome/s for assessment. This year's theme was 'Growth and Evolution'. The general consensus is that this theme was one of the most popular in recent years and resulted in some outstanding final outcomes. As with the other units, the points raised here are genuine observations from the moderation team and any issues raised need to be read in context with your own centre and particular cohort of students.

- The final unit was generally seen to be the most successful and ambitious and the theme 'Growth & Evolution' was well received in centres. Most moderators have commented on the manner in which candidates have used the suggestions and examples from the question paper to initiate their ideas and inform their progress. One would expect the weaker students to adopt an easy way out but at the higher end the work, still drawing heavily from the paper, has developed strongly resulting in sophisticated and ambitious outcomes. In the future I can envisage many coursework units being based on this particular theme.
- As with Unit 2 there was a general perception of large scale or complex pieces being completed outside the time scale allowed rather than being left incomplete. Obviously some centres feel that the time constraints can be ignored to ensure the work being completed and high level candidates not being restrained. In these cases the ESA is not seen as different to the coursework units.
- Many moderators have noticed a preponderance of centres featuring very large portraits, which in many cases are scaled up copies of photographs, often following the path of Jenny Saville, Chuck Close or Lucien Freud. This is often accompanied by little experimentation or development yet is over rewarded.
- Many textiles courses are moving away from fashion leanings and are displaying more of a fine art character. Much textiles work seems to have entered the worlds of installations and fabric sculptures.
- Too often students had decided upon their outcomes very early in the project and seemingly repeat and re-digest certain images until the timed test.
- It was not always clear which part of the work exhibited was produced in the timed exam. This was a particular issue where installation work was presented.

- The candidates had explored exciting and ambitious avenues where they were able to explore a range of ideas.
- Candidates demonstrated they had gained a great deal of insight and understanding in using media and had a high command of visual language. There were some high level practical outcomes and evidence of risk-taking.
- The Externally Set Assignment in some centres allowed candidates to demonstrate sensitive use of media and sound contextual judgment which in turn led to some well executed work.
- As a synoptic unit this is functioning very well with most of the candidates demonstrating the strongest elements of their submission within it. Time constraints continue to be an issue both in the preparatory studies and the timed test. Careful time management is necessary here.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT ISSUES

This is the third year we have issued the statement below, yet sadly it seems to make little impact on the overly optimistic pitching of candidate's marks. We make no excuse for including it again, as the issues are as pertinent now as they have ever been. Centres need to examine closely their internal procedures for standardisation and effective application of the national standards. The solution to the problem is truly effective and accurate marking at teacher examiner level. This may sound obvious but it is simply not happening and we must ask why? Whilst we understand the serious and demanding responsibility of this task, procedures must be put in place to make it happen. The consequences of failing to do so are only too apparent, negatively affecting the qualification, candidates, staff and institutions. Please read it again thoroughly and embrace its points. No-one is immune to its effects everyone from senior management to teacher examiners have a responsibility to understand its invidious character and implement structures to curb it.

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 over-mark idea development, analysis and control over the formal elements that are unsupported by the candidates' submissions. Moderators have observed marking in centres not in 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.

When starting the assessments it is essential that teacher examiners take two steps back from the work they are marking, and ask themselves if the mark they are awarding truly reflects the abilities and achievement of the candidates. To do this effectively necessitates an archive of marked samples for comparison. This must come from the national standards, it cannot come from your own archive of previous years' work or any other source. Edexcel are committed to expanding their on-line archive of marked samples to assist you in doing this so do please keep watching the website for up-dates. They also provide expansive Inset training where senior examiners will demonstrate the application of the standards to real work. Information on these events can be found on the website.

Please also read your own centres report on this year's examinations series. This may reside with your Examinations Officer if you have not seen it before. This is an invaluable document which gives insight into the effectiveness of your marking. Even if your centre marks have not been changed it may be that you are still being slightly lenient in the application of the assessment criteria, and

this is something you will want to note for further examination series. If they have been changed it will highlight the areas that need attention and what to watch out for in the future.

SUMMARY

Scrutinising this report will be of tremendous benefit as there are endless tips and suggestions to improve the delivery of the qualification. It is good to share it amongst the members of departments as someone might spot something that is extremely pertinent to your own centre, but has been overlooked in the initial reading.

Lenient marking diminishes the real achievement of the thousands of candidates who have produced a breath-taking plethora of responses to the diverse and fascinating assignments they have been given.

Moderator's reports contain endless references to the quality, variety and sheer joy displayed in the work they see. These are the real nuts and bolts of the qualification and it is essential they are recognised and acknowledged. Of course it must be realised that in fact they are, as the profusion of genuine high grades awarded testify. These must not be undermined, and the candidates that have achieved them should be extremely proud of their achievement. Fortunately, Art and Design by its very nature shouts out its qualities, and every centre has work displayed for all to see that presents real visual evidence of their candidate's achievements.

We must repeat again that the integrity of our approach to assessment is widely acknowledged, reflecting our mission to maintain standards and represent the performance of our candidates with accuracy and honesty. It is our determination to do this that drives our ambition to ensure marking is in line with the national standard and recognise each candidate's achievement.

As mentioned many times the qualifications from Edexcel/Pearson's suite of GCE Art and Design endorsements are highly 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/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

Pearson Education Limited. Registered company number 872828
with its registered office at Edinburgh Gate, Harlow, Essex CM20 2JE