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Examiners' Report Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2023

Pearson Edexcel GCE
In Art and Design
(9AD0, 9FA0, 9GC0, 9PY0, 9TD0, 9TE0)

Component 1: Personal Investigation
Component 2: Externally Set Assignment

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Introduction

This report is a comprehensive overview of the performance of candidates in the GCE Art and Design Advanced Level 2023 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 2024 examination series.

The 2023 series started a return to somewhat normal conditions, in that the qualification was again composed of two components. Whilst this gave the feel of normality, it was noticed that the aftereffects of the pandemic were still affecting Centres and their candidates. Illness and absences for staff and candidates were still an issue for many and the psychological impact of the last few years was noticeable in many of the candidates' creative journeys. This said, there was a general positivity, energy, and a sense of moving on. Many Centres commented on how they welcomed the return of the exam component. They seemed to particularly enjoy this year's theme and the opportunity for candidates to have protracted and sustained sessions in the classroom. The quality and the standard of the work also appeared to have bounced back to its pre-pandemic levels. Many moderators commented on how impressed they were with the vigour and enthusiasm of the candidates' portfolios and outcomes.

Component 1 Personal Investigation 9AD0/9FA0/9GC0/9PY0/9TD0/9TE0

The observations for Component 1 have been compiled with information from both moderators and centres. They have been summarised by the Principal Moderator for Component 1.

Component 1 Personal Investigation

As was seen before the pandemic, the most successful courses were able to balance the need to provide meaningful workshops and direct teaching of skills, usually at the start of the course, with the confidence to allow students to then find their own direction and work individually.

Visits to experience practical work first-hand or record and gather resources have begun to return to courses but are still fewer than before the pandemic. Moderators commented that good courses consider carefully at the planning stage how workshops and visits can be then developed into individual projects that

enable student 'ownership', helping them to gain ideas and resources that can be incorporated into their own personal development.

Less successful courses tended to deliver a series of prescriptive/small workshops, which sometimes continued throughout Component 1 and even into Component 2. The result was that weaker students in particular, became disengaged from taking ownership of their own work and ideas and never learnt the process of properly reviewing and refining their experiments in a coherent direction. Weaker Textiles and Graphics courses were the most likely to fall into the trap of exploring processes and techniques, without acknowledging the need to develop individual creative journeys, at an early enough stage in the course.

Moderators often reported that the effects of the Covid pandemic were still much in evidence. This manifested itself in increased levels of student anxiety, student absence and a lack of experience at working at scale and making final outcomes generally. This was probably due to the cohort not having the prior experience of doing the ESA practical for GCSE.

The tendency towards introspection in student work, whilst always strong, has continued to increase. Issues concerning 'mental health', body dysmorphia, isolation, personal appearance and identity are very common, along with climate change, the environment, the economic situation and developing technologies. This is the case for both UK and international centres.

It was observed that the use of digital media continued to increase in courses that are traditionally technology based, such as Photography, Graphics and Three-Dimensional Design, but also through animation, film-making and digital image-making in Fine Art and Textiles. Digital presentations of work run the danger of being both exhaustingly over-long and also not distinguishing clearly between the student's own work and examples by other artists and makers, particularly in international submissions.

Component 1 – Personal Study

The Personal Study element is now more generally well-managed by centres. In the best examples the study supports students' understanding of ideas and context, lending depth to practical work and delivering genuine evidence of the cultural capital that students have gained through their studies. Less concern was expressed than in previous years, that the Personal Study disadvantaged ESL, or less academically literate students. However, moderators commented that in some centres the approach has become formulaic, rather tired, and needs refreshing. Overly complex and misunderstood titles abound and often predictable descriptive passages about the students' own work dominate the text.

Some of the best Personal Studies were also able to incorporate ideas from film, TV, literature, music and other media into a discussion about ideas that nevertheless remained focused on an aspect of visual culture. Studies that dealt solely with a societal or other issues without any detailed reference to artworks or artistic ideas did not feed or inform the students in the development of their own work. This is the actual purpose of the study.

Component 2 ESA 9AD0/9FA0/9GC0/9PY0/9TD0/9TE0

Centre staff and candidates reacted enthusiastically to this year's theme. Generally, most welcomed the return of the set assignment and commented that it provided a welcome stimulus and conclusion to the course. The opportunity for blocked, lengthy, official sessions of studio time was welcomed, as it afforded candidates time for sustained focus and concentration. Some commented that it was a bit of a challenge to candidates who had been unfamiliar with the examination processes, after they had had such a lengthy break from them. Candidates were seen to have struggled across the titles, as they re-adjusted to the rigours of exam conditions. Many Centres reported that candidates were also, still suffering from the psychological effects of the past three years and this often manifested itself in their responses to assignments.

This year's theme 'Simple or Complex', was often interpreted through personal experiences of relationships, coping with stress and individual standpoints on international politics and crisis.

Poor choices of creative journeys were those that obviously and literally interpreted the theme, such as: simple or complex patterns and simple or complex animals. Here ideas were generally undeveloped and consisted of basic comparisons between a simple form and a complex one. Comparisons, such as Jackson Pollocks work with Piet Mondrian's, with the candidates not understanding the philosophies between either of these artists and their works. Analysis consisting of simple descriptions of their work and potted biographies of the artists.

Many good responses came from candidates actually reading the exam paper and using the starting points as inspiration for their own creative journeys. Investigations into the complexity of the human body, the complexity of international politics, the reduction of subjects into their primary forms, weather behaviour and the subtleties of seasonal changes, to name but a few.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT OBSERVATIONS

Centres generally are following the guidance and using the Performance Calculators and online exemplars effectively. It appears many Centres are using these to establish effective rank orders and place their candidates in the correct performance levels. However, there is a tendency to place candidates too highly, in the level chosen in each Assessment Objective. This generosity, or creep, often pushes the characteristics of the work out of alignment with the Common Standards and moderators have had no option but make recommendations to bring these marks back into line.

Some Centres continue to show rank order anomalies, where candidates of weaker ability are placed above those of higher ability. This is most perplexing as it endangers the positions of all candidates across the cohort. Whether this is due to ineffective standardisation, or simply time pressure on those internally assessing remains a mystery. It is difficult to imagine that this is an intentional move on the part of some Centres, but sometimes the anomalies are so extreme that they are very difficult to explain logically. It seems unnecessary to say this, but it must be stressed that Centre needs to take great care to establish a correct rank order, as

this is the only way to ensure candidates achieve the grades they deserve. This factor is more important than actually placing candidates in the right levels, as if they are in the wrong levels the

moderators' recommendations will adjust the whole cohort to the correct ones, without disturbing the rank order and therefore individual candidates will not be selected and disadvantaged.

The full range of marks was generally used, but along with individual performance level creep, there also seems to be a perceptible shift towards levels 4 and 5 with a lot of the marks congregating at the top of level 4 and pushing into Level 5. These in reality should be spread more equally through Levels 3,4 and 5.

Those Centres reluctant to present the Performance Calculators with the candidates work during moderation are frequently Centres that have overmarked their candidates. It raises the question of whether they are actually using them as a marking tool or using them and realising that the work does not substantiate the descriptors on the document and are therefore reluctant to display it as the anomalies become obvious. This is most apparent when candidates are being described as erudite and highly intuitive and placed in Level 6, when they actually clearly exhibit the characteristics of purposeful and imaginative (Level 4 descriptors). More emphasis needs to be put on the wording of this document by Centre assessors and then applied accurately to their candidates work. It is worth reminding examinations officers that the Performance Calculators were created by a team of experienced senior examiners. They were asked to describe actual work at each performance level and then the Performance Calculator taxonomy was generated from their language. Many, many centres that use it effectively comment on its usefulness in pinpointing candidates' levels of performance. Let us be clear we are talking about the Performance Calculators not the Assessment Grids. Both documents are freely available from the Pearson website.

SUMMARY

As mentioned before most moderators were pleased to see some sort of return to pre-covid conditions, with candidates genuinely enjoying the specification titles and the opportunity to complete the full course of two components. There were no particularly controversial issues concerning course delivery and assessment, as many of the observations made this year were also being seen before the pandemic. This is not to belittle the trauma of the past few years and the many personal tragedies that occurred during this time, most if not all of the current cohort will have close personal experience of such incidences. It is likely that due to the nature of this subject (in that it is mainly driven by individual experience), we will see many students selecting related psychological issues to explore, in their individual creative journeys, for some time to come. These of course are natural, welcomed and expected, many of those seen this year resulted in many powerful and expressive outcomes. It may well be that art as vehicle serves as a major therapeutic weapon in helping candidates deal with these and other such issues, especially in the age range that the specification is directed towards.

Having said all this, the vast majority of candidates responded to the various internally and externally set assignments with a vast spectrum of individual explorations into many diverse areas of interest. These ranged from panoramic land

and cityscapes, to the microscopic world of bacteria and fungi, with everything inbetween. The opportunity for such limitless diversity is but one of the many aspects that makes this specification such a rewarding qualification for all those involved with it.

It would be absurd not to conclude this report without applauding all of the Centre staff who have delivered this qualification during the past three years. This period has been unique in living history and the experience of every tutor, with unprecedented demands placed upon them. A major part of the stunning performance of the candidates this year is down to the fortitude and perseverance of Centre staff. This report reflects the feelings of the entire moderation team who acknowledge and commend the tremendous support and care Centre staff have consistently shown their candidates.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for A Level Art and Design can be found [here](#).

