



Moderator's Report Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2024

**Pearson Edexcel Advanced Level GCE
in Art and Design**

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

and

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

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Introduction

This report is a comprehensive overview of the performance of candidates in the GCE Art and Design Advanced Level 2024 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 2025 examination series.

The 2024 series returned to its pre-covid levels of energy, enthusiasm and breadth across centres with moderators reporting similar candidate performances to those seen before the pandemic. This was a very welcome discovery, as the current cohort felt the full brunt of the effects of it, in their formative years. There were observations related to its lingering impact and these are detailed in the body of this report. One striking element was that of the candidates' subject matter for their personal investigations and creative journeys. Obviously, their own personal experiences were heavily reflected in these responses.

Component 1: Personal Investigation

9AD0/9FA0/9TD0/9TE0/9PY0/9GC0

Observations:

Here are the observations compiled from individual moderators reports by the Principal Moderator for Component 1.

Component 1 – Personal Investigation

The most successful courses were ones in which teachers had the confidence to allow students to find and maintain their own creative direction relatively early in the course. This is perhaps easier to do in Art and Design and Fine Art courses, where students already have a broad experience of the required skills and techniques. In Photography, students had also been well-supported to make independent responses to themes from the outset, alongside the necessary integration of new skills, processes, and knowledge.

Variety of approach and scale was also important. In Fine Art and Textiles, students who had been challenged to explore different ideas at different scales, including in their sketchbooks, were then later much more confident in creating resolved outcomes, whether at a large or small scale.

Only allowing students to work in one way or at one scale, for instance using very small A5 sketchbooks, often restricted creative possibilities.

Lockdown influenced personal introspection in candidates' focus, and whilst still present, it seems to have diminished from previous series. Politics, war, and other societal issues influenced by current affairs are becoming more frequent.

In Photography it was interesting to see individual responses that differed from a 'Fine Art Photography' approach whilst successfully meeting the assessment objectives, in terms of development of ideas, contextual understanding and experimentation. Here, nature photography, automotive photography, drone photography and animation had all been effectively explored by students.

A wide variety of digital photographic techniques, such as Procreate for both film and animation, are also increasingly being pursued. These approaches are successful when students can clearly and succinctly evidence the development of their creative intentions within sketchbooks or blogs. This skill in documenting development will only gain in importance as AI becomes a more central part of creative practice.

The darkroom plays a vital part in many Photography courses, especially when successfully incorporated into a centre's ethos of creative exploration. It can be less successful if seen as one more bolt-on technique in a series of uncoordinated workshops at the start of a course. This maxim applies to technical workshops in all titles. They are only really useful if the centre validates and continues to support these experiences beyond the workshop stage. Textile Design and Graphic Communications courses that devote much of their time to these discrete workshops, sometimes actually hold back individual creative journeys as students are swamped with too many unrelated experiments in process. Workshops are extremely valuable in developing technical skills and the precious time taken to undertake them can be of even more benefit if the creative focus of each task can be linked to the candidate's own personal theme.

Well-structured and planned visits, to see exhibitions, or artists working first hand, were also very successful. Centres struggling to get candidates out to visit exhibitions would often bring artists into their centres to run specialised workshops and talk about their work. These often provided great inspiration and valuable contributions to candidate's individual creative journeys.

Some centres said that it continues to be increasingly difficult to take students on visits, due to pressure to keep students in school, parental anxieties, and increased costs of transport and gallery admissions.

It has been noticed that one of the dangers of bombarding candidates with contextual sources and artists at the beginning of a course, encourages them to mimic the ideas and techniques of the artists. This can be beneficial in terms of the candidates developing understanding of various media and a breadth of approaches to similar creative journeys. However, for many candidates this becomes the sole method of creating artwork. This system creates problems when the candidate is forced to think for themselves under examination conditions and the consequences are often seen when undertaking Component 2. The candidate often finds an artist they like, who addresses the set theme. They then produce their own versions of the artist's style and work whilst never really taking ownership over the theme or progressing their own personal ideas. Mimicry beyond exploring artists work to acquire techniques in the early stages of a project should be discouraged and carefully monitored. It is difficult to place a candidate in performance level 4 and claim their ideas are imaginative when they have simply taken the artist's ideas and copied them throughout their coursework and externally set assignment (ESA).

Component 1 – Personal Study

The Personal Study can be a very effective part of Component 1, when given proper time for development and supported by active teaching in how to analyse and contextualise works of art.

Most Personal Studies took the form of traditional essay-type responses, but there are signs of more innovative and risk-taking ideas, such as video presentations alongside the written element. Many studies could not rise above performance levels 3 or 4, because they took the form of formulaic comparisons of two or three artists' work or contained extended passages of description, journal-like accounts of the student's own work and a general sense of not being researched beyond initial, superficial forays into ideas.

Good Personal Studies enabled candidates to analyse how the formal qualities of an artwork expressed the artist's intention and related this to an understanding of the broader context of ideas in the theme. They were also able to bring together ideas from disparate media such as film, TV, literature, music and art into a discussion that nevertheless remained focused on an aspect of visual culture. Studies that dealt with societal, or other issues, without any detailed reference to artworks or artistic ideas, did not help the students to develop their own work.

AI programmes such as ChatGPT are now freely available and can provide an instant framework for an essay with a degree of credibility. At present this is usually immediately recognisable, as there is always a huge disparity between the style and competency of the candidate's own annotation in their sketchbooks and coursework when compared to the essay. Centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to check that work presented for submission is the candidate's own. They know the candidates and if the work they are presenting is not representative of the candidates' true abilities they must challenge it. AI generated essays are clear examples of malpractice. Moderators are instructed to report examples of this form of malpractice when they encounter it. As AI essay generation becomes more and more sophisticated it will become harder and harder to differentiate it from the candidate's own hand. This is an ongoing concern and we would ask centre staff to be diligent in monitoring its legitimate use. Obviously as a reference tool it is invaluable, but it is essential that the candidate collates the information and makes their own critical appraisal and cognitive links from the references sourced.

Component 2: Externally Set Assignment

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Centre staff and candidates again welcomed the exam theme and commented specifically on the direction and inspiration it had given candidates. This was a typical comment from the collated moderators' reports:

'The ESA theme was unanimously welcomed and enjoyed by all, Observe, Seek, Challenge saw students really run with the theme and develop some interesting responses and pathways. It was noted that it was a more contemporary and diverse paper than in previous years which was 'exciting and relevant'. In the best instances candidates were able to develop quickly and create work that inspired good portfolios, whilst at times candidates were hampered by controlled courses that felt continual unconnected artist studies and responses taken directly from the paper was the best approach. Often centres felt they had to run the art examination earlier than ever before to be clear ahead of other subject exams.'

Many centres are now using past papers as the foundation for their coursework units, and it is interesting to see online resources expanding the themes and producing even more information and support for candidates once the ESA is published.

For most titles delivery of the ESA is straightforward and is presented as just another assignment, however, Photography often presents challenges as captured in this comment: 'The timed test still throws up issues for the Photography title with centres often uncertain how best to manage this sustained period. It is not uncommon for heavy post-production to be carried out, which is not always the best solution and can adversely impact student work and progress.' This raises an interesting issue which will be addressed with suggestions and advice in this year's training programme.

There still seems to be some uncertainty about the nature of the theme or ESA title. Candidates and staff often think they need to address each word of the theme and this needs to be considered going forward, as this was never the intention. The title, as with the rest of the paper is simply an inspirational starting point where you can take one, or all the words as the initial inspiration. You can even take the ethos of the words and not even mention them. However, using three this year 'Observe, Seek, Challenge' seems to have created issues in some centres. See the following observation from one of the reports:

'In some centres candidates had taken time to address each element in turn, with the result that their supporting studies were more fragmented and never achieved the depth of study that would have placed their submissions in higher performance levels.'

On another note, this comment was particularly pertinent regarding the comments made in the introduction to this report:

'Covid was mentioned in every visit, highlighting the fact that we are still feeling pandemic effects, particularly with students struggling to find their own ideas and often reliant on teachers, who were also increasingly tired at having to 'spoon feed' their students to ensure they kept going and kept focused.'

It seems that the aftershocks of the pandemic are still being felt and manifesting themselves in expected ways, as all candidates had been affected during their approach to GCE. Signs such as

poor attendance, fatigue, introspective themes and less control over the formal elements were seen in many centres. Whilst the main trauma of the pandemic might well be over, the deeper psychological effects will naturally manifest themselves in a creative subject for some time after. This was seen in the final outcomes for the ESA of many candidates, who frequently referenced trauma depicted by artists such as Goya, Francis Bacon, Munch and Chaim Soutine. Whilst it is normal for this age range to dwell on these aspects, there was a definite increase this year in the responses exploring these dark themes.

General Assessment Observations

The new focus on support provided by our Subject Advisor, Jaclyn Wiid, was greatly appreciated by centres who commented on the ease of access and benefits of the Exemplar Library and other support documents and videos. This effort has resulted in few centres not being able to find or access the correct tools for assessment and marking. Generally, this seems to be having a positive national and international impact, although some centres indicate that they use the exemplars for comparison, though it seems this may not always be the case. See the following observation: 'Centres unanimously appreciated the new exemplar library and found it easier to access standards to inform their marking. It was more common to find lenient assessment in Component 2, where often smaller collections of work were overmarked as centres tried to find similar marks for candidates, as seen in their Component 1 submissions. Many centres made direct reference to certain exemplars that guided their marking but equally it was common to find discrepancies between the centre marks and the exemplar material. Where instances of overmarking occurred, it was often in the higher mark ranges, where centres had just pushed beyond the exemplar material, often it seemed they felt that their highest candidate should simply be full marks.'

The stability of the grade boundaries over the past few years has helped to convince centres that constancy is a better approach to assessment and somewhat relieved the temptation to progressively inflate marks. It is worth reminding candidates that the highest grade achievable in this qualification is A*. Any candidate achieving an A* has attained the highest grade possible in this qualification, regardless of the individual raw unit marks.

Summary

2024 has definitely had a greater sense of normality about it and this has been reflected in the stunning artwork seen nationally and internationally. Access to galleries and public spaces has fuelled the creative drive of candidates and we are again seeing a wealth of diverse explorations and outcomes to candidate's creative journeys.

Concerns have been raised about time being eroded in the final two terms of the academic year. These are being affected by internal and mock examinations and other centre-based events. Also, the new ruling to allow candidates time to review their centre marks before final submission, has shortened the summer term. At this point in time these concerns can only be addressed by careful planning and considered structuring, for each individual centre, as no two centres have the same restraints.

Those coping well direct candidates to quickly find their own particular pathway for the exam theme and focus all their efforts on pertinent and relevant research to develop it. Good direction in the early stages can make a big difference. Candidates that choose a personal focus that has enough depth for the whole assignment, without being so broad that they lose their way seem to fare best. Those that are not guided and left to wander from one idea to another, struggle to find a focus and consequently their final outcomes lack resolution.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html>

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