



Examiners' Report Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCE
In Art and Design (9AD0) Paper 02

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Component 2 Theme Overview

The theme for Component 2 is set by Edexcel in the form of an examination paper. In 2025, this was made available for learners to respond to from 1st February. The theme this year was 'Union'.

Learners have an unrestricted amount of time after this date to prepare for a 15-hour timed test.

The start of this preparation period and the date of the concluding timed test are set by the centre. Most centres begin in February or March and schedule the timed test in mid-May, depending on their academic calendars and corresponding holiday dates such as Easter and the Half-Terms on either side. These vary from year to year.

This year, Easter was late. Although the break facilitated the collection of comprehensive visual resources, it was often difficult for learners to capitalise on these in the shortened term that followed. As expected, the more accomplished learners used these resources to create fascinating and skilled outcomes. However, weaker learners struggled to realise their creative intent, resulting in many unfinished or poorly developed outcomes.

Learners are required to provide a set of supporting studies and a final timed test outcome(s) for assessment.

Performance in 2025

This year's theme, Union, was particularly well received by centres, who frequently commented that the single-word theme removed confusion while offering enough breadth to allow learners to develop unique and personal creative journeys.

General concerns were raised about the preparatory period for the ESA. It seems that centre timetables are very pressured during this period due to mock examinations, school visits, marking time, and short terms.

The impact of reduced time seems greatest on mid- to lower-ability candidates, as higher-ability learners have the self-determination to continue their preparation unaided over the Easter holidays. These holidays fell late this year, leaving a very short period afterward to consolidate and develop the work collected by weaker learners during the break.

Very few centres have not developed strategies for effective ESA delivery. However, it was mentioned that learners still struggled with self-motivation, which was felt to be a lingering effect of Covid. This still seems to have impacted the performance of many learners, according to Heads of Department.

Good responses to the theme included:

- Developments exploring politics and protest
- Visual language
- Origami
- Candid portraits
- Couples and relationships

It was noted that concepts and in-depth, confident understanding of art terms were applied to the theme Union, with diverse and sustained experimentation. A range of practical approaches were explored during the preparatory period before refinement

into the timed test practical outcome. For example, one learner produced a broad response to the theme, including growing root systems into a 3D-printed mould and a series of sculptural forms.

Weaker responses tended to follow obvious interpretations of the theme, such as predictable responses involving family, friends, football matches, and politics. These responses did not develop personal viewpoints or ideas and simply consisted of family portraits, selfies with friends, a football game, or union flags. This is typical of any given theme and is an expected reaction from lower-scoring learners.

It was observed nationally and internationally that the theme gave full access to all ability ranges and allowed high achievers to expand and stretch the theme in personal and intuitive ways.

Summary

One of the main reasons centres choose Pearson/Edexcel for their A Level learners is the nature of the examination paper. Every series, comments are recorded stating this is why many centres prefer Pearson/Edexcel over other examination boards. They particularly appreciate the single-word starting point and how it is comprehensively expanded in the paper's content, with many individual starting points and separate sections addressing each title.

All centres (except for some new international ones) now seem fully conversant with the assessment criteria and marking tools and are using the website and exemplar gallery effectively.

They are consistently applying the marking criteria; however, some confusion remains regarding the relationship between grades and marks. The highest possible achievement in this qualification is A*. Learners achieving this grade have demonstrated optimum performance (effectively full marks). The actual marks given for any component are simply a statistical method of establishing whether the learner has achieved the maximum grade.

Awarding excessive marks to safeguard a learner's position within expected performance levels is unnecessary and can lead to problems as the qualification matures. It is essential that centres follow the well-established performance criteria on the performance calculators and use these in conjunction with the online exemplar gallery when documenting the achievements of their highest-performing learners.

International Note

There is still some confusion about the demands of the qualification and their relationship to the marking criteria. Many new centres appear to be taking the qualification without adequate training or research, leading to fundamental errors in course delivery.