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# Examiners' Report/ Lead Examiner Feedback

Summer 2017

BTEC Level 3 Nationals in Art and Design

Unit 2: Critical and Contextual Studies in

Art and Design

(31828H)





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August 2017

Publications Code 31828H\_1706\_ER

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## Grade Boundaries

### What is a grade boundary?

A grade boundary is where we set the level of achievement required to obtain a certain grade for the externally assessed unit. We set grade boundaries for each grade (Distinction, Merit, Pass and Near Pass). The grade awarded for each unit contributes proportionately to the overall qualification grade and each unit should always be viewed in the context of its impact on the whole qualification.

### Setting grade boundaries

When we set grade boundaries, we look at the performance of every learner who took the assessment. When we can see the full picture of performance, our experts are then able to decide where best to place the grade boundaries – this means that they decide what the lowest possible mark should be for a particular grade.

When our experts set the grade boundaries, they make sure that learners receive grades which reflect their ability. Awarding grade boundaries is conducted to ensure learners achieve the grade they deserve to achieve, irrespective of variation in the external assessment.

### Variations in external assessments

Each test we set asks different questions and may assess different parts of the unit content outlined in the specification. It would be unfair to learners if we set the same grade boundaries for each test, because then it would not take into account that a test might be slightly easier or more difficult than any other.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, are on the website via this link:

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### Unit 2: Critical and Contextual Studies in Art and Design (31828H)

Grade	Unclassified	N	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Boundary Mark	0	9	18	31	44

# Introduction

This lead examiner report is written to help you understand how learners performed this year and to support in future delivery, and should be considered in conjunction with the corresponding set task and marking grid.

This was the first year that this externally assessed unit was made available for delivery as part of the BTEC Art and Design Level 3 qualification which commenced first teaching this academic year.

## Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

There were some excellent submissions in response to this paper with learners really engaging with both the theme and the art and design practitioners. There was some purposeful and well directed research into and around the theme, and a wide range of responses were seen with all mark bands accessed across all four assessment outcomes. Learners who produced weaker responses were poorly prepared and not ready to sit the paper. A few learners though were working above the level of the qualification. It was very pleasing to see many learners producing pieces of authoritative writing with independent and fully justified reasoning included.

Learners could access all pathways through the choice of their second artists. Artists in this paper are carefully chosen to ensure that they are internationally recognised and there is accessible research material widely available. The theme of "Consumerism" was considered relevant and accessible, and was well received by centres. A range of art and design specialisms were seen and those working at the higher end had clearly researched extensively to select their chosen artists. Some learners had chosen obvious artists from art movements that they had previously explored indicating that the research time was not fully utilised by the centre.

Learners can take 4 sides of A4 notes with them into the exam and respond to the set task in the period of supervised assessment. It was not surprising then to see a high standard of work produced. What was surprising was how unprepared some learners appeared to be and it is a little confusing as to how the research and preparatory time was used. The ability to research is a skill that will be new to some learners, and centres are advised to plan this into the GLH for this unit. It is recommended that learners spend no more than 20 hours to complete research and preparatory work, and within this time centres should ensure that learners know how to plan and carry out effective research.

This unit was prepared for and delivered well at larger centres, with learners producing independent work and choosing artists from a range of specialisms. Photography and painting were well represented in the artist chosen by the learners, but there was also, amongst others,

sculpture, graphics, textiles and fashion represented. This indicated that the paper was widely accessible to learners working across a range of specialisms.

## Task

### **AO1: Be able to apply an effective investigation process to inform understanding of creative practitioners**

Learners must carry out effective and well directed research into two creative practitioners and the theme of the paper. Evidence of effective research was not only seen in the bibliography (activity 2), but also evident in how well that knowledge travelled through and informed the learner's submission. The process of research is a journey and learners should initially research a large range of sources and then make careful edits as to what is relevant and what can be discarded. The ability to select and edit information is very important due to the constraints given by the word counts.

Learners need to ensure that their additional practitioner chosen to investigate is an appropriate selection which allows them sufficient breadth and depth of coverage. They must ensure their chosen artist has an established reputation and presence, and they are not too obscure otherwise this will limit their ability to research and find relevant information.

The choice of the second artist should not be a teacher led activity; learners must be allowed to independently select their chosen artists. This should come about through effective research once the paper has been introduced to the learners. A couple of centres submitted work where learners had made very similar selections, and one where all learners wrote about the same artist of their own choosing. It is hoped that this does not continue as it lessens the ability of the learner to reflect their own findings and to develop independent work.

Higher achieving learners submitted lengthy bibliographies showing extensive and relevant sources of information about the artists and the theme. Learners carried out interesting and varied research predominantly using websites, but research was also carried out using books, film and TV. At least one learner had contacted their chosen artist directly to gain a response about their work and the influences informing it. Some learners who had restricted access to the internet elected to undertake a questionnaire to gain a greater understanding of the theme, and whilst this was not ideal or to be recommended, the learners proved that they could produce a worthy outcome. This level of research informed the learner to develop a pertinent understanding and draw independent conclusions and statements. This was very pleasing to see rather than a rewrite of one article or gallery website. It is exciting to see learners beginning to develop their own line of enquiry and make brave and original suggestions backed up with valid and consistent research.

Mostly the writing had a consistent and logical structure; some learners responded with a style of writing that reflected the editorial nature of the task. Whilst this was not essential it was a sign that learners had really engaged with the vocational nature of the task rather than simply produce a piece of writing with no audience in mind. Some had gone further still and also

considered layout and purposeful placement of images. Again, this was not essential but very pleasing to see that the whole paper had been considered in terms of the set task being taken on board. This is good to see in a visual arts qualification.

Some learners work contained serious factual errors. These had likely come about through weak research leading to inaccurate statements and assumptions being made by the learner. Some images were also wrongly identified and attributed. Poor copies and pastiches of very well-known artists were incorrectly attributed and described as original and authentic. This is not acceptable at this level of qualification and learners must ensure that their research sources are reliable. It would make sense to double check information and not always accept the first finding as accurate. This is particularly relevant when using internet search engines.

Two centres had omitted to include any images, and the absence of any images meant that additional visual checks needed to be made by examiners. It is hoped that this will be addressed in future; all submissions must be accompanied by at least two images.

Some learners had taken the theme to be an art movement and described practitioners as being part of the movement. However, this was done in a less convincing way and indicated a lack of understanding of both the theme and the vocationally based task.

## **AO2: Demonstrate the ability to visually analyse the work of creative practitioners**

The two selected images that were presented in the task were mostly well described by learners. There was no obvious difference in the level of response depending on the choice of the prescribed artists. There was a large range of published material available to learners about both the artists included in the paper. The challenge here was for learners to access readily available information and to go beyond simply reproducing it, by creating an original and thoughtful response. This was particularly evident again in their choice of second artist, the learner's choice of artist that linked with the theme was critical. Learners who chose obscure artists were often limited in their research, but could partially compensate by creating original lines of enquiry. However, this was harder for learners to reference with valid evidence. Learners who chose well-known artists, perhaps ones they were already familiar with tended to rewrite findings from a single source and only tentatively made connections with the theme.

A broad and in-depth research is required to develop a more sophisticated ability to visually analyse the components and characteristics of the work. Higher achieving learners who had effectively researched consumerism also made connections that brought another level of depth to their writing. They could explain how the theme was evident in both visual analysis and contextual factors influencing the artist and this was very convincing. It is important not to lose sight of the theme throughout this paper. The level of detail in the visual analysis tended to go hand in hand with an increase in the appropriate and knowledgeable use of specialist terminology. There was an excellent response by some learners who demonstrated the ability to process information into a detailed and sophisticated analysis, often producing a well-informed piece of writing that was enjoyable to read. It was pleasing to see high levels of

confidence emerging in some of the visual analysis. Learners ready for this level of study clearly showing development and progression from learning that had taken place at level 2. Higher achieving learners, including those who had prepared well for the set task were able to bring a real sense of individuality to their writing. These learners displayed authority and ownership of their commentaries whilst imparting a high level of understanding and connections between subject matter and meaning.

### **A03: Demonstrate understanding of how contextual factors influence creative practitioners work**

There was a clear differentiation shown in learners work here. Some learners, again mostly those whom had carried out a more comprehensive and therefore effective research were able to evidence a much broader understanding of how contextual factors influence practitioner's work. These learners could confidently reference other artists, and art and design movements, as well as social, political, and environmental issues, clearly linking them to the theme of consumerism and the influence on practitioners' work. Some learners limited themselves to simply extracting detail from a practitioner's biography and didn't get to engage with a wider investigation of contextual factors that were or could be an influence. This basic response therefore being a direct result of weaker or less focused research. A tendency was seen here for the learner to write about an artist in isolation without any consideration given to contextual factors influencing creative practitioners work.

Learners must undertake research into a broad range of contextual factors that could influence a creative practitioner and then select the ones that are most pertinent. If they can also make connections to the theme, considering contextual factors then this will make for a commanding piece of writing that also engages with the task.

Learners can get lost in the research or indeed in their writing and they will do well to keep a focus on the set task, which in this unit is to write an article for a magazine. It would be good practice to view a range of magazine articles particularly from art and design publications. It is never impossible to include everything that has been researched in a magazine article and centres would do well to explain the purpose of editing and selection - in this case the selections should link to the theme when researching around the artists.

### **A04: Communicate independent judgements demonstrating understanding of the work of creative practitioners**

For activity 3, learners must write convincingly about their findings. This is an opportunity for a succinct summary to be produced about both creative practitioners. It must not be a repeat of what has been written in activity 1, but a summary. Learners must evidence this difference in their writing. It is important that this also connects directly to the theme as the learners are asked to be persuasive about the selection of one artist for use as a front cover illustrations. Some learners really got to grips with this task and managed to write convincingly in fewer words (approximately 400), about how their artist of choice (whether the one from the paper



or their own), would be a convincing cover artist. They included a brief summary of both artists, comparing and contrasting the different approaches, whilst keeping a focus on the fact that the artwork itself should be visually strong enough to be placed on a front cover. These learners also wrote appropriately for an email communication and maintained a focus on the set task requirements. This was perhaps an area where not every learner managed to do so well. Some learners had not understood what was required and had written instead to explain to the fictitious editor all about their magazine article and had completely missed the opportunity to show they could select and justify a decision. Some learners only mentioned one artist and others did not make full use of the word count available. Learners must make sure that they identify one artist that best fits the set task and explain why.

It is essential that the learner does refer back to the set task and responds to all the points that they will be assessed on. In the paper it clearly states that learners will be assessed on their ability to synthesise the visual analysis and contextual factors to form judgements; compare the practitioners and their work linked to the theme 'Consumerism' and to justify their arguments with relevant evidence.

The key points here for learners to take away are the need to synthesise, make judgements, compare, link to the theme and justify with evidence. Where learners have done this they responded very convincingly and were able to justify their decisions with a clear audit of evidence.

## Summary

Learners were nearly all ready for this level of study, showing development and progression from learning that had taken place at level 2. There were a few number of learners who could be considered not quite ready to undertake this level of writing or indeed would benefit from a more intense period of teaching to prepare them adequately for the set tasks. Higher achieving learners, including those who had prepared well for the set task were able to bring a real sense of individuality to their writing. These learners displayed authority and ownership of their commentaries whilst imparting a high level of understanding and connections between subject matter and meaning.

Centres will see a more focused response from their learners if they can upskill them with research techniques and to help them fully understand the nature of the task itself. This unit is not just to write about two artists, but it must link convincingly to the theme and meet the requirements of the task. In this paper it was to write a magazine article. There were some brilliant pieces of writing submitted, worthy perhaps of publication, and the authors of these had carried out effective and pertinent research, formed their own judgements, and had considered the nature of the task and all the assessed components within it.

This was an excellent start to a very well-received paper. The first delivery was this year with one opportunity available to sit the paper. From 2017/18 Academic year there will be two opportunities to sit the paper for unit 2 and these will be in January and May. This is the only

externally set and examined unit to be available twice in each year. Each paper will be different with different artists featured within it and a new theme for each paper.

