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# Moderators' Report/ Principal Moderator Feedback

## Summer 2012

## GCSE Astronomy (2AS01) Paper 01

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# GCSE Astronomy

The Controlled Assessment work submitted this summer continues to show that the system gives students a useful insight into the principles of astronomical observation. Most centres had clearly prepared their students fully for their chosen Controlled Assessment tasks, enabling them to make reliable astronomical observations and to make meaningful deductions from them.

It was also pleasing to see that candidates were selecting from the full range of observational tasks available in the Specification. Consequently, this part of the GCSE Astronomy qualification is helping to ensure that candidates demonstrate proficiency with a range of optical aids such as cameras, telescopes, binoculars or robotic telescopes.

Some leniency was seen this year in the awarding of marks towards the higher end of the range. In many cases, this was the result of centres' application of the new Assessment Criteria, which delineate clearly the four stages in astronomical observation – design, observation, analysis and evaluation. Centres wishing to ensure that their candidates gain the highest grades possible are encouraged to explain fully the different requirements of these four sections to their candidates.

For the highest scores, candidates must address each section in full, linking each to the outcomes required in the task title. This approach will also ensure that students have a deeper understanding of the astronomical principles underlying the task, resulting also in improved results for Section 1 of this qualification.

Several examples were seen this year of candidates who had very impressive observations but who failed to achieve the highest scores due to no or only cursory attention to the other three sections of design, analysis and evaluation. No matter how high the quality of the observations, the Assessment Criteria are quite distinct and such observations on their own can only ever account for 25% of the final mark for the task. Centre should note that this is a change from the previous specification.

The two most common areas of leniency in awarding the higher mark levels (4 or 5) are: Firstly, in the Design criterion, many centres are awarding full marks without noting the requirement for the candidate to evaluate fully a number of alternative observing sites, instruments or times, using detailed astronomical knowledge and understanding. Many centres appear to be satisfied with a detailed description of the astronomical principles underlying the task (as was largely acceptable in the previous Specification for GCSE Astronomy).

Secondly, in the Evaluation criterion, centres are not insisting on the need for some detailed suggestions for the improvement or extension of the task when awarding full marks. Very general comments about taking more readings or using more accurate equipment are insufficient on their own.

A number of centres would appear to be advising their candidates to write up their observations in a similar style to that required by the previous version of this Specification, i.e. confusing Statement of Task for Design and missing out any systematic or quantitative evaluation altogether. Almost all centres correctly administered the Controlled Assessment tasks and provided their moderator with the correct sample of work, along with yellow OPTEMS sheet and Candidate Record Sheets for all candidates. Almost all centres used the Assessment Criteria to place their candidates in the correct order in terms of the quality of their work, although some

leniency was noted across a number of centres. Centres are reminded of the importance of adhering to the descriptors for the Assessment Criteria in the Specification and of looking closely at the samples of Controlled Assessment work in the Controlled Assessment Teacher Support Book, available for download from:

http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gcse/gcse09/Astronomy/Pages/default.aspx

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