



Examiners' Report

Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2025

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE

In Fine Art (4FA1), Graphic Communication
(4GC1), Photography (4PY1), Textiles Design
(4TE1), Three-Dimensional Design (4TD1)

Paper 2

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International GCSE Principal examiner report component 2

Externally Set Assignment (ESA)

Introduction

This report reviews the 2025 series of the International GCSE Art and Design for Component 2 Externally Set Assignment (ESA).

(9-1) International GCSE examinations; Fine Art 4FA1/02, Graphic Communication 4GC1/02, Photography 4PY1/ 02, Textile Design 4TE1/ 02, Three-Dimensional Design 4TD1/02.

Component 2 Externally Set Assignment (ESA). Weighting = 50%. Externally set and marked.

Component 2 Externally Set Assignment, and ten hour timed test

Component 2 of the International GCSE Art and Design qualification consists of one externally set, broad-based theme, developed through a series of suggested starting points. Students must produce a personal response to the ESA theme. Students must continue to work in the same endorsed title as they did for the Personal Portfolio (component1). For example, if a student chooses Fine Art for component one, then they are required to continue with Fine Art for component two.

The Externally Set Assignment examination paper can be given to students as soon as it is released on 2 January.

Component 2 should allow students to demonstrate the ability to construct a sustained line of reasoning, which is coherent, relevant, and logically structured. All knowledge, skills, understanding and activities should therefore be relevant to the student's creative journey. The work undertaken for this component should be seen as part of a substantive project, rather than a series of disjointed tasks, and work should evidence all the Assessment Objectives.

Preparatory studies should show students' development of ideas and progress through their work. Preparatory studies may be evidenced through, worksheets, design sheets, different scale rough studies, samples, swatches, test pieces, maquettes, and digital material.

Preparatory studies **must conclude** once the 10-hour period of sustained focus commences. Therefore, students must not add to or alter their preparatory studies.

During the **10-hour period of sustained focus**, students will produce their final response(s) to the ESA theme, based on their preparatory studies, which could be a single artefact, a series, or a group of artefacts. Students must work unaided under examination conditions during this time. The 10-hour period of sustained focus under examination conditions may take place over multiple sessions. Once the sustained focus period has started, all work, including the preparatory work and the personal response(s) for this component, must be retained by the centre under secure conditions and students must not have access to it, including between timed sessions.

Students should plan the best use of the 10 hours to complete all response(s) within this time.

NB. Students who are given multiple sessions for the 10-hour period must not add to their supervised work between the sessions, and it is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that no additional work is brought in or out of each session

The ESA examination paper for 2025 has one theme, **‘Intertwine’**, and presented students with a selection of relevant diverse and stimulating visual and written prompts. The prompts addressed each of the endorsed titles and came from a range of historical periods and cultural contexts.

The images in the exam paper are to support candidates helping them understand the meaning of the written prompts. Candidates should be guided and supported throughout the preparatory period of the ESA. They should also be given a suitable environment and exam conditions to do the ten-hour timed test. The structure and content of the examination paper makes it accessible to the whole ability range of students.

The 2025 exam paper can be found on the Pearson website:

[w79990-international-gcse-art-design-4fa1-02.pdf](https://www.pearson.com/uk/qualifications/gcse/art-design/4fa1-02.pdf)

General Administration.

Examiners made the following observations regarding how work was submitted on the Learner Work Transfer platform for Component 2.

- In terms of the submission of digital portfolios it was much easier to access the work presented in a PDF PowerPoint format containing slides of preparatory studies and outcome/s rather than files of separate J Pegs where it was more challenging to follow a logical line of enquiry.
- Many centres produced PowerPoint submissions with the first slides showing the candidate’s name, number and centre number then the Authentication form. The quality of photographic images was good, with images in focus and positioned straight. Most Centres presented submissions of work in a suitable digital format.

- Examiners found it much more straightforward to mark work that had been presented as a 'rolling' ppt presentation.
- Viewing the work as individual photographs (Jpegs) often interrupted the logical line of enquiry and became a distraction to the intended chronological order of a submission.
- Some centres included their own mark sheets, this is not required as all work is externally marked for both components.
- The random use of jpg files which had not been linked into a format which facilitated the use of a slide show (and therefore had to be individually downloaded) was also complicated and slow marking process.
- Centres that placed the authentication form with the ppt slides helped with administration logistics.
- There has been a mix of 'traditional' 4 sheet submissions (live artwork stuck onto A2 paper/card, photographed and pasted into ppt slides and live work photographed, pasted and arranged directly into ppt slides).
- Photography and Graphic Communication are often entirely digital which often requires clear written and visual explanation of processes and techniques used. Some students add commentaries to explain how they are working.
- Some centres submitted poor quality photographs of candidate's submissions.
- Some centres did not include authentication forms with their submissions. This slowed the marking process down as examiners had to request authentication forms from centres.
- Including a title slide with the ESA theme visible is useful, so examiners know students are responding to the correct exam theme, also they can be certain the centre has uploaded the correct component.
- It is important to indicate size and scale when submitting Textiles and Three-Dimensional Design work. Including a ruler or measuring stick adjacent to work when it is photographed can be helpful.

It is hoped highlighting the examples above will improve how digital submissions are submitted in 2026. *Please note, none of the candidates were disadvantaged by the way work had been submitted on LWT.*

Students must submit:

- Three sheets of supporting studies (maximum size A2 for each sheet) one sheet of final outcome/s (maximum size A2) photographed and submitted in a suitable digital format.
or
- Digital Portfolios should be no more than 20 slides if done in a PowerPoint presentation
- Digital portfolios should be in chronological order, so the sequence of the development can be followed by the examiner.

- All submissions for component 2 should also include a signed authentication form.

Component 2 Externally Set Assignment

Below are areas of strength and weakness of candidates' submissions highlighted by examiners in the 2025 series:

Areas of Strength:

- The theme Intertwine was well received and allowed candidates to explore personal themes within it, often with a good reliance on primary source material. Candidates looked at culture, beauty, relationships, family, food, dreams, travel and the natural world.
- Drawing from first hand observation and selecting primary sources seems to germinate stronger ideas at the start of the course, rather than trawling through the internet for artists with similar idea.
- Some submissions had used digital software to good effect, mainly Procreate and Photoshop. Some candidates photographed hand drawings/sketches, then manipulated their work using a range of creative options in the respective software.
- AI was used in some submissions to kick-start concepts. Used correctly AI is proving to be a helpful tool, conversely if it abused and used incorrectly it can compromise the integrity of a submission of work.
- High achieving candidates produced highly skilled and intuitive work. The references were appropriate, well-chosen and moved their work forward. There was a level of sophistication and visual awareness which enabled critical analysis with inspired outcomes
- Annotations were focussed and informative, critical and reflective - not simply used as labelling or description.
- The more generic responses included twisted toots and trees, interlocked hands, intertwined in nature, and intertwined with manmade technology.
- It was evident that many candidates demonstrated established skills and techniques learned from Component 1 practice, which they refined and developed within their examination response.
- Personal and individual local material most often came in the form of primary photography, which was often used successfully for development work and outcomes.
- Higher performing candidates produced effective submissions which thoroughly explored the theme of 'Intertwine' from a wide range of starting points including natural forms, human-made, structures and relationships, many of which were highly personal resulting in effective and very skilful outcomes.

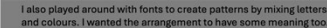
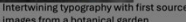
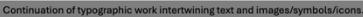
Areas for Improvement

- Some candidates struggled to consolidate ideas before beginning their timed examination piece, which led to a lack of resolution. It was clear that some centres were guiding candidates with given sub-themes and visual references. This formulaic approach prevented some higher performing candidates from pursuing more independent themes that would have enabled them to fulfil the visual characteristics expected at a higher Performance Level.
- Time often seemed to be a factor with less work and hurried studies making up a lot of submissions. In these cases, outcomes were often disconnected from developmental work.
- A lack of focus and intent left weaker candidates with ill-considered or non-existent realisations. Instead of reviewing progress there was description of feelings and thoughts. Lack of analysis led to stilted progression and missed opportunities.
- Some candidates showed low levels of skills and understanding of materials and media. Centres should use the Exemplar Gallery on the Pearson Website to understand the levels of achievement required to meet the common standard in all Assessment Objectives.
- Over-reliance on copying artists' work (pastiche) can be an issue for some candidates and as a result, not using their personal interpretation/ideas to produce personal response.
- Some Photography candidates focus far too much on creating mood boards based on the work of other photographers rather than using these images to inspire their own photography.
- In some cases, where the projects fitted into performance bands 'limited' and 'basic', the work was unstructured and disjointed, which amplified the lack of skill with media, materials and techniques. The lower end submissions lacked the ability to make critical connections between their work and the sources that informed them. Some references appeared to be added to fill a gap, rather than to aid meaningful development.
- A reliance on secondary sources from the internet usually results in poorer drawn interpretations. Candidates' own photography used as a recording tool, ordinarily improves the subsequent observational work.
- When candidates present their work with AO headings; often providing a sheet of evidence for each AO, the submission can become a series of exercises, and the sequential creative journey can be lost and ideas appear fragmented.
- Some teachers do not fully understand the scope and range of the thematic starting points within the Exam paper.
- Meaningless annotation and written biographies shortened the space available for the candidates' own artwork.

- Too much pastiche work and direct copying from the images found in the exam paper can often translate into disappointing personal responses in the timed test.
- Candidates who have good drawing and mark making skills sometimes chose to limit their practical evidence. Instead, they by write copious amounts of substantive text and gather examples of work by artists and designers.
- In some centres there is extensive use of digital enhancement which produced polished images but can mask a lack of developmental thinking.

paratory studies and the 10 hour timed test presented in a powerpoint of approximately 8 slides.





10 Hour Timed Test Final Outcome

THE FINAL OUTCOME



Hotel de Ville • Eiffel Tower • Louvre • Arc de Triomphe • Centre Pompidou



Component 2 Assessment Objectives

Below are general comments in relation to the four assessment objectives made by examiners in the 2025 series. They are generic and must not be seen as a blanket list of criticism or praise for individual centres.

AO1 Develop ideas through investigations, demonstrating critical understanding of sources.

- Most students responded well to some aspect of the prompts on the exam paper. There were many artists referenced that were not on the paper but linked to the candidates work. The use of local artists to help cultural investigations was a worthy response.
- Candidates stood out when they used diverse and relevant sources, including their own images and objects, to support their visual goals.
- This Assessment Objective was often the least successfully met by candidates, who tended to use this opportunity to make a reference to one artist, make a transcription of part of the painting that links with their initial mind-map and consider the physical approach of the artist rather than their ideas and purpose.
- Higher scoring candidates demonstrated a strong ability to develop personal ideas that were meaningfully informed by the work of others. These candidates made purposeful connections with chosen sources and used contextual research to support and refine their own creative intentions. In such cases, investigations were focused, analytical, and clearly influenced the direction of the project.
- Annotations were often concise and insightful, showing increasing understanding of visual language. Poor quality images from secondary sources provided insufficient information to lead to personal development of work. Weaker students struggled to develop ideas beyond initial stages. Pinterest was frequently used to find contextual and secondary sources.
- Ideas were often formed very early, leading to repetitive studies of a similar image, leading to unresolved outcomes, often copied from a secondary source image or artist's work.
- Developmental studies were impressive for this component and saw candidates develop good, personal lines of enquiry from focused starting points.
- Weaker candidates tended to respond directly to their first ideas, resulting in underdeveloped, unrefined submissions that were short and disjointed. A lack of time seemed to pervade submissions and AO1 tended to suffer as a result, meaning, the line of enquiry often had missing detail. Also, candidates rushed into an idea so they knew what they would be doing in the ten-hour test.

AO2 Refine work by exploring ideas, selecting and experimenting with appropriate media, materials, techniques and processes.

- Candidates who explored visual language to develop ideas through sketches and drawings had instant access to the full range of performance levels in this AO. Observed drawing from primary resources, or from their own photographic recording of images, created the platform from which the higher achieving candidate had an opportunity to fully develop new and exciting ideas.
- Assessment Objective 2 was a strength within many ESA submissions, where a secure level of technical processes and visual language was seen. This included drawing with a range of mark making techniques, lino printing, collagraphs, collages (digital and physical), acrylic, water-colour and oil painting as well as using dry materials including oil and chalk pastel. Three-dimensional responses tended to be digital but were supported by card and paper maquettes as well as studio pen drawings. Constructed Textiles saw a wide range of materials and techniques used creatively and resulted in well-constructed garments.
- Some students lacked the language to analyse and evaluate images and objects successfully, instead overlong descriptions were given. This resulted in repetition of images and weak connections. More able candidates made sound connections to relevant work of artists and designers and were often resourceful in their investigations showing a lively curiosity about the work of others. Responses were confident and insightful adding rich contextual links to their own work
- Some centres, to their credit, made good use of the limited resources they appeared to have. Digitally enhanced imagery (Photoshop/mobile phone camera filters) was experimented with, as were different photographic techniques to encourage the use of primary resources from candidates' and this was effective at building up idea development.
- In Graphic Communication and Photography, students who explored more fully and diversely really showcased their skills in a more cohesive way which led to more consistent work across all assessment objectives.
- Most candidates built on good practice of skills, techniques and processes developed in Component 1. In Component 2 they returned to the tried and tested methods, then mastered and refined their further.

AO3 Record ideas, observations and insights relevant to intentions as work progresses.

- People, objects and the natural world were the thematic areas of strength of this year's ESA submissions, with strong photography, drawing and painted studies, informed by a wide range of contextual sources, including Surrealism, Modernism, Expressionism, Fauvism, Futurism and Pop Art.
- Digital techniques and processes were used effectively to record things seen for many candidates, particularly weaker candidates who used this medium as an alternative to traditional drawing and painting techniques.
- Recording through traditional observational pencil drawing was evident across most of the ESA submissions. Where there was a commitment to the practice of tonal drawing, this often supported a better understanding of form, proportion and differences in surfaces.
- Annotation tended to be succinct and purposeful. Those centres submitting work of 4 sheets, were keen to utilise most of the available presentation space for visual responses. PowerPoint presentations had greater amounts of annotation that were frequently more descriptive than analytical.
- Some PowerPoints were supported by written commentaries which occasionally proved to be useful, particularly where candidates had used AI and digital techniques. This provided a way of explaining how work had been achieved.
- Increasingly sophisticated and skilfully rendered imagery is being produced by many candidates. A range of skill levels was witnessed, from powerful and outstanding imagery to clumsy and simplistic recordings.

AO4 Present a personal and meaningful response that realises intentions and demonstrates understanding of visual language.

- The most compelling and successful responses to this assessment objective were those rooted in sustained, personal, and genuinely investigative creative processes. These candidates demonstrated a clear commitment to enquiry, probing ideas, materials, and techniques in a way that reflected both curiosity and intention. The resulting work was often rich in meaning and highly individual, shaped by the candidate's willingness to explore and refine over time.
- Many candidates decided on their final ESA response very early in the development process. Consequently, leading to an exam outcome that was often less refined, or they produced an outcome combining several preparatory studies, creating a rather unresolved and aesthetically confusing result. This was exacerbated in Component 2 because of the time constraint given to preparatory period and timed test.

- Candidates in upper performance bands expanded on broad range of ideas with intent and diversity, this led to fully resolved and skilful outcomes that often utilised a range of techniques and media.
- Where the ESA response was disjointed and minimal with limited connections, rather random ideas occurred that seemingly had no relevance to the ESA theme.
- Realisations ranged from the sophisticated and powerful in the exceptional performance band to minimal and clumsy in the limited performance band. Where candidates had produced thorough and comprehensive lines of enquiry, alongside a carefully planned timed test the exam piece was usually skilful and fully resolved.

Results Plus Service

You will be able to access individual candidate's marks for each assessment objective and the total mark awarded for Component 1 and 2 by using our Results Plus service, using the link below.

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/Services/ResultsPlus.html>

Results Plus is a free online results analysis tool for teachers that gives you a detailed breakdown of your learner's performance in Pearson qualifications. This will enable you to analyse the strengths and weakness of each candidate in each AO. You will find it helpful to refer to the taxonomy and candidate assessment grid when using this service. If you have any difficulties using Results Plus, please ask your exams officer.

Summary

A clear understanding of the IGCSE specification requirements, good teaching, a well-structured Externally Set Assignment preparatory period, creating the correct conditions for candidates in the 10 hour test and appropriate resourcing ensures that candidates perform to their full potential in Component 2 of the International GCSE.

A programme of online and face to face training and professional development covering various aspects of the specification can be found on the Pearson website for 2025-2026. Centres may also wish to contact their Regional Development Managers for further information and support regarding training requests.

If you have a question about the International GCSE Art and Design specification '**Ask the Expert**' ATE is a resource, you may decide to use. Information about this resource can be found on the Pearson Edexcel website under information for teachers.

Jaclyn Wild is the subject advisor for Art and Design, and you can contact her via the Pearson website in relation to questions you may wish to ask or training opportunities:
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Centres should be commended for their hard work in preparing candidates for this qualification.

