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General Certificate of Education (A-level)
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Art and Design (Graphic   **ARTC3**
Communication)

(Specification 2200)

Unit 3: Personal Investigation

Report on the Examination

GCE Art and Design General

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General
Familiarity with the examination resulted in more appropriately structured courses this year. The different demands of each unit were, in the main, been better managed. Students continued to explore a wide range of starting points, responding to diverse ideas and themes. Both traditional and contemporary methods and approaches were seen. Increasingly, in the latter parts of courses, students developed their own ideas. Many have engaged in issues-based work. The influence of photography, across a range of endorsements, had an impact on the nature of practice.

The response of students to critical/contextual materials had a significant influence on the work produced. Materials from books, magazines, the Internet and galleries were widely used. On occasions, visits to artists' and designers' studios and workshops proved to be productive. Unfortunately, some students found it difficult to move beyond the work of artists, designers and craftspeople and failed to make meaningful connections with their own work. In the most successful examples, students demonstrated that they had learnt from the work of others and at the same time successfully developed their own visual language.

Technical skills and awareness of the nature of particular materials continued to be a key aspect of the most accomplished work. Often the development of skills was a central consideration during the AS year enabling students to develop independently and with confidence at A2. The work of some students was really exciting and displayed an impressive level of achievement, maturity and competence. Clearly, such work was the result of many hours of conscientious effort and practice.

At the core of much of the most successful work, across a range of endorsements, was the development of drawing skills as a means of researching and investigating, and developing ideas. In some cases drawings were successfully presented as final outcomes.

A continuing problem was the tension between quality and quantity. Many students produced large quantities of work but failed to develop their ideas in sufficient depth. There is no specific guidance in the specification about an ideal quantity of work. Students should be guided by the assessment objectives and consider carefully the extent to which their initial intentions are realised through their work. Successful work often provided evidence of a coherent journey, with a genuine sense of purpose. Less successful work was often fragmented and poorly executed.

Sketchbooks and workbooks continued to be a key feature of the work of the majority of students. A smaller number chose to display their preparatory work solely on mounted sheets. Such work has become an essential means for researching and developing ideas and referencing critical/contextual work. It can reveal key aspects of a student's thinking, the starting point for their ideas, the impact of their observations and the influence of the work of others. In some cases, the quality of work produced was quite outstanding and demonstrated high levels of commitment and technical skills. Unfortunately, some sketchbooks were little more than a collection of cut and pasted images from magazines that provided little insight into students' ideas or intentions. In Photography, the workbook has become a key means of providing evidence of students' explorations into different techniques alongside studies into the work of a number of photographers.

Annotations and more extended written materials continued to be widely used across all units. At best, such material provided genuine insights into students' ideas, intentions and subject knowledge. At worst, written materials took the form of fairly superficial page fillers. Successful written materials can provide evidence of students' knowledge of subject specific

terms, the reasons for making various choices and the influence of particular works of art or design.

The use of ICT was a significant feature of work across all endorsements. The Internet enabled students to access the work of a wide range of artists, designers and craftspeople. However, teachers and lecturers need to be vigilant in monitoring the websites used, steering students away from inappropriate material. Most students used a digital camera at some point in their course. Adobe Photoshop was widely used for the development of ideas. The majority of Graphic Communication students used computers extensively in both preparatory work and final outcomes.

Personal Investigation
A more integrated approach to the written and visual aspects of the Personal Investigation was noted in a number of centres. When carried out successfully written work provided genuine insights into students' knowledge and understanding. Useful reflections on their intentions, the influence of others and reasons for making various choices were provided. Many students used the opportunity to engage with issues and concerns about which they felt strongly. On occasions, this resulted in some very powerful and engaging work. Some students produced thoughtful extended, illustrated essays based on a particular artist or theme alongside a practical project; others chose to reflect on their own work, influences and progress. In the more successful submissions written materials were thoughtfully produced, carefully constructed, clear and well presented. The written work of less able students often lacked care and added little to the practical work. Far too often, students provided a rather pedestrian list of activities, punctuated with '*I did this*' and then '*I did that*'. They would be better advised to pay attention to analysing their own work and that of others, giving insights into their intentions and progress. A number of moderators reported that a small number of students failed to meet the requirement for 1000 words of continuous prose. There was often a lack of a bibliography which is also a requirement. Students that fail to provide written material in continuous prose should be withdrawn from the unit.

Administration, marking and moderation
Many moderators reported improvements in the provision of essential paperwork. In the majority of centres mark sheets were correctly completed and deadlines were met. Problems occurred in a number of centres where Candidate Record Forms (CRF) and Centre Declaration Sheets were not completed prior to the moderation visit. Detailed comments on the Candidate Record Forms (CRFs) were helpful and informative.

Preparation for moderation visits was generally good, with required samples organised as an exhibition or as a collection of folders. In some centres, labelling was very helpful and clear. Useful maps, indicating exactly where samples might be found, were particularly useful. Most centres made every effort to provide a quiet environment for moderation to take place. Many moderators commented on the warm reception they received although there were still occasions when they felt under pressure to reveal marks. General feedback was generally well received and thought to be helpful.

A better understanding of the assessment objectives resulted in more accurate marking in many centres but there was a tendency to be somewhat lenient in quite a few centres. Occasionally, problems occurred when centres awarded their top student maximum marks when a far lower mark in the high sixties was appropriate. Many teachers and lecturers commented on the value of standardisation meetings and the provision of examples of work at different levels. Unsurprisingly, erratic marking was often linked to non attendance at these meetings.

Assessment Objectives

AO1
The ability to develop ideas in a coherent manner was a key feature of the most successful work and impacted on all four assessment objectives. Successful students provided sound evidence of learning from contextual materials but at the same time developed their own visual language. Evidence of analysis and critical understanding was provided in different ways. Written materials often gave insights into students' knowledge and understanding and the reasons for making various decisions. In less successful submissions work seemed fragmented, intentions were not always clear and connections with the work of others were often somewhat superficial.

AO2
A well organised course, at the beginning of the AS year, often gave students a good understanding of the nature and potential of a range of materials, processes and techniques. Students were able to build on these experiences when responding to a particular idea, issue or theme as they had a range of options available to them. It was clear that many hours had been spent developing these technical skills. Students were able to review, refine and communicate their ideas with confidence. In the least successful work, basic skills of handling materials failed to be developed and made it difficult for students to successfully explore ideas and realise their intentions.

AO3
The availability of digital cameras and mobile phones with cameras had a significant impact on the nature of recording. Digital images often came first in sketchbooks and were followed by drawings and colour studies. However, there were many examples of carefully observed, analytical studies, which formed the basis of other work. Some students recorded ideas and observations in written form, often making notes about particular locations, or as a means of noting aspects of colour, light and texture. Initial ideas were often recorded as a series of thumbnail sketches. In Textile Design many students presented their ideas in the form of mood boards. Evidence of reflecting on work and progress was provided both visually and in written form. In some of the least successful work students packed sketchbooks with poorly selected collections of magazine images.

AO4
In AS courses there was generally less emphasis on making a personal response than at A2 as many students concentrated on honing their technical skills and strategies for developing ideas. However, in some centres, students were given free rein and were encouraged to explore a wide range of personal ideas, issues and themes from the beginning of the course. This approach was often problematic as students tended to produce somewhat superficial responses. Generally, students seemed to respond well to a limited number of starting points. This was noticeable in the work produced for externally set assignments. The linking of written and visual elements was most apparent in the Personal Investigation. In the most successful examples, careful consideration and serious intent was clearly evident. Written work enhanced and informed visual elements and provided insights into the students' knowledge and understanding.

Graphic Communication

Personal Investigation
Graphic Communication is often well taught in centres and this resulted in the production of some outstanding, thorough and well-presented submissions. Evidence of good practice was not confined to the work of the most able students. Some extremely sophisticated work was seen in which design elements and visual language were understood and manipulated with confidence and maturity.

The Personal Investigation is an opportunity for students to develop and apply the skills and understanding that they have acquired at AS and to develop their ideas in depth. The thoroughness of many students' investigations demonstrated that they understood the sustained, focused and personal nature of work at this level. It was clear from their work that many students found graphic communication an exciting, enjoyable and rewarding area of study.

The written element was presented in various forms. Illustrated extended essays or reflective evaluations were most common but there were some examples where students had chosen to produce an ongoing log or journal. Although, in some centres, little connection had been made between the practical and written elements of the investigation, most students provided written materials that clearly supported and informed their practical work. Where the written material was most successful it demonstrated the student's ability to analyse and compare, and it provided valuable insights into their thinking. There were some examples of very high standards of presentation. Some students made their own books, occasionally using unusual formats, such as collections of opening boxes or overlays with fold-out pages. Centres are reminded that students are required to include a bibliography or a list of sources in their written work where appropriate.

Areas of study that were most popular included design for print, corporate and promotional graphics and packaging design. There were examples of illustration using both traditional and electronic media in which high standards of drawing, painting and printmaking were evident. Graphics for film and television were also popular.

Centres had set starting points that included design briefs or more open themes from which students could develop their own briefs. Fieldwork is frequently evident in students' work and this can add depth and meaning to the development of ideas and to the understanding and appreciation of context. Where secondary sources were used, students were increasingly aware of the need to be selective and discriminating.

Many students demonstrated skill in using digital photography to collect source material. Computer software programs were often used with high levels of skill and creativity to manipulate and process images, to develop ideas and to produce finished work. It was a welcome trend that there were far fewer examples of students applying filters with little thought being given to development. Some students investigated and developed their ideas on paper or in sketchbooks before beginning work on a computer. Drawings, sketches, diagrams and other studies often provided evidence of a student's ability to generate, develop and refine their ideas.

Most students presented their work well, often to a high standard, and in a manner that made it possible for moderators to 'read' their work. The most common formats included sketchbooks, folders of transparent sleeves, mounted sheets of studies and design sheets. Some students used electronic media to produce sketchbooks and PowerPoint presentations. It was unusual to find a student's work that was spoilt by poor hand-drawn lettering, by careless and untidy captions or by an ill-considered layout.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available at
www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion