

Moderator's Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2016

Pearson Edexcel Advanced Subsidiary
GCE in Art and Design

8AD01/8FA01/8TD01/8TE01/8PY01/
8GC01/8CC01

AND

Pearson Edexcel Advanced Level GCE in
Art and Design

9AD01/9FA01/9TD01/9TE01/9PY01/
9GC01/9CC01

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Introduction

This report is a comprehensive overview of the performance of candidates in the 2016 GCE Art and Design Legacy examination series and is compiled from observations made nationally and internationally by the whole assessment team.

It is important therefore, that the practitioners who are delivering this qualification receive copies of it, and examination officers in centres relay it immediately to the relevant personnel, as it may help to inform their procedures for the forthcoming examination series. This is especially true on the brink of introducing the new A Level examination as many of the issues observed will be relevant to the new qualifications.

As in previous series, the moderators have reported seeing some exceptional performances by candidates and many unique and personal responses to the examination themes.

Here are the observations pertinent to each unit, as reported by the Principal Moderators responsible for them. As mentioned last year, the observations are generic and must not be seen as lists of criticism or praise for individual centres. They have been taken directly from the moderator's reports and collated and edited to avoid duplication. Single issues are not commented on, so the points raised have been made by several individual moderators from different National and International locations, and therefore form important trends that need to be addressed.

Units 6AD01 - 6CC01

Overview

This unit offers Centres opportunities to structure programmes of visual study that encourage breadth and depth in the development of students' visual language. Students will need to have opportunities to generate ideas and research from primary and contextual sources, record their findings, experiment with media and processes and develop and refine their ideas towards producing outcome(s).

Students review their progress at appropriate points in the development of their work. The assessment objectives should form the basis for planning learning activities so that students develop working practices appropriate to their aims. There is no prescribed order for covering the assessment objectives. Centres might assist students to concentrate their ideas by requiring a student proposal or an outline of their main focus and intentions.

Observations

Candidates welcomed the opportunity to revisit the Coursework Unit and the Externally Set Assignments

- This year re-sit Unit 1 submissions were small in number, with candidates improving on previous work with new sketchbooks or outcomes.
- In stronger submissions, candidates had quickly and confidently identified a line of inquiry which formed the basis of a journey.
- Centres with a Pearson Edexcel GCSE background benefited in the transition to GCE, as there was already an established system and understanding when addressing Assessment Objectives.
- Moderators have generally reported an improvement in the submissions in Unit 1.
- In most Centres, Unit 1 is used for developing skills and work practices.
- The majority of Centres visited offered broad and balanced courses, often as a foundation unit to develop good working practices and develop skills.
- The most successful courses observed, built in a degree of flexibility to allow students the independence to produce exciting, innovative and creative work. This approach tends to suit the more able candidates. In some Centres, the work is more closely dictated by the teacher. This system is more sequential and proves less successful, where students are merely jumping through hoops with less creative freedom. However, this does provide security to the less able by providing a clear structure.

- Past ESA Themes are often used as inspirational starting points.
- Moderators reported that work journals usually demonstrated an understanding of the AOs and illustrated the creative journey. However, our moderators reported that candidates sometimes embarked on a final outcome without demonstrating the ability to review, refine, experiment and investigate a range of possibilities. Some weaker work journals fell back to being an artificial construct with specific contrived exercises to fulfil the AOs rather than a journey of discovery. In some cases, the work journals and supporting studies took the form of retrospective accounts rather than being proactive and ongoing.

Units 6AD02 - 6CC02

Overview

This Unit is assessed through an externally set assignment which consists of one broad based theme – this year's theme was 'Energy, Power and Dynamism'

Observations

- The accessibility of the theme did not appear to cause any problems and the moderators who commented on the Unit in their reports said it was well received.
- Very few candidates took the paper this year, due to the introduction of the new AS qualification, so there were very few observations that could be taken accurately, as statistically they did not form any general consensus.
- Those candidates that did submit for it were either re-taking the unit or completing a full legacy A Level in a year.
- General comments reported that candidates tended to pursue a more personal line of enquiry than for Unit 1. They were able to build on skills and strengths learnt during their study through the first term but journeys were short and quite linear. This may be due to those re-sitting or taking the whole legacy qualification in a year having reduced preparation time.

Units 6AD03 - 6CC03

Overview

This is a coursework unit which has two requirements: Practical work and Personal Study (an investigation into a selected aspect(s) of others' art, craft or design). They may be approached in any order, or progress alongside each other. They must be presented as 'separate final outcomes'. Because this is coursework, centres are completely free to determine their own content and delivery, so long as candidates are given opportunity to produce work which may be assessed using the four Assessment Objectives. The nature of Unit 3 with its two elements means the observations made by the moderation team are quite expansive, careful analysis of their findings, however, will be very rewarding.

Observations

- By Unit 3, students are familiar with the process of keeping a journal, built up as a practice from the earliest days of GCSE. Moderators commented that generally the work journals were a rich source of experimentation and annotation.
- Textiles journals were often particularly full of practical experimentation, exploring different techniques and processes. The best also combined observation, critical analysis and experimentation in the pursuit of an identifiable idea. The weaker candidate's tended to be uncritical and value process, sometimes resorting to enhancing the journal to look acceptable.
- Photography as a medium continues to move on at a fast pace; developing technology enabling students to produce ever more impressive images with ease. Skill as such is harder to identify. This makes it all the more important that original ideas, formal awareness and critical analysis drive projects. It has been noted how blogs and other digital means of presentation can mask a lack of real critical awareness. Because of this, truly original and imaginative projects are possibly harder to achieve in Photography than in other endorsements. What five years ago seemed clever and interesting can quickly become stale through endless repetition. The proportion of students taking Photography continues to grow.
- Three dimensional design has become something of a rarity, but is often well taught in rigorous courses in a few Centres. Graphics shows a wide variance, technology playing either a minor or dominant role. Drawing as a route to exploring ideas, whether through digital or traditional means, still seems to be the key to exciting work.
- The Personal study was most successfully delivered when it played an important and valued role in the development of the candidate's work and ideas. In successful courses, the purpose and nature of meaningful critical analysis was often embedded in the teaching of

the course from the beginning of Unit 1, and was addressed with rigour from the outset.

- Some of the best examples of the personal study were in Centres where the study began at the end of AS and candidates prepared throughout the summer break. This allowed time for the candidate to approach the study in a broader, holistic way initially and then to focus later on more specific issues as their practical work developed. It was also noted that if contextual sources had been well analysed within the development of the practical work, then it was usually soundly analysed within the personal study.
- Personal studies that addressed a specific question enabled the student to keep a focus and develop individual insight into their own and other's work. Titles that were too broad or vague – 'how do artists express themselves' - were likely to be covered with insufficient detail and not achieve the same depth.
- Another successful strategy was to keep a separate critical and contextual notebook from the start of the course, where notes, images, thoughts could be jotted down in museums, galleries, workshops and in any cultural context. These were much valued by students and encouraged critical analysis as a natural, ongoing part of creative study.
- In the strongest Personal studies, students were able to identify characteristics in specific works of art that revealed the intentions of the artists being investigated and then were able to relate this to their understanding of broader contextual issues. They could then show how this was relevant to their own development of ideas.
- The continuing influence of the internet as the only source of context for many candidates was commented on. Whilst being democratic and diverse, the internet tends to homogenise value and minor artists with little contextual significance become more dominant in weaker student submissions, as they reach for easy references.
- Other characteristics of weaker Personal Studies were noted, in which Centres allowed students to create little more than a diary of what they did practically, alongside descriptive and uncritical passages of text taken verbatim from the internet, referencing artists and practitioners with little cultural significance. This approach was very often leniently marked.
- However, it was noted that the opportunity to meet and work with local artists can be very enriching. Fellow practitioners seem only too keen to engage and communicate with these students and discuss influences and ideas. This has perhaps become less common in recent years and should be encouraged and re-endorsed.

- Many moderators considered that for the new specification, the introduction of a mark specifically for the personal study is an opportunity to develop a more rigorous approach.

Units 6AD04 - 6CC04

Overview

As with Unit 2, the theme for Unit 4 is set by Edexcel/Pearson in the form of an examination paper. This was available for students to respond to from the 1st February. They have an unrestricted amount of time after this date to prepare for a timed test of 12 hours. The start of this preparation time and the date of the concluding timed test are set by the centre. Most centres start in February or March and give the timed test in mid-May, depending upon their academic calendars and the corresponding holiday dates, such as Easter and the Half-Term's either side. These vary from year to year and influence the preparatory time. They are required to provide a set of supporting studies and a final timed test outcome/s for assessment.

Observations

Here are some typical extracts from individual moderator's reports on this year's theme 'Truth Fantasy or Fiction':

"Truth, fantasy and Fiction" was a well-received theme, which encouraged a very wide range of exciting and personal interpretations. However, sometime it was taken rather literally by some of the candidates. The strongest candidates often took one focus and developed this with energy.

Candidates' responses to the externally set assignment were wide, ranging in subject matter and media, reflecting the flexible nature of the theme. This allowed candidates to interpret the theme of Truth, Fantasy or Fiction in a very personal way. The best outcomes were imaginative, thoughtful and the result of in-depth contextual research and personal experimentation. Weaker responses were largely based on fairly obvious links to Surrealism and optical illusion.

Candidates, in all disciplines, had responded enthusiastically and intelligently to the ESA theme and made very individual investigations, experimenting in appropriate media and related to a variety of practitioners. Most had been able to complete resolved works and there was evidence of fluent and confident work in all endorsements, but with real engagement by all.

- As can be seen from these reports, general observations are consistent with previous years; in that the nature of the exam papers and their generic themes are very successful in stimulating personal and interesting responses.
- Many of the general issues observed in Unit 3 are also pertinent to Unit 4 so I will not repeat them in this section; however, one of the biggest concerns is how many centres are approaching Assessment Objective 1. Therefore, I will devote most of this report to unravelling its aims, as it is essential to understand and rectify the issues before Centres deliver the new A Level next year.

- Many centres still do not understand the nature of Assessment Objective 1. Development of an idea is still perceived by many as 'development of technique' or 'experimentation with materials'. As a result, this objective is often weakly addressed and attribute with marks that are completely out of alignment with the National Standards.
- Typical approaches to fulfilling this objective consist of supporting studies almost completely made up of a sequence of copies of several artists work who are considered linked to the theme. Although studies of artists work are invaluable in developing techniques and analysis of the work, complete reproductions usually called 'responses' or some other term designed to infer greater significance than the word 'copy', simply consume the little time the candidates have to develop their own ideas. These compilations of copies are then concluded with a final outcome, usually derived from one of the artist's ideas (rather than the candidates) and completed in a technique similar to either that artist, or one of the other artists studied. It was noticed that this approach is particularly prevalent in Photography. Whilst the outcomes are not always exactly pastiches of a single artist, crafts-worker or photographer, many come very close to being so. The question to ask is, how do you give any marks for the candidate's own idea development in these cases?
- In Centres adopting this approach, because the assignment is driven by a rigid, formulaic, structured system of studying one, then another, then another, artist or photographer, the candidate is given little time at the end of the assignment to formulate, develop and complete their own idea or focus.
- Better courses are underpinned and driven by the students own concepts right from the start. Here, the contextual references and artists are dropped into the study at relevant points to help expand the students own ideas, or help sort out some sort of technical difficulty that the student is having and that the relevant artist has already solved.
- There also seems to be a general feeling that candidate's ideas have to be a completely original. Many times, I have witnessed candidates trying to develop their own take on Analytical Cubism because the list of artists given to them included Picasso, or Abstract Expressionism because one of the six artists they were given was Jackson Pollock. Needless to say, most are completely out of their depth, and they end up producing for their final outcome an uninformed pastiche of Picasso or Pollock. Candidate's ideas should ideally be directed to paths that honestly reflect their true level of maturity, understanding and sensitivity. These ideas can in fact be quite straightforward, yet still be expanded to great depths of sophistication and perception.

Rather than describe this issue, it is probably best to illustrate it with one centres constructive approach, contrasted with another's less helpful strategy.

One approach scores highly in AO1, the other struggles to score at all.

1) Title of paper 'Truth, Fantasy or Fiction'

In one situation a candidate explores the theme by taking a generic photo shoot and selects some puddle reflections as being of particular interest, especially how they distort reflections. The candidate then decides on personal focus 'Reflections are not the Truth'.

A candidate starts by exploring reflections in different objects taking photographs and making sketches of reflections in different things. The candidate then gets excited by distortions in shop windows and water and then tries to paint these distortions and struggles. The candidate is directed to look at how Lorraine Shemesh has painted water and tries out her technique. The candidate then tries her technique on her own photographs of hatching tadpoles.

And so the project and the candidate's ideas develop in a genuine exploratory journey.

2) In contrast to this, here was a different approach to the same concept that was commonly observed, and highlighted perfectly the issue of over-rewarding development of ideas in Assessment Objective 1:

Title of paper 'Truth, Fantasy or Fiction'

A centre gives a list of artists they think relate to the theme.

Candidate chooses Lorraine Shemesh.

Centre then sees the potential in 'reflection' as an idea, from the candidate's skilled copy of Lorraine Shemesh and then gives the candidate the following list of artists (who they know have some link to reflections in their work) to do responses to: Escher, Velasquez, Klimt, Canaletto, Jan Van Eyck.

The candidate spends most of the time allocated to their supporting studies doing accomplished copies of one of each of the artist's paintings and then is in a dilemma at the end of the course to think of a suitable final outcome. The final piece is a technically proficient painting in the exact manner of Lorraine Shemesh, of one of their friends in the school swimming pool, with a distorted version of the Doges Palace (Velasquez) in the ripples.

It can be clearly seen that this second approach, whilst scoring well in AO3 and AO4, loses many marks in AO1 and AO2.

As mentioned above, this second approach is probably even more prevalent in Photography and was witnessed at many centres.

It is unfortunate that verbal or written feedback does not allow for comments on individual course structures, however this report does allow for generic observations on successful and less successful structures, so again, I must repeat that it is essential that the recipients of this report pass it on to the departments concerned.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT OBSERVATIONS

It is proving increasingly difficult for centres or moderators to effectively interpret or use the marking criteria. This means that centres approach assessment with a slant towards the correlation between prior grade boundaries and their relationship to the marks on the assessment grids.

As mark inflation has now forced grades A*, A and B into the Fluent range of marks on the assessment grid, the descriptors for that category now make little sense when trying to establish differentiation in the visual characteristics of the work.

Thankfully, a remedy is at hand. The opportunity to reset the dials with the new specification and produce a document that pinpoints marks to criteria effectively will enable stability to return to assessment procedures.

In light of this, it is essential that all centres using the Pearson Edexcel qualifications, either access current training programs, or fully familiarise themselves with the assessment tools available on the website; paying special attention to the 'Performance Calculators'.

SUMMARY

Looking back over the life of the qualification, although mark inflation has been an issue, we must not let it overshadow the impressive achievements of both the candidates and their tutors. The wealth of creative endeavour has been astonishing and the quality and breadth of candidates' submissions bear little resemblance to those of candidates in the Pre-Curriculum 2000 qualifications. One of the biggest effects of Curriculum 2000 was the focus of candidates in Year 12, Lower Sixth Form. The mandatory AS requirement caused them to focus much earlier in the course, than in the previous two year linear specification. This gave them a solid foundation to start the Upper Sixth, Year 13 course and gave them a better start.

The Alumni of centres using Pearson's Art qualifications, often go on to impressive art based careers across the globe. These are fine ambassadors for the high quality of Art and Design education in the United Kingdom. As mentioned many times before, the qualifications from Pearson's suite of GCE Art and Design titles are highly prestigious awards that continue to be respected by both employers and further education institutions, nationally and internationally.

I now feel we are in a very strong position at the launch of the new qualifications, to carry forward the foundations laid over the last 16 years and embrace the potential offered by the changes to the structure. The freedom to be able to sit, or not sit the new AS, along with the opportunity to use the work from it, in the new A Level, present interesting options and flexibility for course delivery.

The new 2016 Advanced Subsidiary qualification has now completed its first year, and will therefore have its own separate report, as it is now a stand-alone specification independent of the A Level.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

