



General Certificate of Education

Art and Design 2200

ARTF3

**Photography: lens-based and light-based
media**

Personal Investigation

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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GCE Art and Design – General (for information specific to Photography see page 6)

General

Each of the four units made different demands on students and required the development of a wide range of skills and knowledge of the subject appropriate to work at this level. These different demands were intended to lead to courses of study in which students had opportunities to develop as confident artists, designers, craftspeople and photographers, producing work of substance and depth. Many students rose to this challenge.

Written work

In most units students included written notes and annotations. These often complemented visual aspects of the work. In the most successful cases these notes gave useful insights into students' knowledge and understanding of their own work and that of others. In many cases students were able to reflect on their progress through particular projects. For some, this simply became a list of 'I did this, then I did that'; for others it added another dimension by providing opportunities for reflection and analysis.

Personal Investigation

Written work was a core element in Personal Investigations. On the whole these were well managed and informative. The opportunity to link written work with a practical project proved to be a positive development. Looking for evidence of these links was an important task for moderators.

Some students produced an illustrated essay based on a topic of particular interest, alongside visual work; others reflected on aspects of their own practice. However, a small number made little effort to link the two elements. They wrote essays based on aspects of art history without making any meaningful attempt to relate them to their own work.

Many students produced written work aimed at providing insights into the development of particular projects, commenting on their own work and progress, the influences of others and the reasons for making various choices.

There were few examples of written work fulfilling only the minimum word count and that seemed to be produced as an afterthought. The requirement for well-expressed English seemed to have been met by many students. Moderators saw a number of examples of highly perceptive and well-informed writing which did much to complement visual work.

In a small number of cases students presented only annotations alongside visual work which clearly failed to meet the requirements related to extended writing and continuous prose. The Teacher Resource Bank document 'Coursework Guidance', pages six and seven offers further guidance on the written material for Unit 3.

Contextual materials

Students continued to make reference to a wide range of artists, designers and craftspeople from different historical periods. Contemporary examples were popular. In many cases they generated interesting and occasionally, innovative work, but for some students making a constructive response proved to be problematic. A common problem was a lack of understanding of artists' ideas and work. This sometimes resulted in work that was simplistic, banal and crude.

It should be noted that the development of students' own practice is central to this examination. They should be encouraged to make *a personal, informed and meaningful response demonstrating critical understanding*. This statement, in AO4, relates to the students' own work and that of others.

There was also a continuing problem, particularly in photography, of students accessing and producing material that was inappropriate in a school or college context. Teachers and lecturers are reminded of their obligation to monitor materials accessed and produced by students. AQA cannot condone the use of materials that might contravene current child protection policies.

In Unit 3 students were encouraged to access work in galleries, museums and through visits to artists', designers' and photographers' studios. This, for many, proved to be a most fruitful experience with many positive responses seen by moderators. Occasionally, students were disappointed when work in galleries failed to match up to the glossy post card images with which they were familiar. However, this in itself was a learning experience as an appreciation of scale and the physical nature of materials can have a significant impact on the work. Centres are reminded that, where appropriate, students should submit a bibliography and list of galleries and websites visited.

The development of skills

The development of practical skills has been a major concern in the examination. In the most successful work students were clearly able to manage processes and techniques successfully. They demonstrated awareness of the potential and limitations of particular materials and used them to successfully research and develop their ideas. Unfortunately, a number of students failed to develop their basic skills in the early part of the course and this hampered their progress later. This was a particular problem in some photography courses, where centres had failed to recognise the level of competence and depth of understanding required to achieve A-level standard.

The requirement, in all endorsements except Photography, for students to *explore drawing using a variety of methods and media*, failed to be addressed in a number of centres. It goes without saying that confidence and competence in drawing is a common factor in the most successful work.

ICT

Students across all endorsements have used some aspect of ICT. The majority have access to digital cameras and camera phones which were widely used as a research tool. A number of students produced digital sketchbooks.

Most students used the Internet, although this was a mixed blessing, as outside the school and college environment it is largely unregulated. Downloaded images were often of a poor quality and responses often seemed somewhat superficial. However, some sites offered students direct contact with artists and gallery sites, enabling them to keep informed about current exhibitions.

In some subjects, such as Graphic Communication, the use of ICT was a central part of practice. This resulted in a number of students creating highly polished professional looking images. In others, ICT was used less convincingly and masked a lack of understanding and skill. Some Textile students used ICT to develop ideas and try out different colours. Although the photography endorsement encompassed film and video, developments generally seemed to be fairly limited. Film and video

were often included and often were used as an additional element in particular projects.

Accessing on-screen images was a problem for moderators who often wasted valuable time looking at blank screens and waiting for technical support. Whenever possible, hard copies of images in the requested sample should be provided by centres to help avoid such problems.

Selection, organisation and presentation of work

Access to work at teacher standardisation meetings clearly had a positive impact on practice. This was particularly noticeable in portfolios which were better organised and generally easier to 'read'. Many candidates were able to make effective visual links with different aspects of the work to give clear evidence of addressing the assessment objectives. This was particularly noticeable in AO1 where development is a central consideration. Links between students' work and that of other artists, designers, craftspeople and photographers were often also clearly made through the careful positioning of images on mounted sheets and in students' exhibitions.

Annotations formed a part of most students' work and often helped make clear to the moderator their intentions and shed light on the students' knowledge, understanding and achievements. In Personal Investigations good, clear writing and well-presented work was a major consideration. Effective and informative annotations were widely seen in carefully prepared photography workbooks.

Poor quality labelling continued to be a problem, in some submissions. Carefully prepared mounted sheets were often spoilt by crude lettering, often clumsily made using a large felt tip pen.

Administration

Moderators reported some improvements in administration this year with centres becoming more familiar with AQA procedures and making samples more accessible to moderators. However, there was concern about the lack of organisation in some centres. The late posting of centre marks, the poor organisation of samples and a lack of space for marking work were all issues in some centres. Thoughtful comments on Candidate Record Forms were welcomed and often provided useful insights into the work.

Marking

Marking was generally more accurate this year although it continued to be a problem in a number of centres. Many teachers and lecturers continued to mark too generously in the higher mark bands, often failing to recognise that a mark of 80 should only be awarded to the most exceptional work. Teacher standardisation meetings were well received and valued. Having opportunities to discuss live work with colleagues and examiners had a positive impact on marking and helped to link the different statements in the marking criteria with visual examples. Although there are limits on the number of teachers attending each meeting all teachers should have access to the visual standards posted on the AQA website. Advice and guidance is also available from Coursework Advisers.

The standardisation of markers in centres continued to be a significant problem with clear differences emerging across different endorsements.

AO1

The ability to develop ideas from the initial starting point to the final outcome in a sustained and informed manner was a significant feature in the more accomplished

work. Essential to this process was the ability to use materials and techniques effectively. Contextual sources, when used well, informed the work. In less successful work little real connection was made and the work appeared fragmented. Analytical skills were evident in the way that students were able to use aspects of the work of others in their own work. Analysis was also evident in written comments and observations.

AO2

In many of the more successful courses students were taught a number of techniques related to their chosen endorsement. They learnt about the nature of materials, their potential and limitations. They also had opportunities to experiment with media and approaches. This basic grounding, often in the first part of a course, gave students the confidence to review and refine their ideas as their work developed. For other students these skills were never learnt. They had interesting ideas but were unable to fulfil their intentions and achieve a reasonable outcome.

AO3

This AO was well managed by many students who gathered a range of materials related to issues, ideas and themes in a variety of ways. Drawings and colour studies, using a variety of media were popular. Some studies were closely observed; others were looser and more gestural and impressionistic. Much of this work was contained in sketchbooks and workbooks. Some studies were large scale; others were far smaller and contained considerable detail. Written materials were also used alongside drawings and photographs. In the most successful examples recording was focused and relevant to intentions and there was clear evidence of reflection on the decisions made related to different aspects of the work.

AO4

Evidence of a personal response and the development of visual language was evident in many AS submissions but it became much clearer in A2. Critical understanding was revealed through the decisions made within the work and by the extent to which students were able to realise their intentions. It was in Personal Investigations that links between visual materials and written work could be best assessed. In some cases little real effort was made to link an art historical essay with the students' own work; in others little effort was made to write in a clear or meaningful way. When the requirements of the Personal Investigation were conscientiously addressed they provided genuine insights into students' knowledge, understanding and engagement with art and design practice.

Photography: lens-based and light-based media

General

Photography remains a popular endorsement, with digital photography featuring in a substantial number of submissions. However, the ease of access to images is a double-edged sword as some students presented large numbers of image files with little sense of purpose. The most successful students demonstrated clear intent in their photo shoots and discrimination in the selection of presented images. Image manipulation using Adobe Photoshop is still occasionally mistaken for developing an idea. The more successful students tended to use it purposefully, to explore or develop particular images. Some entirely electronic submissions were seen this year with a number of digital sketchbooks presented. The most successful students included hard copies of final images to demonstrate their understanding of printing techniques and image quality. Some students also explored the use of software packages such as PowerPoint to present their work. Occasionally, centres used restricted access discussion forums on Flickr, or centre websites to good effect.

Traditional darkroom work remained popular and some highly accomplished images were seen by moderators, both in colour and black and white. This was often the product of well-resourced centres.

Personal Investigation

Generally, most students made the transition from AS satisfactorily and understood the need to provide more sustained work which demonstrated greater understanding of context and the acquisition of skills. Some extremely well-informed and personal work was produced, demonstrating genuine innovation on occasions. The most successful submissions demonstrated a clear sense of purpose and discrimination in the selection of work. These were supported in many cases by perceptive and thoughtful written material. On some occasions, this took the form of a detailed study of an artist or photographer that the candidate had referred to in their practical work; on others a detailed, illustrated, evaluation of the student's work was included. Presentation of the written element varied from a traditional essay approach to illustrated studies. In the work of less able students there was often a failure to move beyond AS standard. Some failed to appreciate the need to provide continuous prose which is a requirement for this unit. Many students produced extensive studies which included reports on gallery visits and reflections and analysis of selected topics, as well as their own collections of images. In-depth explorations of particular topics and themes tended to be a common feature in more successful students' work.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.