General Certificate of Education

Art and Design 2200

**ARTF4
Photography: lens-based and light-based media**

A2 Externally Set Assignment

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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.

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 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.

Externally Set Assignments

Question papers for both AS and A2 appeared to be welcomed by most centres with many teachers and lecturers commenting on the richness of contextual sources and the opportunities provided for imaginative responses. Some of the most successful work seen was in response to externally set assignments.

The structure of the AS externally set assignment with the requirement for a period of supervised time for developmental work appeared to present few problems for centres. Many successful outcomes were seen with the majority of students choosing to produce finished work.

The A2 externally set assignment which offers a longer period for preparation seems to have been welcomed by centres. Many students produced their most successful work for this unit. In the most successful work students established a clear link between their initial intentions and the final outcomes. There were many examples of highly competent work across all 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.

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 for some students who 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 more 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. 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.

A2 Externally Set Assignment
A range of work was seen in response to the question paper and some interesting and occasionally outstanding work was seen by moderators. In the main, students produced work in the darkroom or as a series of digital images. Occasionally they explored the use of video or film.

Approaches to Landscape
This question resulted in some interesting responses using traditional techniques. Darkroom skills and image quality were carefully considered in the more successful submissions. Unusual subject matter was sometimes explored, such as miniature and domestic landscapes. In some of the more successful submissions students used the question as a vehicle to comment on issues related to the landscape, such as fly tipping and hunting.

Mixed Media
This question appealed to many students with fine-art leanings and was handled with varying degrees of success. Robert Rauschenberg was a popular reference, but many unusual references to current photographers' work were seen. Generally, this

question tended to be approached by the more able students who took the opportunity to stretch the boundaries of traditional representation.

Ways of Seeing

The nature of this question tended to channel students into a particular way of thinking which resulted in some unusual outcomes. However, many students struggled to move beyond the obvious pastiches of contextual references. Close-up photography was popular and was used effectively. The most successful students considered subject matter and image quality carefully.

Viewpoint and Natural Forms

Similar comments to those made about *Ways of Seeing* might be made in relation to responses to both *Viewpoint* and *Natural Forms.* They were equally popular questions and also provided opportunities for traditional recording and printing as well as digital work.

New Realities

This proved to be a very popular question with students who chose to explore digital techniques. Some students used it as a vehicle to demonstrate their expertise with image manipulation but many paid little regard to context and the development of an idea. The most successful students tended to use various techniques to make a personal informed response. Some genuine innovative and powerful images were seen in response to this question.

Images within Images

This was approached by a number of students. A common approach was based on observations of reflections in mirrors. Combining images using digital layering was also seen. The most successful submissions explored visual contradictions in a 'Through the Looking Glass' approach. Many pastiches of Lee Friedlander's work were seen, with varying degrees of understanding evident.

Colour

A number of disappointing digital submissions were seen in response to this starting point. However, it appeared to be one of the most popular questions which generated some excellent responses informed by a variety of contextual materials. Less successful students failed to develop their ideas in a personal way despite producing some sound initial work but this often lacked direction. The ease of digital recording was most apparent in responses to this question, with the less able students tending not to provide evidence of discrimination and selection. The more successful students had clearly considered image content carefully, and the selection process was well documented.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website.