

Moderator's Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

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 2015 GCE Art and Design examination series and is compiled from observations made nationally and internationally by the whole assessment team.

It is important therefore, that centres 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 a new specification.

The 2015 examination series provided another opportunity to witness some outstanding candidate performances, many of whom exceed the expectations of the qualification. The moderation team universally acknowledge the privilege of being able to witness this work first hand. These experiences are one of the most rewarding aspects of the role and this is again supported by their comments this year.

The observations pertinent to each unit as reported by the Principal Moderators responsible for them are presented in this document. As with last year's report, they are presented in bullet points for clarity. Upon inspection, you will be able to quickly see any points that may be applicable to your own centre or candidates. It was interesting to note, however, that many similar observations were made by different moderators both nationally and internationally. Therefore, some of the points listed in each unit may be generically pertinent.

Units 6AD01 - 6CC01

Unit 1 offers centres the opportunity to structure programmes of visual study that encourage breadth and depth in the development of students' visual language, development of ideas, experimentation and analysis of their own and others' work. The unit is project-based and teacher-led.

- The majority of centres' visited offered broad and balanced courses, often to develop good working practices and skills. This generally worked well, but when badly delivered, responses were affected.
- A common pattern within centres' approaches was to treat the unit as a kind of bridge between GCSE and AS level, and almost as a mini foundation. This can lead to problems where centres pitch the content of the unit at too low a level, necessitated by the quality of candidacy on the course. At other times, the structured element of the course extends too far into the time allowed for the unit, which limits the degree to which candidates can explore their own artistic journey once the foundations of their AS work have been laid. This can inhibit the progress of higher achieving candidates in particular.
- Centres are sometimes challenged by the candidates' lack of recording skills. There was a reduction in creative investigations in primary and secondary curriculums.
- References to artists found on the internet are widespread and there is a tendency for candidates to work from bad quality secondary images. Students use Google without real purpose and this often does not lead to comprehensive gathering of evidence. Indiscriminate use of the internet tends to reduce candidates opportunities to visit galleries and exhibitions.
- In a few centres, contextual references were 'given' to candidates who made very few additional contributions to the 'prescriptive' starting points. At times, there was a 'tick box' approach leaving little opportunity for genuine diversity and individuality in responding to critical and contextual sources and in exploring ideas, media and processes.
- Coursework themes were in most cases appropriate, interesting and challenging. Courses were constructed showing a real understanding of the process-based nature of the specification.
- Centres with Edexcel GCSE benefited in the transition to GCE as there was already an established system and understanding when addressing Assessment Objectives. Many base their coursework units around the suggested "Themes" for the ESA, often with great success.
- In many of the centres visited, it was felt that Photography was again popular. Tablets and smart phones are replacing the conventional use of film, or even the digital SLR, and there is a concern that the

attraction of photography can disguise the lack of manipulation and composition.

- One issue that re-occurs throughout moderators' feedback is the lack of observational drawing from primary sources. This has become the most noticeable aspect from the samples seen in centres. It has to be suggested that the introduction of digital media may be responsible for the removal of drawing activities and this is now having a negative impact on the ability of candidates to address the formal elements and our assessment objectives. In this respect, the introduction of the new AS and A Level specifications will once more allow candidates to develop direct observational skills and be more confident in their understanding of the assessment criteria.
- It was evident that centres valued the use of sketchbooks and journals in developing a candidate's ability to generate ideas. Large study sheets and outcomes were also a valued method of allowing candidates to break away from their sketchbook and consider carefully the scale and process in the mid to lower ranges who were then unable to fully satisfy the requirements of the assessment guidance.
- In AO2, centre assessment does not truly consider the degree to which review and refinement was actually taking place, reflected in work that showed little genuine progression, and learning to appreciate the qualities of the medium were paramount. A 'diverse range of experimentation' needs to go hand-in-hand with an ability to 'extend, refine and recognise potential' to achieve the higher marks as many centres appear to assess this AO based on quantity of experiments'.
- Concern was raised in relation to the value of written analysis evidenced in some centres. It seems important to emphasise the lack of critical and contextual understanding presented. In some cases, writing continues to be purely descriptive, with citations of artists' biographies venturing nothing further than personal comment. Many candidates are not encouraged to look analytically and write with the appropriate critical vocabulary.

Units 6AD02 - 6CC02

This unit is assessed through an externally set assignment which consists of one broad based theme. This year's theme was 'Relationships'.

- The accessibility of the theme did not appear to cause any problems, but was considered by some centres to be 'too general'.
- The idea of the 'mind map' as the initial and traditional start to the unit has the potential to lead to problems. Candidates, especially the lower ability groups, are inundated with ideas they generate and struggle to know where to start. More able candidates often move on to a more visual method of generating ideas – combining primary sources with contextual references. Gallery and museum visits are ideal, but again, weaker candidates struggle to make the most of their visit if they do not choose a focus for their work and simply collect postcards almost as evidence that they were there, rather than using them for a particular purpose.
- Reports this year seemed to suggest an increase in the number of centres delivering at least the start of the unit as a whole to students, resulting in work which was very similar throughout the cohort. Working in this way seemed to reduce the opportunity for candidates to produce work 'demonstrating independence and personal style'.
- Evidence that the suggested starting points have been used by candidates is difficult to find. Some centres produce their own PowerPoints of images from the artists mentioned in the paper and we have no doubt that teachers find the suggestions useful.
- This year's theme proved challenging for lower ability candidates to access unless they were carefully directed – there was a tendency for literal interpretations where many failed to move beyond initial starting points.
- Centres spoke of the need to guide candidates away from the inevitable pitfalls of teenage interests into more interesting and accessible ways of interpreting the theme.
- More successful subthemes derived from primary sources were based on ideas such as the juxtaposition of different objects and their physical and aesthetic properties.
- The exam conditions do not appear to be a problem in the planning and completion of work. Centres now seem to be able to judge the 'right amount of time' to dedicate to this unit, resulting in evidence being produced for all four AOs

Units 6AD03 - 6CC03

This is a coursework unit with two requirements: Practical work and Personal Study (an investigation into a selected aspect/s of others' art, craft or design). The requirements may be approached in any order, progress alongside one other and must be presented as 'separate final outcomes'. Centres have freedom to determine their own content and delivery, as long as candidates are given the 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.

- 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 rigor from the outset.
- Some of the best examples of the Personal Study were from 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 maintain 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 skate superficially over ideas 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 and thoughts could be jotted down in museums, galleries, workshops and in any cultural context. These were valued highly 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 of specific works of art that revealed the intentions of the artists being investigated. They were then able to relate this to their understanding of broader contextual issues and specify how this was relevant to their own development of ideas.
- Nearly all moderators commented on the overwhelming presence and increasingly common characteristics of weaker personal studies; where centres allowed students to create little more than a diary of what they did practically, alongside descriptive and uncritical

passages of text lifted from the internet, referencing artists and practitioners with little cultural significance.

- Weaker candidates were reliant on the internet for research, some using no books at all. Thus their studies were underdeveloped. Many of the personal studies were very descriptive and lacked true analysis and thorough contextual understanding.
- In recent years, there has been less production of personal studies in the form of lavishly crafted objects, perhaps because their effort in production bears little relationship to the actual value of the critical analysis.
- 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 and to give further guidance and exemplars of good work.
- However, it should also be noted that marks for critical understanding in AO1 do not rely entirely on writing. Moderators have been sensitive to candidates who demonstrate understanding of ideas and context visually (an example of this would be Hockney's work from the early 60s, which is clearly a visual synthesis of a range of different influences and ideas from Egyptian Art to Cubism to Abstract Expressionism).
- Many moderators and TMs commented that the AO1 element of Unit 3 was often the most leniently assessed of all units and across all endorsements, for the reasons stated in section 2. Descriptive and uncritical analysis was leniently marked.

Units 6AD04 - 6CC04

As with Unit 2 the theme for Unit 4 is set by Pearson Edexcel 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 on their academic calendars and the corresponding holiday dates. These vary from year to year and influence the amount of preparatory time. They are required to provide a set of supporting studies and a final timed test outcome/s for assessment. This year's theme was 'Flaws, Perfection, Ideals or Compromises'. The general consensus is that the theme was one of the most popular in recent years and resulted in some outstanding final outcomes. As with the other units, the points raised here are genuine observations from the moderation team and any issues raised need to be read in the context of your own centre and cohort of students.

- The ESA was particularly well received and executed across a range of endorsements. In many cases, the ESA samples clearly displayed a sense of autonomy, independence and effective analysis that built on the emerging strengths from candidates' coursework submissions.
- Many centres took their candidates on regular gallery visits out of school time as part of the planning for this unit. These encouraged a wide range of ideas and exploration resulting in individual outcomes, often ambitiously scaled.
- At this stage in the course, most students have gathered enough experience, skill and ambition to respond to the demands of the theme and this was often manifest in the outcomes viewed overall.
- Some accomplished and individual work was seen in Unit 4, where many candidates have produced ambitious and skillful work that explores challenging and personal issues of enquiry.
- The focus of this unit encouraged more consistency across Assessment Objectives.
- Contextual studies were more tailored to the individual and therefore more relevant to the outcomes.
- At all levels, 'connections to sources' were referred to but not always apparent, except at top-mark end.
- In some instances, the time restraint prevented the resolution of ambitious ideas which were consolidated too early, and yet for others, the pressure of the ESA provided a motivation.

- The theme led to more independent pathways and outcomes with many centres allowing candidates to pursue their own interests appropriate to the theme. However, in some cases, work produced during the preparatory period did not truly reflect eight week's work. This was particularly common with candidates in the mid and lower mark range, which was often due to insufficient evidence of AO2 and AO3 learning criteria.
- The final unit was seen as the most successful and the theme 'Flaws, Perfection, Ideals or Compromises' was very well received by centres. At the higher level, it was apparent that students were ready to take this subject further. The energy and excitement pervaded every display I saw which was reflected across the board.
- The ESA time allocation seems to be more flexibly interpreted by centres.
- A lot of centres tend to feature large portraits, which are scaled up photographs, often following the path of Jenny Saville or Lucien Freud. This is accompanied by little experimentation or development of ideas and is over rewarded.
- House-style is often evident but is not detrimental to students or their outcomes.
- Textiles courses seem to be moving away from the 'fashion' leanings and towards a fine art basis. Many pieces in Unit 4 display a rich and experimental approach with a range of final pieces ranging from installations to 3-D constructions.

GENERAL ASSESSMENT ISSUES

Moderators are encountering over-marking due to centres' not firmly grasping the current national standards and their reluctance to apply them effectively to their students, along with general lenience in the application of the assessment criteria.

The approach by some centres placing their A to C grade cohorts into the top end of the 'fluent' mark band between 70 and 80, thereby pushing their weaker candidates to gain an A*, A or B grades has serious consequences. Any recommended downward shifts to the over-marked candidates may have knock-on effects on the others, possibly reducing those that justly deserve high marks.

When grade boundaries condense at the top of the scale into the last 2 to 4 marks, the room for centre assessor error increases exponentially, and the consequences of adjustments to either the centre's marks by the moderator, or the centre's grades by later grade boundary changes, can become a serious issue for all concerned.

As this qualification comes to an end, it is essential that the lessons learnt are taken forward to the new specification. If the current attitude of anticipation of grade boundaries during the marking process are taken forward to the new specification, as mentioned above, we will again be in exactly the same situation in a very short time.

The new qualification will allow us to reset the dials and implement precise assessment documents, along with other constructive changes in an attempt to halt this destructive trend.

It is essential that centre staff, senior management teams, examination officers and teacher examiners scrutinise their assessment procedures, and learn the lessons from this journey through the last qualification.

SUMMARY

The majority of centres can hold their heads high and exalt in the achievements of their students, which continue to impress and inspire parents, centre staff and the moderation teams. Even their cohorts, however, cannot escape being influenced by this ongoing problem, as grade boundary changes affect us all.

Centre assessors must take the necessary steps to ensure they are trained and familiar with the National Standards, and have adequate time allocated to mark their students correctly and effectively.

We must repeat again that the integrity of our approach to assessment is widely acknowledged, reflecting our mission to maintain standards and represent the performance of our candidates with accuracy and honesty. It is our determination to do this that drives our ambition to ensure marking is in line with the national standard and recognise each candidate's achievement.

As mentioned many times, the qualifications from Edexcel/Pearson's suite of GCE Art and Design endorsements are highly prestigious awards that continue to be respected by both employers and further education institutions, nationally and internationally.

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>

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