



General Certificate of Education

Communication and Culture

**COMM4 Communication and Culture in
Practice: Portfolio**

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General

In the first year of this specification the quality of the work submitted, reflecting the skills and effort of the teachers supporting candidates, was of a commendable standard. In some cases the word 'impressive' used in the mark scheme was amply justified, and even at the lower end of the scale, 'sound' and 'competent' were good descriptors of the work. Candidate choice, a concept of at the heart of the new specification, was well-evidenced, and the multifarious dimensions of the word 'Creative' were fully explored. Teachers have clearly made good use of the material from standardising meetings, from the AQA Teacher Resource Bank, and especially from using Coursework Advisors. Many lessons have clearly been learned from last year's COMM2 administration and centres are to be congratulated on their packaging and presentation of material to their moderators. Above all it should be noted that teachers' enthusiasm and commitment to the specification is evident at every stage of the process from the broad discussion of ideas within each Topic, to the detailed, and sometimes elaborate, supporting commentaries on candidates' submissions.

Case Studies

Case Studies were, by and large, exemplary in their focus, their discursive register, and in their exploration of ideas with well-balanced use of key concepts and approaches. Moderators were impressed by the range of references and sources, although many were reliant on Internet scavenging rather than on books. Both clearly have a role to play in gathering material and ideas for a Case Study, but well chosen and integrated academic references have a status and capacity to contextualise thoughts, which serve candidates well at higher levels of achievement. It should be added that a few centres are placing too high a premium on Primary sources, generating questionnaires and surveys whose role in the academic essay is rather limited compared to thoughtfully integrated use of secondary academic sources.

Body Modification was the most popular choice of Topic, followed by Celebrity and then Cinema-going, the latter proving challenging with regard to being fully sustainable over the full length of the Case Study. Few candidates made use of the option of '50/50 or 'Penny Farthing' modes of delivery, possibly due to teachers' anxiety as to their academic validity – sustained focus being more 'admirable' in many ways. But for some candidates this may have allowed them an opportunity to focus more sharply on the discursive elements of the Topic, rather than write fairly descriptively for long passages. It was evident, too, that candidates with a close focus on a particular aspect of the Issues were advantaged by their tight critical responses, as opposed to work that only discussed the Issue with scant reference to a 'personal angle' – all of which coursework advisors may contribute helpfully towards in the process of planning the Case Study. The lack of focus is an issue with many knowledgeable candidates reduced, as it were, to offering a general overview of an Issue, rather than using an actual Case Study to explore with appropriate contextualisation from some of the perspectives. Some moderators felt that a feature to work on next year is the academic, impersonal, discursive register of a Case Study where responses which were essentially personal throughout the Case Study achieved lower marks.

While exploration of AS key concepts such as Identity are both expected and welcome, given that Topics in Site A are directed towards Identity, too much time spent on AS content is unlikely to allow candidates easy access to the higher parts of the A2 mark scheme. Parenthetically referenced use of Johari Window, Cooley, Maslow, et al, doesn't enhance the conceptual levels of work submitted.

With regards to the mechanics of the submission process, there are still candidates who don't put the details of Name; Candidate number; Centre number; Topic, Issue and Angle on their work. Digitally submitted files should also try and include at least the first three of those

elements in the file name. In addition, centres which relied on online websites made accessing candidates' work sometimes difficult if not impossible, and centres who want to use online media must consider ways of submitting, and backing up, the work in a format which can be put on disc or data stick. Others, however, worked well, producing interesting, lively creative work in a medium which offers a wide range of possibilities.

Case Studies were the most accurately marked element of the Portfolio; teachers clearly felt on familiar ground with the written work, and had made good use of the examples offered at Standardisation meetings, using them with students as examples of what to aim for and what to avoid. Close attention had also been paid to the demands of the Assessment Objectives, only occasionally suggesting that 'competent' work should be rewarded at Level 3+. Work in level 4 needs to be impressive, challenging and/or sophisticated – words moderators sometimes found difficult to apply to the work presented as Level 4.

Creative Work

An extraordinary range of modes, media, concepts, lengths of pieces, styles of delivery, sources garnered from everywhere – confronted moderators. Centres can celebrate the cornucopia of ideas submitted. The awarding of marks using the Assessment Objectives was not an easy task, and perhaps observation, insight and some engagement with the polemical dimensions of the piece are more effective elements on which to focus for rewarding work as a whole. It would be useful in distinguishing the ways in which the Case Study and Creative Work are different were centres to enjoy the full implications of the idea that Case Studies are academic pieces requiring evidence of sourcing in influence, argument, quotation and referencing, whereas Creative Pieces wear their influences lighter but merit descriptions like 'informed' even 'wide-ranging'.

Most candidates handled the developmental link between Case Study and Creative Work appropriately; only in rare cases were candidates miscued to either choose an entirely different Issue from their Case Study, or, slightly more frequently, advised to replicate their Case Study in Audio-Visual form – the 'illustrated' Case Study. A few candidates still referred to their work as a 'presentation' – which it is not. The range of media employed was varied, and it was heartening and refreshing to see and hear candidates directly. There were some excellent parodies and satires among higher levels of work, and some less than exploratory PowerPoints achieving lower levels and marks.

Creative Work, as might be expected, evidenced more clearly the tendency of centres to over-reward the 'ordinary'; hopefully the next round of standardisation meetings in the autumn will clarify by example what characterises level 4 work, and Levels 2 and 3. To be pedantic, it would be helpful if candidates used the last 'frame' to indicate their sources to validate the AO4 mark, and even the first 'frame' to Title and contextualise their rhetorical direction. Throughout the Creative Work it was apparent that candidates had enjoyed their work; the levels of commitment and engagement shown were a delight, reinforcing the idea of the 'spirit' of the specification.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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