



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2012**

Communication and Culture

COMM2

(Specification 2625)

**Unit 2: The Individual and Contemporary
Culture: Portfolio**

Report on the Examination

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General

Portfolios

The three tasks contained within the portfolio are designed to reflect the course content as a whole and, in particular, to enable students to respond both personally and critically to the relationship between communication and cultural contexts. The key concepts are the driving force behind the specification as a whole and therefore are central to the coursework. At AS it is the concept of **identity**, which underpins both the content (however centres choose to shape it) and the assessment process and coursework is most successful when students are working explicitly and thoroughly with this concept at both a personal and cultural level.

The moderation team has once again been impressed by the quality of the best work being produced and by the level of enthusiasm and interest that it demonstrates. Candidates are engaging with a range of tasks with a high level of knowledge and understanding and in an increasingly creative way and there is substantial evidence that teachers in many centres are continuing to offer detailed and innovative courses of study. This commitment to fully exploiting the potential of the AS specification has helped to maintain the success and stability of this unit and enabled candidates across the ability range to produce meaningful, informed and competent work.

It is clear that many centres are taking on board the advice and guidance provided by the moderator feedback in the previous series and the Principal Moderator's Report. Colleagues have also made effective use of the updated materials provided in the AQA Teacher Resource Bank and through Teacher Support and Teacher Standardising Meetings, which have been very well attended and positively received. Such events have enabled AQA to exemplify good practice and for delegates to raise issues and concerns, seek clarification and access updated resources on the new coursework topics. The introduction last year of a full range of secure key materials made available through e-AQA is beginning to have a real impact on the capacity of centres to work closely with the established standard. However, we are aware that some colleagues are not accessing these resources, which is potentially putting them and their students at a disadvantage. We would strongly encourage centres to make full use of these materials, particularly in relation to their own assessment and internal moderation, and to reference them in the comments entered on the CRFs. A further development this year was the introduction of a revised mark scheme, which places less emphasis on the separate rewarding of the AOs and attaches more importance to the exemplification of skills in relation to the specific requirements of each task. This development has been positively welcomed by colleagues and many of them are now making explicit reference to the new descriptors in the judgments they are making on the CRFs.

There has been significant progress in the efficiency and clarity of the submission of marks and samples. The majority of portfolios were effectively organised, easy to access and well supported by the CRFs and centre produced paperwork. There were very few instances of inappropriate submissions, and AQA were generally advised of these in advance. However, there were a few isolated incidents of readings on topics that are no longer current and centres are reminded to check the AQA website for the 2013 Site Topics.

However, while moderators are frequently impressed by the work they see, there remain concerns about some of the submissions in terms of both approaches and outcomes. It is important that we work with colleagues to address these issues in order to ensure that their candidates can fully address the assessment objectives and the specific requirements of each of the portfolio tasks and that a consistent and robust national standard can be upheld.

Section A: Readings

As in previous years, there was some very impressive work submitted and many candidates are responding confidently and knowledgeably to interesting and often challenging issues. The differentiation between the focus on personal identity in the Investigation and the wider cultural context in the Exploration is more secure and this has been aided by the use of sharper and more specific titles. The suggested two-part formula has worked particularly well in enabling candidates to focus on a manageable and clearly defined area of enquiry. It appears that centres are increasingly allowing students to choose areas of personal interest from across the full range of topics, which has resulted in work that is more individual and less uniform and formulaic. Candidates have engaged positively with the new topics for this year (**Stories of my Life** and **Family Life**) and *Stories of my Life*, in particular, produced some very insightful and at times sensitive pieces of work. In terms of the investigation, **Everything I own** and **Clothes make the person** continued to be very popular whereas with the Exploration, there was a more equal balance between the coverage of the three topics.

Regardless of the topic chosen, the Investigations are most successful when they are precisely focused on personal identity and when the individual voice of the candidate is heard. At times these pieces were hampered rather than enhanced by an overly cumbersome application of theory, which tended to sit on top of, rather than genuinely inform, the work. The use of the personal pronouns I/me are crucial here in establishing the right approach.

Explorations, on the other hand, should aim to achieve some critical distance even where the starting point is the candidate's own lived experience. Well-chosen and apposite secondary reading can support students to develop an informed argument and their own active reading. This can also help to avoid the empty application of "jargon" which often obscures what candidates themselves want to say about the topic in hand.

Once again it is worth noting that theoretical perspectives studied at A2 are often not handled well at AS. Moderators have again reported that there continues to be a minority of candidates whose work has been rendered less effective by an attempt to apply A2 theory without a secure grasp of the implications. Although this is less evident than in previous years, there remain some centres that are not sufficiently mindful of the pitfalls of this approach.

The key to success at AS, both in relation to the coursework and the examination, is the fully assimilated use of key concepts and the ability to communicate in the discourse of Communication and Culture. Students should always be encouraged to establish their own argument within this framework and to utilize relevant theory in order to develop their active reading of the chosen cultural product or practice.

In general AO4 is being handled more effectively and the progress identified in last year's report has been maintained. Some of the best work saw candidates making full and integrated use of a wide range of source material in order to frame, develop and challenge particular lines of argument. However, it is still the case that a minority of centres are over rewarding this Assessment Objective. Moderators again reported instances of Level 4 being given merely for the presence of a bibliography at the end of the Exploration or for the rather generalised citing of theorists. There were also examples of candidates either being rewarded or indeed penalised by centres for the inclusion/exclusion of sources in the Investigation. Even with the more holistic approach encouraged by the new mark scheme, AO4 is not being assessed in the Investigation.

Centres are once again reminded of the importance of a tightly focused framework for analysis in the Explorations. Pieces that attempt to deal with a broad and generalised topic

("the meanings of living rooms and bedrooms", "Meanings of cars") are likely to struggle to achieve the necessary degree of specificity required for high Level 3 and Level 4. These pieces often lapse into description and generalised assertion, which might well have been avoided with a more precise and sharply defined title. Those pieces that attempted to offer a reading of a particular room or mode of wheeled transportation were at their most effective when they made use of the semiotic toolkit to underpin their analysis and when they were able to engage with the broader cultural meanings of rooms and transport in relation to power, representation and value. An additional area of concern this year was the overly sociological approach taken particularly in relation to **Family Life**. While some titles might encompass issues that have been the subject of sociological debate, a generalised summary of theoretical positions in terms of, for example, gender roles or social class, is not helpful. Centres are reminded that this topic is inviting students to 'explore a contemporary family as a cultural entity' and therefore should be framed as a tightly focused case study.

Centres who are experiencing difficulty in formulating appropriate titles for Readings are reminded that the exemplar titles on the AQA website and the use of Coursework Advisers are both provided by AQA to support them in this.

Section B: Presentation

Moderators have once again been impressed by the amount of genuinely creative, engaging and often very moving work which they saw this year. The overall technical quality of the presentations continues to develop and candidates are utilising the creative potential of a range of multi-media formats. Again, it is encouraging to see the widespread use of voice over commentary and/or direct address to the camera, which frees candidates from an over-reliance of written text and demonstrates an awareness of the target audience. Centres are reminded that while 'live' presentations are not prohibited, it is not advisable to film candidates delivering PowerPoint presentations live to camera. Not only are these very difficult to moderate, but this format prevents candidates from having the opportunity to edit and refine their work and seriously limits their creativity and the substance of their argument/ideas.

It is pleasing to note that centres are continuing to encourage candidates to work closely with the specified key concepts and these concepts are being more explicitly and substantially addressed in the main body of the presentations. This has helped to further enhance the analytical depth of the argument and to interrogate their identity more critically.

However, as in previous years, there still remain some difficulties in establishing relevant titles and areas of focus. To be successful, Presentations must have the candidate at the heart of the piece. Some of the work sampled for Section B did not convincingly or explicitly engage with 'the interrelationships between the individual and wider cultural influences.' The requirements of this task are clearly outlined in the specification. "The purpose of the presentation is to deal with the struggle between 'who we want to be and 'who we're allowed to be': the place where the personal and cultural meet." Work entitled 'The Representation of Women in Film', 'The Gaming/Beauty Industry' or 'Beyonce' does not easily allow the candidate to explore this struggle in relation to their own identity. It is imperative that centres build into their delivery of the course, an opportunity for candidates to share work in progress in a draft form. This should enable teachers to identify where students are in danger of not addressing the requirements of the task or where they are tending to merely offer a walk-through of the course content without a sharp focus on their chosen area.

In summary, then, whatever course structure, teaching model and theoretical content is chosen, centres should be ensuring that students can make meaningful use of the teaching and learning they experience and can apply it to the topics and titles they have chosen. Careful preparation by centres to deliver the course content in a way that empowers students

to think independently will enable students to achieve fully in line with their ability. The nature of the coursework unit does make demands on both teachers and students to think and work creatively, which is more challenging than relying on a closely managed and formulaic approach, but ultimately is more educationally valuable. It is very rewarding to see students develop confident critical voices through their active readings of personal identity and wider cultural contexts. This unit provides them with an opportunity to establish, extend and demonstrate these skills.

Conclusion

It is inevitable that as the Specification matures the work on this unit is going to become increasingly effective. There has already been a clear uplift in the standard of work produced by candidates and while this is beginning to plateau, there will undoubtedly be future improvements as teachers and students gain in confidence and subject support resources and CPD provision become more comprehensive and accessible. It is really important that centres keep abreast of these developments and use the most recent standardising materials (presented at standardising meetings and available on the secure site e-AQA) in order to support their own internal assessment and moderation procedures. This will hopefully correct the 'drift' away from the established standard that was evident in the sample submissions of some centres.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

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