



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2011**

**Communication and Culture**

**COMM2**

**(Specification 2625)**

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

***Report on the Examination***

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## COMM2: The Individual and Contemporary Culture

### General

### Portfolios

It is clear from the work sampled this year that there has, once again, been a real development in the quality of work being produced across the portfolio requirements. Candidates are engaging with a range of tasks with enthusiasm and creativity and there is substantial evidence that teachers in many centres are offering detailed and innovative courses of study. This has ensured the continuing success of this unit and enabled candidates across the ability range to produce meaningful and competent work. It is clear that the majority of centres have paid close attention to the advice and guidance provided in the 2010 moderator feedback 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 Standardisation Meetings, which have been 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. In addition, a particularly welcome development this year has been the capacity to share standardising and exemplar materials (including presentations) through the secure site e-AQA.

Moderators have reported on the increased efficiency of the submission of sample Portfolios which, on the whole, were easy to access and which were often well-supported by the CRFs and centre produced paperwork. There were very few instances of inappropriate submissions, and AQA was generally advised of these in advance. Centres are reminded to check the AQA website for the 2012 Site Topics.

As the specification evolves, there continue to be issues that need to be addressed by centres in order to ensure that their candidates can fully address the assessment objectives and the specific requirements of each of the portfolio tasks. These issues are addressed below.

### 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 was pleasing to see centres engaging with the new topics for this year, ***Everything I own: what stuff means*** and ***She's got wheels: transportation as cultural practice*** although ***Clothes make the person: to what extent are we what we wear?*** and ***Don't forget the songs that saved your life: popular music as cultural communication*** proved the most popular choices.

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 the rather formulaic application of theory, which tended to sit on top of, rather than genuinely inform, the work. This can also be an issue with the Explorations and some pieces were prone to a rather empty application of 'jargon' without a clear sense of what the candidates themselves wanted to say about the topic in hand. Furthermore, 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. Fully assimilated use of AS key concepts and the ability to communicate in the discourse of Communication and Culture are key to accessing high marks for both Assessment Objectives 1 and 3.

Centres are becoming more confident with addressing AO4. Some of the best work saw candidates using and integrating a wide range of source material in order to frame, develop and challenge particular lines of argument. However, a minority of centres are over-rewarding this Assessment Objective. Moderators reported instances of Level 4 being given merely for the presence of a bibliography at the end of the Reading or for the rather generalised citing of theorists.

Centres are also 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.

While a lot of successful work was seen on popular music, it was noted by moderators that issues previously identified remained in evidence. Candidates continue to offer narrative-based band biogs or potted histories of particular music genres and this often hinders their capacity to engage with the function and meanings of popular music within a cultural context.

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 straight 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 thereby enabled candidates to access higher marks for AO3.

However, as in previous years, some difficulties still remain 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, for example, 'Shopping as a Cultural Practice', 'Women in Athletics' or 'Triathlons' does not easily allow candidates to explore this struggle in relation to their own identity.

### **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 in the first three years of the Specification and this is likely to continue 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.

### **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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