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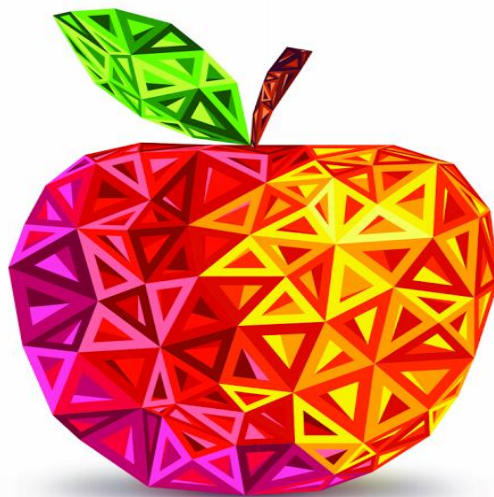


Examiners' Report/ Lead Examiner Feedback

Summer 2018

BTEC Level 3 Nationals in Art & Design

Unit 2: Critical and Contextual Studies in
Art & Design (31828H)



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Grade Boundaries

What is a grade boundary?

A grade boundary is where we set the level of achievement required to obtain a certain grade for the externally assessed unit. We set grade boundaries for each grade (Distinction, Merit and Pass). The grade awarded for each unit contributes proportionately to the overall qualification grade and each unit should always be viewed in the context of its impact on the whole qualification.

Setting grade boundaries

When we set grade boundaries, we look at the performance of every learner who took the assessment. When we can see the full picture of performance, our experts are then able to decide where best to place the grade boundaries – this means that they decide what the lowest possible mark should be for a particular grade.

When our experts set the grade boundaries, they make sure that learners receive grades which reflect their ability. Awarding grade boundaries is conducted to ensure learners achieve the grade they deserve to achieve, irrespective of variation in the external assessment.

Variations in external assessments

Each test we set asks different questions and may assess different parts of the unit content outlined in the specification. It would be unfair to learners if we set the same grade boundaries for each test, because then it would not take into account that a test might be slightly easier or more difficult than any other.

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, are on the website via this link:

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Unit 2: Critical and Contextual Studies in Art & Design (31828H)

Grade	Unclassified	Near Pass	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Boundary Mark	0	8	16	28	41

Introduction

This lead examiner report is written to help you understand how learners performed this year and to support in future delivery, and should be considered in conjunction with the corresponding set task and marking grid.

This externally assessed unit is available for delivery as part of the BTEC Art and Design Level 3 qualification which commenced first teaching in September 2017.

The paper requires learners to address two set activities and produce a bibliography. The learners have 20 hours in which to research and collate notes on more than 4 pages of notes, and 5 hours of supervised timetabled sessions in which to complete the two set activities. The instructions to centres have slightly changed, so that it is clear that learners can prepare up to four sides of summary notes, but that these must be in bullet-point form, and that no full sentences may be included. Learners must have access to a computer and the internet for the 20 hours to complete their research, but only a computer for the supervised 5 hours in which to complete the set activities.

Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

The theme 'Reinterpretation' and the artists for this year's paper were well received by centres and learners. There was evidence that learners had really engaged with the structure of the paper, and demonstrated that they were well prepared. The responses on the whole linked purposely to the theme of 'Reinterpretation', and the selected artists were relevant and mostly appropriately or well justified.

Research is a key skill that learners need to use to achieve the strongest responses. As in previous series of this exam, learners whom demonstrated they had read widely and developed a clear understanding of both the artists piece of work, and the context that it was produced in, generally were more able to justify their reasoning. Some learners lacked the understanding of their research to achieve marks beyond mark band 1, but on the whole learners had researched and responded, therefore enabling at least marks in mark band 1 or 2. Where learners had achieved the highest marks there was strong evidence of fully reasoned well justified and authoritative independent writing. This continues to be a well-planned unit for learners and there is good evidence that centres are using past papers and the Lead Examiner's report to further improve.

Artists in this paper are carefully chosen to ensure that they are internationally recognised and there is accessible research material widely available. Learners accessed all pathways through the choice of their second artists.

The theme of 'Reinterpretation' was accessible and was widely explored by learners. Many explained in their introductions how they were going to use it to structure their responses. A range of art and design specialisms were seen and there was strong evidence provided in the bibliography that higher achieving learners had clearly researched extensively to select their chosen artists. The learners who selected Issey Miyake to research, mostly then also picked another fashion designer, and these provided rich sources for analyses and comparison. Learners seemed to find Cornelia Parker's work interesting and responded to the complex layers of the artist's approach. There was good evidence that they understood the conceptual nature of the piece and the working practices of the artist, with the visual analysis perhaps more challenging.

A few learners picked second artists and works which were more linked to commercial manufacturing or film making. Learners that did this then found it difficult to visually analyse, although often picked up marks by making relevant contextual references.

The most common selected artists and designers, where those who had produced works which reinterpreted historical works of art, leading to stimulating considerations of relevant and contemporary matters.

Learners can take bullet-point notes with them into the supervised sessions and respond to the set task in the period of supervised assessment. This change from taking in 4 pages of notes in the initial sessions of the paper, has resulted in an improvement in how research is used. Encouragingly more learners are responding to the facts they have found and making reasoned judgements and there is less evidence of research simply being lifted and repeated. Research generally is being appropriately selected and evidence of this is in the main Activity 1 and the bibliography. However, there are some learners who included detailed bibliographical details without explaining why or how these facts may be important in terms of the art work.

Photography, painting and fashion were well represented in the artist chosen by the learners, but there was also, amongst others sculpture, graphics, film and product design represented. This indicated that the paper was widely accessible to learners working across a range of specialisms.

Task

AO1: Be able to apply an effective investigation process to inform understanding of creative practitioners

To achieve in this assessment objective learners needed to carry out effective and well-focused research into two creative practitioners and the theme of the paper. Evidence of effective research will be seen in the required bibliography and will also be evident in the main parts or both Activity 1 and Activity 2. Research must clearly inform the learner's submission. Initial research should include a large range of sources and then there should be evidence of their making careful edits as to what is relevant and can support their own justifications and observations. The ability to select and edit relevant information is very important.

Learners must ensure that their additional art and design practitioner chosen to investigate is an appropriate selection, which will provide sufficient breadth and depth of research. They must ensure their chosen artist has an established reputation and presence, and they are not too obscure otherwise this will limit their ability to research and find relevant information. There were a few learners who were not able to produce a balanced piece of writing based on poor selection of the second artist. This limited access to higher mark bands and the ability to equally consider and analyse each artists work. Sometimes due to a lack of appropriate contextual reference to research and sometimes due to the nature of that practitioners work not being wholly related to the visual arts.

The choice of the second artist should not be a teacher led activity; learners must independently select their chosen artists. A number of centres are still submitting work where learners had made similar selections, however it is very pleasing to see that largely it is evident that learners have made their own choices, albeit sometimes from possibly a limited selection. The ability of learners to reflect on, justify their own findings and to develop independent work, is particularly reliant on use of effective research skills and they must clearly understand and articulate their ideas.

Many learners submitted lengthy bibliographies showing extensive and relevant sources of information about the artists and the theme. Learners carried out interesting and varied research predominantly using websites such as the practitioner's own website and links to video sites, such as YouTube and Vimeo. Also, there is good evidence that learners are triangulating sources, for example where encyclopedia websites are used, this evidence is tested against other sources. It is also very encouraging to see links listed to art journals as well as national and international reviews by established critics in the mainstream traditional print media.

The standard of writing generally showed a consistent and logical structure in line with the expectations of learners working at Level 3. As in previous series of this exam some learners responded with a style of writing that reflected the editorial nature of the task. This approach demonstrated that learners had engaged with the vocational nature of the task. When done well this approach demonstrates that learners are fully engaged with the whole paper and is

good to see in a visual arts qualification. A few centres had generated subheadings for learners to work with, however this could limit especially the strongest learners and centres are reminded that it is not appropriate to provide learners with writing frames.

As in previous series of this exam, it is evident that some learner work contained serious factual errors. These had likely come about through weak research leading to inaccurate statements and assumptions being made by the learner. Learners must guard against this by double checking information and not always accept the first finding as accurate. This is particularly relevant when using internet search engines.

A few centres had, as in previous sessions of this exam, omitted to include any images. The absence of any images meant that additional visual checks needed to be made by examiners, and this runs the risk that the intended image is missed. It is hoped that this will be addressed in future; all submissions must be accompanied by at least two images.

AO2: Demonstrate the ability to visually analyse the work of creative practitioners

The two selected works presented in the exam paper were mostly well described by learners. There was no obvious difference in the level of response depending on the choice of the prescribed artists. There was a large range of published material available to learners about both the artists included in the paper. The learners needed to access and then to go beyond simply reproducing it, by creating an original and thoughtful response. The learners tended to reproduce factual observations consistently but weaker learners then found it difficult to generate independent responses, regarding the visual analysis and the meanings created and intended by the art works.

The second choice of artist, and how they linked to the theme was critical for learners. Any obscure artists tended to limit the range of sources for research, but in a few cases generated independent and original lines of investigation. Learners tended to select artists and works that were well established, and most justified their choice of artist against the theme. However, there were many learners who having not fully addressed the visual analyses of the set artist then lacked this also in their chosen work. There is evidence that some centres had developed a formal elements checklist for learners; for weaker learners, this may have supported superficial observations, but has the potential to limit the strongest learners. Centres are reminded that at Level 3 the use of writing frames is inappropriate.

Learners appeared to understand the conceptual nature of the set works, but found it harder to provide a sophisticated visual analysis of the components and characteristics of other works. Higher achieving learners who had effectively researched the theme also made connections that brought another level of depth to their writing. A few learners struggled to link the theme of 'Reinterpretation' more widely to the influences and artistic practices of the chosen art and design practitioner.

Most learners used the theme as a starting point, and in their introductions explained how they intended to address it. Those that lacked a personal understanding of the theme tended

to find justifications harder. It is important not to lose sight of the theme throughout this paper.

The learners that demonstrated a sound level of visual analysis also showed a good use of appropriate and knowledgeable specialist terminology. Some learners demonstrated excellent ability to process information into a detailed and sophisticated analysis, often producing a well-informed piece of writing. Examiners have noted that generally learners are referring to a number of sources and are producing independent responses bringing their own interpretations to their investigations. There are high levels of confidence emerging in some of the visual analysis, and this could be linked to the confidence that centres have developed over the last few exam series.

For AO2 learners generated at least some evidence, at best well-informed, articulate and original investigations. It is apparent that learners are developing good skills, and using past papers to practice and inform their submissions.

AO3: Demonstrate understanding of how contextual factors influence creative practitioners work

The theme appears to have lent itself to some rich and sophisticated links to a wide range of contextual factors. In the best instances learners have demonstrated that they have researched and then meaningfully identified how these factors have impacted the chosen works.

Learners with the most comprehensive and effective research evidenced a broader understanding of how contextual factors have influenced the art and design practitioner's work. These learners confidently reference other artists, and some make connections to art and design movements, as well as social, political, and environmental issues, clearly linking them to the theme and the influence on practitioners' work.

Too many learners had limited themselves to simply extracting detail from a practitioner's biography and didn't then engage with a wider investigation of contextual factors. These basic responses tended to be a direct result of weaker or less focused research. A few learners wrote about an artist in isolation without any consideration given to contextual factors influencing creative practitioners work.

For AO3 learners must undertake research into a broad range of contextual factors that could influence the chosen creative practitioners and then select the ones that are most pertinent.

AO4: Communicate independent judgements demonstrating understanding of the work of creative practitioners

For Activity 2, learners must prepare an email to the curator of the exhibition explaining which of the two practitioners should be put on the home page of the website. This requires them to write convincingly about their findings. It is an opportunity to produce a succinct summary that should justify their choice. It must not be a repeat of what has been written in Activity 1.

For this activity it is important that the writing connects directly to the theme. Some learners referred back to their introductions in Activity 1 and their explanation of the theme, this then provided them with a strong structure from which to develop their ideas in order to make a persuasive argument for the selection of one artist. Some learners wrote very convincingly in fewer and more focused words (up to 400 words). In the more successful submissions learners included a summary of both artists and then used compare and contrast to develop their work, whilst keeping a focus on the fact that the artwork itself should be visually strong enough to be placed on a home page. Most learners wrote appropriately for an email communication and generally provided a balanced argument. However, this was the area where not every learner managed to do so well, and evidence to support AO4 could be attributed to Activity 1 if it was not found in this second task. A few learners, as in previous series only mentioned one artist and some did not make full use of the word count available. Learners must make sure that they identify the one artist whose work that best fits the set task and explain why.

In the paper it clearly states that learners will be assessed on their ability to synthesize the visual analysis and contextual factors to form judgements; compare the practitioners and their work linked to the theme 'Reinterpretation' and to justify their arguments with relevant evidence. It appeared that not all learners had fully understood the complexity of this task. Where learners had used the guidance on the exam paper their submissions were more convincing.

Summary

Learners appear to have been generally well prepared for the exam and there is evidence to show development and progression from learning that had taken place at Level 2. There is strong evidence to indicate that centres have used past papers to inform and support their learners prior to taking the exam. It appears that learners have been taught to address the AO's and that the structure of the exam paper is well understood.

It is pleasing to see how centres have prepared learners to engage in Critical and Contextual Studies and how generally responses have been individual and show good levels of independence.

The structure of the submissions generally indicate that learners have understood the tasks, and related their responses to well-grounded research. Most learners have in-depth bibliographies, the best submissions reference their sources in the main activity, and some centres have encouraged learners to comment on the sources used.

As in previous series, the advice to centres is to focus on developing research techniques and skills. To fully understand the nature of the tasks and access marks across all the AO's at the higher levels learners need a good grounding and the confidence to then develop their observations and finally justify their judgements. To reiterate, this unit is not just to write

about two artists, it must link convincingly to the set theme and meet the requirements of the two tasks. Learners are required to structure a piece of writing in this case for an online guide, and to address the requirements of each of the assessment objectives.

There have been some outstanding pieces of writing submitted and these have been produced by learners who have picked relevant and inspiring second artists to analyse. Writing has been well structured and research effective and pertinent. It is encouraging to see how through these activities how and where learners have formed their own judgements, and have embraced the nature of the tasks. The skills developed in this unit should provide learners with invaluable skills and confidence for progression onto higher education.

This was a very well-received paper. There are two opportunities to sit a paper for Unit 2 and these are in January and May.