

# Lead Examiner Report

January 2019

**BTEC L3 National in Art &  
Design**

**Unit 2: Critical & 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, at Distinction, Merit and Pass.

### Setting grade boundaries

When we set grade boundaries, we look at the performance of every learner who took the external 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 is 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 external assessment 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 assessment, because then it would not take accessibility into account.

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

Grade	Unclassified	Level 3			
		N	P	M	D
Boundary Mark	0	8	17	29	42

## 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. There have been changes made to the paper that take effect from the January 2019 series; the paper is now delivered in two parts.

Part A is provided 4 weeks prior to the release of Part B. Part A provides the theme of the paper, scenario and 5 named art and design practitioners. Learners are advised to spend 15 hours, including the 3 hours period of monitored preparation on independent research into one of the artists and the theme. During this research learners can produce 2 sides of A4 summary notes that can be taken into the Part B formal assessment session.

Part B provides a specific piece of work from each art and design practitioner named in Part A. An image is provided along with title, scale, medium and date the piece was created. Part B also significantly introduces a further artist and design practitioner previously unseen to learners. An image is provided of the unseen artist and a resource page included in Part B of the set task which contains relevant and carefully edited information about the unseen artist. This written resource content includes biographical, contextual and critical information. Learners will not be able to access the internet or any other research platforms to investigate the unseen artist as Part B is given to learners under formal supervised conditions. Learners are provided with the resource material to understand the unseen artist and respond to the set task.

The instructions to centres have changed regarding the structure of the exam paper and levels of supervision. The prepared notes that learners generate to support them for Part B must adhere to the requirement of the paper, and are outlined in the exam paper and in the Administrative Support Guide for unit 2. Learners must have access to word processing and the internet for the preparation time of 15 hours to complete their research, but only word processing for the formally supervised 3.5 hours in which to complete the set activities.

Centres are reminded to familiarise themselves with the requirements of the levels of control required for each period of the exam.

## Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

The theme, 'The Human Condition' and the chosen artists for this year's paper were well received by centres. Learners generally produced relevant and thoughtfully justified responses that related to the theme, the chosen artist from Part A and the unseen artist from Part B.

Research as in previous series of this exam is a key skill that learners needed to undertake and apply effectively to evidence their investigations. Learners demonstrated they had read widely and developed a clear understanding of the context and work of the chosen artist. They were able to contextualise and justify their reasoning and then apply that understanding to responses on the unseen artist also. Learners' responses to the unseen artist was predictably less detailed and considered than the chosen artist and this provided a key differentiating point. Higher ability learners engaged at a greater depth and produced writing that was original and evidenced informed and creative thinking. For learners that achieved the highest marks there was strong evidence of fully reasoned, well justified and authoritative responses. These were informed and enjoyable to read. Examiners reported that there was far less evidence of regurgitation from online encyclopaedia sites and much more independent and critical thinking produced in the submissions.

Most learners demonstrated that they were prepared for the paper but there were some whom lacked the understanding of their research to achieve marks beyond mark band 1, and it was difficult to understand how and if the 15 hours of research had been used. Centres should ensure that research skills are taught as part of the delivery of this unit, and that learners understand how to most usefully break down their findings into the support bullet notes that they can take into the supervised assessment period.

The artists presented in this paper are carefully chosen to ensure that they are internationally recognised and that there is accessible research material widely available; most learners accessed a range of research sources. There is evidence that research is generally accessed via the internet although encouragingly some learners showed that they had developed contextual references from a range of other published sources and galleries. Responses were seen from the range of given artists provided in Part A with Kathe Kollwitz (printmaker), Jenny Saville (painter) and Alina Szapocznikow (sculptor) proving to be very popular choices by learners. Martin Parr (photographer) and Hussein Chalayan (fashion designer) were less commonly written about.

The theme of 'The Human Condition' provided a relevant and accessible starting point; many learners described the theme in their written introduction and then used the artists and designers works to illustrate and justify their arguments. Learners tended to describe how the work connected to the theme as well as its place in the wider contextual understanding. Higher ability learners demonstrated some well-crafted responses that originated from an emotive beginning but were then developed and justified through considered and evidenced arguments. These learners used a range of work from the chosen artist to explore and discuss the theme as well as making original connections, comparisons and considerations with the unseen artist in Part B.

The unit content appeared to have been well taught and learners generally demonstrated skills and understanding into how visual elements related to subject matter and meaning. The changes to the mark scheme reflected this heavier weighting to visual analysis and in Assessment Outcome 2: Demonstrate the ability to visually analyse the work of creative practitioners, marks available have gone from 18 to 20. In Assessment Outcome 3: Demonstrate understanding of contextual factors relating to creative practitioner's work, the marks have changed from 18 to 12 with a reduction in mark bands from 5 to 4. This reflects the constraints in Part B, with learners able to demonstrate their visual analysis skills for AO2, and for AO3 needing to respond to the provided resource material in the paper together with their wider knowledge of social, political, environmental, historical and art and design movements. In Assessment Outcome 4: Communicate independent judgements demonstrating understanding of the work of creative practitioners, marks available have increased from 12 to 16. The total marks available remain the same at 60.

The preparatory research phase of the exam appears to have provided some good differentiation between learners who have read widely and have more developed and sophisticated skills, and those who have not. The unseen nature of the paper has provided learners with an opportunity to respond to the unseen and given artists work and contextual reference page. Less well-prepared learners found it difficult to extract the most salient information from the given text, and of those, some summarized or repeated, without relating the information to the specific work or wider contextual references, for example several learners noted the both Quinn and Saville are described as Young British Artists, but few developed that link and how it might have impacted on the work. As centres and learners become more familiar with this externally assessed paper, and considering the changes evident in this series, it is positive to see that learners are responding to the facts they have found and making their own judgements and connections; there is less evidence of research simply being lifted and repeated.

## Task

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

Learners need to carry out a recommended 15 hours of focused research into one of the given practitioners in Part A and the theme of the paper, 'The Human Condition'. The research must clearly inform the learners' submission for the set task evidencing support for an effective and independent investigation. The ability to select and edit information is very important due to the constraints given the controlled assessment period. Learners need to reflect on, justify their own findings and to develop independent lines of inquiry and this is particularly reliant on their abilities to research, clearly understand and articulate their ideas.

It is encouraging to see that learners have made their own choice of art and design practitioner from Part A and that this has not been centre directed. Centre submissions usually included a variety of chosen artists from Part A in learner submissions.

Learners must have a clear understanding of how best to respond to the unseen practitioner and the work of art. The need to extract contextual references from the text on the given artist, and in some cases this highlighted a lack of art, historical and general knowledge of some learners. At times learners failed to fully exploit details in the references, for example most mentioned that Quinn had not attended art school, instead he worked as an assistant to Barry Flanagan, but only a handful explained how these facts might supported their understanding of the work or the theme.

There is no longer a requirement for a bibliography in this paper, and it is encouraging to see that some did use referencing in their work and this demonstrated good skills for progression.

Learners' writing generally showed a consistent and logical structure in line with the expectations of Level 3. Some learners did format their work into columns, which does present a convention for writing an article, however, it does not generally add to the readability of the work and should be avoided. Some learners used subheadings to structure their work which for the most part was logical and helpful however centres should avoid directing learners to work from a writing template as these have the potential to limit exploration of an idea or line of enquiry.

This is an extract from a learner's submission which achieved 11/12. It is a small example of the standard expected at this level, there was more in the whole submission that supported this mark:

*"A quote from Kollwitz, from her book, "men without joy seem like corpses" seems to reflect so well on this image and the real sense of death that there is coming from artwork that should be more upbeat as she is talking about survivors. The colour, or lack thereof, was also very significant to me as I first looked at this image because it makes everything look much more stark and alien. Kollwitz may have done this in order to portray how unnatural this life was for her and the people around her during these times. I feel the dark black of the lithograph print was done deliberately, as colour lithographs were introduced in 1798, in order to create the idea of the unknown, almost as if a shadow had covered the bodies making it hard to know what would happen to them next, they were survivors, but for how long?"*

This learner's selection of research is considered and clearly relevant to their enquiry, they have referred to a number of selected works by Kollwitz to support and use their understanding of her experiences during war to develop their ideas. There is less developed reference made to Mark Quinn's 'Self', and the learner does provide evidence that they have understood the given source and selected from this to justify their ideas. The learner has applied an effective and consistent use of written communication in a logical and engaging structure.

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

This assessment outcome attracts a mark out of 20 and is now the highest weighted assessment outcome in the paper.

There was a large range of published material available to learners on each of the six given artists included in the paper. Learners needed to access research and create an independent and thoughtful response. Weaker learners had difficulty generating independent responses regarding the visual analysis and meanings presented or provoked by the art works.

The selected art and design work presented in the exam paper was mostly well described by learners. As in previous series most learners used the theme as a starting point, some included definitions in their introductions and generally then returned to it throughout especially in the justifications.



Learners generally used the photograph of the works and the titles to inform their visual analysis. They then used this information, their research and the given text to compare the work of the chosen artist to that of the given artist.

Most learners appeared to have been well taught to approach visually analysis in a consistent fashion and there was good evidence that most learners could respond beyond a superficial level to consider formal visual elements, subject matter, meaning and that they then could compare the two works. The strongest learners included pertinent and relevant independent observations and linked these to research or application of contextual information from the given text.

Learners appeared to understand the visual as well as the conceptual nature of the set works and higher achieving learners who had effectively researched the chosen artist and thought about the theme also made connections that brought depth to their writing. The theme was evident in both visual analysis and contextual factors, learners appeared to understand the theme in different ways. The strongest submissions appeared to gain confidence through their writing as they developed ideas from looking at the unseen artist and applying the theme to his work. The learners that demonstrated a sound level of visual analysis also showed a good use of appropriate and knowledgeable specialist terminology.

This is an extract from a learners submission which achieved 18/20. There was more in the whole submission that supported this mark:

*“Both attracted to the compelling desire to change one’s self, Saville heavily uses this as a central focus in her work whereas Quinn merely remains fascinated by the concept. It is evident that they both share the fascination of what the true meaning of beauty is and this is made clear through their exploration of the human mind when conformed to society – they both try to challenge these societal concepts. Quinn explores the contemplation of beauty by using a different range of materials in his work, allowing him to push the boundaries with his former use of bread, ice, DNA, blood, flowers, marble and bronze. By creating a sculpture of himself, he is able to give a realistic and accurate portrayal of the literal aspects of being a human by creating a sculpture of his own head. His unusual choice of material and approach to the human identity incorporates his own DNA from his blood, something in which scientifically defines an individual human being and thus creating a realistic self portrait and emphasising the theme of the human condition. Contrastingly, despite also having a fascination of self-portraits as shown through some of her previous works such as Passage, Branded and Plan, Saville’s piece titled Cindy is a praise to the artist Cindy Sherman and her exploration of identity and mental health. Saville deviates into her subject and uses her work as a painful example of self-sabotage.”*

This learner has demonstrated a consistent and sophisticated approach to analysing visual elements, demonstrated throughout. This learner clearly understands the connections between visual elements and subject matter and meaning. They have included a variety of pertinent and insightful references, although these are not always as well developed when referring to the work by Marc Quinn. Specialist terminology is generally used with authority throughout.

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

For AO3 learners must apply their research, to focus on a broad range of contextual factors that could influence the chosen creative practitioner. They must also relate the information from the given text to any factors that demonstrate contextual factors to the given piece and also to the theme as a whole.

Most learners appeared to have identified and described the theme 'The Human Condition' and in the best instances learners had demonstrated that they researched and then meaningfully identified how the reference to the theme impacts on the interpretation of the works of art.

Research is key to the whole paper, learners with the most comprehensive and effective research could evidence a broader understanding of how contextual factors influence practitioner's work. Some learners referred to other relevant artists, and some to art and design movements, as well as social, political, and environmental issues, making clear links to the theme.

As in previous series lower achieving learners limited themselves to simply extracting detail from a practitioner's biography and made limited or superficial reference to a wider investigation of contextual factors. These basic responses tended to be a direct result of weaker or less focused research.

This is an extract from a learner's submission which achieved 10/12, there was more in the whole submission that supported this mark:

*"Furthermore, another influence of Szapocznikow work is that during 1969 she was then additionally diagnosed with breast cancer; which was the unfortunate cause of her death later in 1973; some may believe that her possible lack of health and safety when creating her sculptures, especially when using resin, could have been a cause of her forming breast cancer as the toxins if inhaled to a certain extent can damage your body creating a possible cause of cancer. It soon became clear that her early work was based around her*

*experience during the holocaust and her later work based around breast cancer; but still both experimenting and revealing the human body, the reason for this is her interest in gender. Her creations can be viewed as an illustration of history during that time period.”*

There are a number of relevant and effective references to wider contextual factors. Themes and ideas have been competently identified and some effective links made. The personal experiences of the artist have been explored in connection to the theme.

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

For this AO learners must communicate independent judgements and demonstrate their understanding of the work of both creative practitioners. This must also show links to the theme.

Learners that have effectively researched widely appeared to write more convincingly to justify their ideas. For most learners the justifications appeared as a summary towards the end, although in the strongest submissions it was generally found throughout, and demonstrated how some learners had developed their ideas, findings and personal responses.

It is important that the writing connects directly to the theme and the artists' work. Learners tended to write more convincingly about the chosen artist than the unseen artist, a very few included in their writing that they found the unseen artist and the work difficult to understand. In the best submissions learners included a summary of their findings and ideas regarding both artists, and they compared and contrasted their work. Learners must make sure that they identify which of the two artists' work that best fits the theme and justify why.

## Summary

Learners have been well prepared for the exam and there is good evidence to show that learners have applied skills, knowledge and experience acquired from the teaching and learning phase of this unit. There is also evidence to indicate that centres have used past papers to inform and support their learners prior to taking the exam and, although the structure of the paper has changed, this has been a positive experience with the standard remaining constant. It appears that learners have been taught to address the assessment outcomes and the change in the structure of the exam paper has been well understood. It is positive to see how centres have prepared learners to engage in critical and contextual studies and how the new structure has enabled some individual responses with good levels of independent, creative thinking evidenced.

The conceptual nature of the unseen artist's work in Part B, generated some significantly personal responses and enabled many learners to engage with the theme and the work in a philosophical way which has helped them generate some pertinent and/or perceptive observations. Less well prepared learners could at least describe the work and refer to some basic contextual references.

The structure of learners' submissions generally indicate that they have understood the set task. Where there was evidence that learners had used and applied the guidance on the exam paper their submissions were generally more logical, convincing, well researched and justified. Guidance is provided on suggested timings is provided to help support learners.

Advice to centres is:

- To focus on developing the key skill of applying research techniques.
- To encourage learners to research widely around the chosen artist.
- Learners should follow the timing guidance on the exam paper for Part B; it is recommended that learners spend approximately 30 minutes reading the information on the unseen artist to consider how they can use and respond to it.

Examiners have read some well-structured and effectively researched pieces of writing. It is encouraging to see how learners have formed their own judgements, and embraced the nature of the task. The skills developed in this unit provide learners with invaluable skills and confidence for progression onto higher education.

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

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