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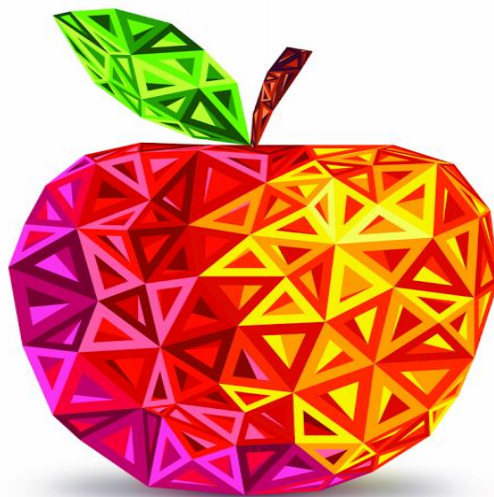


# Examiners' Report/ Lead Examiner Feedback

Summer 2019

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:

[qualifications.pearson.com/gradeboundaries](https://qualifications.pearson.com/gradeboundaries)

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

Grade	Unclassified	Near Pass	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Boundary Mark	0	8	16	29	43

## Introduction

This Lead Examiner report has been written to support your understanding of how learners performed during this examination series and to help inform on-going delivery of this unit. When reading this report you should consider the points raised in conjunction with the following materials:

- unit content - which can be found in the qualification specification
- the set task - which can be accessed on the qualification pages of the BTEC website
- the unit marking grid - which can be accessed on the qualification pages of the BTEC website.

This series saw the second iteration of the new approach for this paper, which requires learners to undertake targeted research prior to sitting a supervised assessment where they are presented with unseen material to respond to. As such the paper is presented in two parts. Part A is provided 4 weeks prior to the release of Part B.

Part A provides learners with a theme, a scenario and a list of five practitioners from which they must select one to research. It is expected that learners should spend 15 hours independently researching the theme and the practitioners they have selected from the list given. The last three hours of this preparatory period is undertaken as a monitored period in which learners must collate the research undertaken and produce up to 2 sides of A4 summary notes that can be taken into the supervised assessment period.

Part B provides a specific piece of work from each of the practitioners named in Part A. An image is provided along with details such as title, date, medium and size where appropriate. In addition Part B of the paper also introduces an additional practitioner that learners must respond to. For the new practitioners learners are provided with a specific image from the practitioner as well as a short body of text that provides contextual information about the unseen practitioner and will make direct reference to the theme of the paper.

It is important to note that during the 3 hours of monitored preparation learners are permitted to have access to the internet, library or other research sources in order to produce their summary notes. However during the supervised assessment period learners will not have access to any research sources and therefore will need to rely solely on the summary notes they have produced in the preparatory period and the information provided in the Part B of the paper. Based on this information learners then have 3.5 hours to produce a formal written response to the set task. It should also be noted that learners are no longer required to provide a bibliography or list of sources as a requirement of this paper.

It is strongly recommended that specific note is taken of centre instructions in both Part A and Part B of the paper, as well as the Administrative Support Guide for Unit 2. This is to ensure that all mandatory requirements are met.

The mark scheme was also slightly amended to reflect the new format of the paper and the new requirement for learners to respond to an unseen practitioner. There is a heavier

weighting to visual analysis. As a result the marks for Assessment Outcome 2: Demonstrate the ability to visually analyse the work of creative practitioners, have changed from 18 to 20. In Assessment Outcome 3: Demonstrate understanding of contextual factors relating to creative practitioner's work, the marks have been reduced from 18 to 12. This is reflected in a reduction of mark bands, from 5 to 4. This reflects the constraints in Part B and the unseen content. There is much more emphasis now on learners demonstrating their visual analysis skills for AO2, and for AO3 by responding 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. This reflects the increased need to see evidence of independent analysis rather than regurgitation of research. The total paper marks available remain the same at 60.

## Introduction to the Overall Performance of the Unit

The underlying principle of this unit is the importance of being able to undertake appropriate research and then be able to apply the research to a given task. Based on the response it was clear that the content of this unit had been generally well taught ahead of the paper being sat. The majority of learners were able to demonstrate skill and understanding regarding how visual elements relate to subject matter and meaning. Most learners were able to make appropriate use of research undertaken during the preparatory period to provide relevant and thoughtfully justified responses.

The 15 hour preparatory period, which includes the 3 hours of monitored preparation, should be used to conduct extensive research into the practitioner they have selected from the list provided in paper A. Most learners were able to demonstrate they had read widely and developed clear understanding of the work and the context of their chosen practitioner. Whilst it was clear that the majority of research had been conducted using obvious research sites on the internet, there was evidence that some learners had engaged with wider and more specialist sources of information. This was often most evident in the responses from higher achieving learners. Centres must continue to ensure that research skills are taught as part of the delivery of this unit. Learners also need to develop the ability to identify pertinent information in the research undertaken and then apply this to inform opinion and justify arguments. During the monitored preparation period learners must breakdown their research into bulleted summary notes that will support them during the supervised assessment.

This session the papers theme was 'Planet Plastic'. The majority of learners passionately engaged with the subject matter on a very personal level, showing real engagement and genuine interest. The proliferation of plastic waste, in particular in the oceans has been much publicised with a range of information campaigns across news reports, documentaries, journals and social media, which made the paper very accessible to all learners. Most learners were able to access relevant information and used this to contextualise the practitioners work

to varying degrees. Unfortunately at times the focus on the emotive nature of the theme was at the expense of objective analysis and learners should be reminded to keep in mind the assessment objectives associated with this unit. There was also a lot of repetition of statistics about plastic and pollution demonstrating that the majority of learners had accessed the first couple of websites listed from a basic 'google' search and not gone too much further.

Paper A provided learners with a diverse range of practitioners who spanned a range of different specialisms. The practitioners included in the paper are carefully selected to ensure they have an appropriate international profile to provide learners with ample opportunity to undertake broad research. There was evidence of learners responding to all of the practitioners listed in Part A of the paper. Of the five possible practitioners Chris Jordan (photographer) and Steve McPherson (artist, collection and assemblage) were by far the most popular selection with Stella McCartney (fashion designer) and Nobuhiro Nakanishi (artist, print and installation) were also selected by large number of learners. There were only a small proportion of learners who selected to research Gayle Chong Kwan (installation artist) but it is unclear what factors informed learners initial selection of practitioners. For works achieving in the higher mark bands there was evidence that learners were able to reference a range of work from their selected practitioners to explore and discuss the theme as well as making original connections and comparisons with the unseen practitioners in Part B.

The unseen practitioners Tim Noble and Sue Webster appear to have been accessible for learners and the majority of responses demonstrated learners making relevant observations about the work and drawing from the contextual information provided. However, less well-prepared learners appeared to struggle to recognise the salient points within the given text and simply regurgitated portions of the text without relating the information to the specific works or without capitalising on the information to contextualise the work.

## Task

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

The aim of this assessment objective is for learners to be able to conduct sustained research into a specific practitioner and a related theme. Learners must then summarise their research into a maximum of 2 pages of summary notes to support them to complete the task during the supervised assessment period. Learners need to be able to evidence their ability 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 the vast majority of learners made their own choice of practitioner from Part A and that this has generally not been centre directed. Each centre submission usually included a good selection of practitioners from Part A. However, there was still evidence from a small minority of centres that a whole class approach was taken to the selection of practitioners in Part A. Learners should always be encouraged to independently select and must independently research the practitioner for this unit as this is part of what they are being assessed on.

Learners are no longer required to provide a bibliography for this unit and summary notes are not submitted for assessment. Therefore Examiners must form a judgement on the effectiveness of a learner's investigation based on how they have used the information gleaned from their research to respond to the task.

A large number of learners quoted pollution statistics in some detail, which did provide some evidence of appropriate research. However the information was often used as an introduction without directly relating to the artist's work and did not sufficiently demonstrate how the investigation process had informed understanding of the creative practitioner.

This is an extract from a learner's submission which achieved a high mark for this assessment outcome. It must be noted this is just a single extract, and that there was more in the whole submission that supported the high mark in AO1:

*In these images Jordan never manipulated, moved, placed or altered any of the plastics that the albatrosses had ingested and up to 75 pieces of everyday plastics such as bottle lids and lighters can be found inside of just one baby albatross. While he was on this island, he found thousands of bird skeletons, where piles of plastic remained from where their stomachs had been and even skeletons that had biodegraded and the plastic still remained, unchanged. All that is left of these birds are feathers, bones, the beak and the plastics that are non-biodegradable which raises the issues of the monumental effects of plastic waste on our ecosystems which shows that Midway's isolation has not saved it from the impact of human consumption oceans away. Midway's name also describes the place that: humanity finds itself, midway to its own destruction. But at the halfway point, everything can change.*

This learners' selection of research is considered and clearly relevant to their enquiry, they have demonstrated a good level of knowledge about the work produced by Chris Jordan and have used this to suggest meaning within the work and to justify their ideas. The learner has applied an effective and consistent use of written communication in a logical and engaging structure.

Work submitted 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 will not gain extra marks. 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 this approach can have the potential to limit exploration of an independent idea or line of enquiry.

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

This assessment outcome is the highest weighted outcome in this paper and is worth one third of all marks available. Learners are expected to provide a visual analysis of the selected work by their chosen practitioner as well as the work provided for the unseen practitioner. As learners are provided with images of both pieces of work to refer to during the supervised assessment it is expected that there should be equal emphasis on the visual analysis of the both pieces of work. However, when assessing the work, it is possible that particularly strong analysis of one piece can compensate for weaker analysis of the other piece.

Many learners approached visual analysis in a very formulaic way seeking to place comment against the more obvious formal elements where they were relevant within the work, whilst this approach does support the initial stages of analysis, it is not always effective in supporting learners to access marks in the higher grade bands. The majority of learners were able to clearly identify and describe the visual elements that made up the work, but not all learners were able to capitalise on this starting point to provide a clear analysis.

In this series a large number of learners who selected to research Stella McCartney appeared to struggle with the visual analysis of her work. The fact that the work was a commercial object appeared to limit and further analysis and many learners simply described the work as a white trainer.

It is important that learners go beyond description and comment on the connections between visual elements, subject matter and meaning. This does rely on learners using the information gathered during the preparatory research and the given text to deduce meaning. The strongest learners included pertinent and relevant independent observations and linked these to research or application of contextual information from the given text or initial research.



This is an extract from a learner's submission which achieved a high mark for this assessment outcome. Again, there was more in the whole submission that supported the high mark given for AO2:

*Within this specific photograph taken from the series, the viewer is exposed to the gut which is filled with plastic caps, lighters and other lethal plastic objects, however the bird itself is still recognisable. The perspective of the photograph is taken from above which provokes the concept that we are looking down at the corpse, as if we ourselves are standing above it and therefore Chris Jordan is using this as a portal, forcing us to face the entirety of our actions and the amount of plastic that occupies this small birds body. This spacing of the image fills the entirety of the frame, creating a sense of intimacy; as is Jordan is allowing us to have a deeper connection with the bird, to allow us to reflect on our individual actions. The emphasis within the image is the toxic plastic which lie in the centre of the image, the pieces are a colourful juxtaposition to the mute colours of the baby bird. This startling contrast further exemplifies the concept that this is unnatural, the colours are not consistent throughout the image which evokes just how strange this is and therefore Jordan is further reinforcing our negligence of our earth.*

This learner has demonstrated a sophisticated approach to analysing visual elements, demonstrating assured understanding. This learner clearly understands the connections between visual elements and subject matter and meaning. They have included a variety of pertinent and insightful references and made appropriate use of specialist terminology throughout.

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

For this assessment outcome learners must draw on the research undertaken in the preparatory period as well as the text provided in Part B of the paper. During the preparatory investigation it is important that learners research into the wider context in relation to their selected practitioner as well as developing their understanding of the theme and how this impacts on the interpretation of the selected work.

Contextualisation in relation to the theme was generally very strong with lots of learners making wider reference to social, political, and particularly environmental issues. Contextualisation in relation to the selected practitioner was far more varied. Learners achieving in the lower mark bands for this assessment outcome limited themselves to simply extracting detail from a practitioners' biography and made limited or basic reference to a wider investigation of contextual factors. It was unclear if these superficial responses were the result of poor research or simply demonstrated a limited ability to apply the research effectively to the task. However learners achieving higher grades for this assessment outcome were able use in their researches convincingly, demonstrating understanding of the practitioners' creative practice and making insightful links to the theme.

Contextual understanding in relation to the unseen artists Tim Noble and Sue Webster was understandably less developed as learners were reliant on the short body of text provided in Part B of the paper. It is important that learners develop their skills in analysing the

information provided to be able to extract the pertinent points; using the information to develop their understanding of the work they are discussing in the task. Lower achieving learners unfortunately provided a direct transcription of the given text without demonstrating any understanding of the information provided. However learners achieving higher grades for this assessment outcome showed they were able to absorb the information and weave it into their own commentary, making very good use of the quotes provided to help support their judgements.

This is an extract from a learner's submission which achieved a high mark for this assessment outcome. Again, there was more in the whole submission that supported this mark:

*The two corrupt looking people (which are projections from light shining onto the pile of rubbish) appear to be sitting wasted on a pile of waste ignorant to this fact. The ironic nature of this 3D artwork draws the viewers eyes to the huge, fierce, irregular proportions of plastic, which portrays a complex form, as the viewers struggle to understand what the main subject matter is amongst all the jagged points is it the people, or the pile of plastic pollution. If it is the people then perhaps they reflect Noble and Webster themselves, as we get a sense of the "punk" characteristic coming out of the alcoholic characters. If so, then perhaps they are commenting on the fact that we are all guilty of adding to the plastic pollution, and have become oblivious to it. This oblivion is depicted by how they lounge back on their pile of rubbish, looking unbothered, but yet tinged with the possibility of doubt, regret alienated in their world. They literally mirror our current situation in the world.*

This shows the learner has made reference to a number of the contextual factors identified within the text provided and have linked these to wider contextual factors, themes and ideas. 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 assessment objective learners must communicate independent judgements and demonstrate their understanding of the work of both creative practitioners. For the majority of learners this assessment objective was addressed towards the end of their written submission through a summary of their findings and ideas regarding both practitioners, comparing and contrasting their respective work. Learners need to ensure they identify which of the two artists' work that best fits the theme and justify why. In the stronger submissions learners made appropriate use of quotes to support their assertions and provide valid justifications, whilst weaker responses relied on a more generalised link to the Plastic Planet theme.

It was heartening to see that many learners bravely communicated independent judgements throughout the work, albeit some more succinctly and effectively than others. Some learners clearly struggled to articulate their own thoughts, and relied on regurgitating facts instead. It may be beneficial during the teaching of this unit content, to allow learners to rehearse, practice and develop skills of articulation, and really get their teeth into understanding the work of creative practitioners beyond face value.

## Summary

Based on responses seen in this session, centres and learners are offered the following advice:

- Ensure appropriate research is undertaken to help develop a broad understanding of the chosen practitioner.
- Make sure that visual analysis goes beyond a purely descriptive response.
- Develop a wider understanding of the impact that social, political, religious and environmental issues have of the creation of work as this will support understanding on context.
- Develop skills in extracting salient information from a given text and be able to use this to present a clear and reasoned argument.