General Certificate of Secondary Education (Short Course)
June 2011

Art and Design 42112

(Specification 4211)

Unit 2 – Externally Set Task

Report on the Examination

GCSE Art and Design (4201-4207, 4211)

General

This was the first year candidates could enter for both Unit 1 and Unit 2 as a full course award and claim certification for the new specification in all GCSE Art and Design endorsements.

Moderators reported that many centres had taken the opportunities presented by the specification to restructure courses and offer more flexible approaches to teaching and learning. Others had been more cautious, retaining the best practice from legacy course models, sometimes with the addition of workshops and one-off activities, to reflect the individual needs of their own candidates. Overall, whichever approach was taken, it would appear that the specification and its enhanced opportunities have been very well received by schools and colleges.

For Unit 1 there is no prescribed approach to development of work, but for the full course the submission must show the coverage of all four assessment objectives through "more than one extended collection of work, or project". For some centres the portfolio ethos was actively pursued with teachers encouraging candidates to take a lead role in the selection and organisation of work to be presented for examination. For others, candidates submitted two or three complete projects, as in previous years, with little selection.

Work for this unit may also be produced in the form of one sustained project supported by work generated by other experiences such as visits, workshops, experimental exercises in handling media and engagement with a wide variety of sources from which to develop individual responses. Alternatively, two or more projects of similar or different scope and complexity could fulfil the assessment criteria. Therefore, themes for projects, assignments and briefs were often wide ranging and varied and candidates were able to engage with a wealth of possibilities and developmental opportunities. In many centres, the use of starting points from the previous year's test paper was common practice.

For Unit 2, the extended preparatory time available for the externally set task, was well received. More time allowed centres to select a delivery approach to suit individual candidates' needs and working practices. Some centres chose to use the full lead-in time available from early January, allowing candidates the time to explore their ideas and intentions in greater depth. Other centres opted for a shorter preliminary time followed by a much longer period over which the 10-hour supervised sessions were spread to support candidates' 'momentum'. The flexibility afforded by the extended preparatory period was deemed to be a major factor in the success of this unit of work.

The externally set task papers for each endorsement were also well received, with many centres welcoming the familiar paper format, which allows candidates the choice between focused questions with suggested sources, or an open-ended starting point. Each paper is designed to ensure candidates have access to a range of different, equally valid, ways to achieve the assessment objectives. Please remember that candidates should be allowed to select their own question from the full range in the paper. Teachers should not pre-select questions on behalf of learners or offer them a narrower range to choose from. AQA regards this as a form of malpractice.

In both units, visually engaging assessment evidence in the form of sketchbooks, ideas books or journals, as well as mounted loose sheets were seen.

Teacher Standardisation Meetings

The meetings not only illustrate standards, but give teachers the opportunity to view a variety of practices in all specification endorsements from both Unit 1 and Unit 2. The generosity of centres in loaning work for training purposes at teacher standardisation meetings is gratefully appreciated.

Attendance at teacher standardisation meetings was deemed essential this year for centres new to the specification. At moderation, those centres that did not send a representative do not appear always to have fully grasped how to evidence the new assessment objectives.

Delegate feedback indicated that fundamental issues such as the administration of paperwork, deadline dates and reminders of the support available were a vital part of the meetings, but that the emphasis on standards and training through the marking of 'live' work is why the AQA teacher standardisation sessions are so highly valued. Understandably the absence of grade boundaries in this first year of full course certification was an issue for many delegates. Presenters endeavoured to allay fears and confirmed that although the raw mark boundary may change, the overall standard will stay the same and be carried forward.

The provision of CDs, for delegates to take away from the meetings, that included a 'visual reminder' of the training and marking sets and associated attainment commentaries was welcomed. This compensated for delegates now being unable to photograph the exhibition for copy-right reasons. Please note, the reminder notes and all other Teacher Resource Bank information are also available through the AQA website.

Administration

Administration was generally good this year, although in a few instances moderators did receive paper work after the 31st May deadline. It is essential that centres send two copies of their Centre Mark Form (CMF) or EDI printout to the moderator. This ensures the moderation sample is selected in good time, and the centre's copy is returned in advance of the agreed moderation date.

Transferring marks on to forms still posed some problems, for example, confusing Unit 1 with Unit 2 when adding marks on the CMF or adding up the marks incorrectly on Candidate Record Forms (CRF). Generally, however, inaccuracies such as these were dealt with by moderators during centre visits.

Please remember, it is a mandatory requirement that CRFs are signed by both the candidate and the teacher responsible for delivering the course of study. This is to signify that the work submitted is solely that of the candidate and is an essential part of centre administration. Thankfully, there were very few instances this year of incomplete forms, although the supporting information boxes (to expand on information about candidates' individual circumstances or to explain the awarding of marks) were rarely used.

Assessment and Moderation

The change to the sample selection process caused some confusion in centres this year. A single sample of candidates' work is now chosen according to the range of marks submitted across Unit 1 and Unit 2 for each endorsement. For this reason, it is much less likely that both units of work of the same candidate will be seen. The selection is also proportionate to the number of units entered for each endorsement So if a centre enters equal proportions of Unit 1 and Unit 2 for an endorsement, for example, 20 Unit 1 and 20 Unit 2, 15 units will be selected for moderation, 8 for Unit 1 and 7 for Unit 2 or vice versa.

In terms of the accuracy of centre marking, where centres had sent a representative to a teacher standardisation meeting, used the assessment criteria appropriately and with reference to AQA's standards, marking judgements were generally sound. Where this had not been done and where there appeared to be a lack of internal standardisation marking appeared to be erratic. In these cases, the use of marks that were too high or too low in the four-mark band was a common problem. Where teachers had marked to the requirements of the assessment objectives, using the key words of "Develop", "Refine", " Record" and "Present", and the distinguishing characteristics "Just", "Adequate", "Clear" and "Convincing" in the four-mark bands, they were better equipped to differentiate when proposing marks for their own candidates.

Moderation meetings and visits were generally very successful this year, with fewer instances of inadequate provision and/or presentation of samples. Whether submissions are presented in the form of an exhibition or carefully labelled folders, a quiet, undisturbed area is essential if the moderation process is to be effectively conducted.

Assessment Objectives

In both Unit 1 and Unit 2 candidates are required to evidence all four assessment objectives through appropriate means. The document "Interpreting the Assessment Objectives" offers valuable guidance for centres and is available through the AQA website.

Assessment Objective 1

The combination of instructions to "develop ideas" with the wording "informed by contextual and other sources" saw many candidates move beyond the frequently accessed artists typical to previous years' submissions. The breadth of possibilities under the heading of "sources" has been evidenced through what one senior moderator described as "an eclectic mix of increasingly contemporary and very stimulating practitioners" as well as song lyrics, dance displays, objects and artefacts, cultural gatherings, trips, visits, exhibitions, poems, posters and films. Where candidates had simply downloaded information from the Internet, little evidence of analytical or cultural understanding was seen, and their own work was rarely "informed" as a result.

Assessment Objective 2

In some cases, refinement was simply evidenced through the eventual selection of one version of the same image that had been replicated in a range of media with little consideration of alternative possibilities. In others, candidates had experimented extensively to evidence the creative selection and rejection of a wide range of media in a journey of exploration through a project or series of stand-alone experiences. Digital media was in evidence across all ability ranges, with candidates often using software packages such as 'Photoshop' to good effect in considering a range of possibilities. Screen shots were also used by some candidates to effectively demonstrate the manipulation and refinement of ideas.

Assessment Objective 3

Recording in a wide range of both two and three-dimensional media was seen this year, with digital recording used effectively for a variety of purposes, and a balance of primary and secondary sources was noted in the most successful portfolio and test submissions. These included documenting work in progress, design ideas and working drawings, as well as recording through drawing. One moderator reported that "drawing as a recording tool appears to be as strong as ever" whereas another reported that drawing continues to "wither on the vine". Candidates also evidenced their own insights and opinions through written annotations, with thoughts and reflections complementing associated visual materials. Once again however, the presentation of written information that had simply been downloaded from the internet or copied from books without subsequent development rarely formed evidence for the marking criteria.

Assessment Objective 4

Personal responses were varied, with some showing ambition and creativity as a result of individual journeys of enquiry. Many candidates progressed their ideas through a wide range of projects or client-orientated briefs, often showing sound understanding of process and intention. Encouragingly, fewer examples of pastiche were reported this year. Please remember, an "informed and meaningful response demonstrating analytical and critical understanding" does not have to be seen as a separate outcome, and there was more evidence this year of candidates showing personal responses through collections of related work centred on a particular theme, sketchbook investigations and/or design sheets. Equally some excellent examples of fully resolved outcomes were submitted in a wide range of styles, media and sizes that evidenced the candidates' abilities to handle materials sensitively and with a clear understanding of their appropriateness, given intended purposes.

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Unit 2: Externally Set Task 42112

The Externally Set Task questions were well received by centres with all questions being attempted although certain questions were more preferable than others.

Question Paper Starting Points

1. The Everyday

This starting point proved to be the most popular question. Candidates responded well, particularly in the use of primary sources, which for this question were readily available when engaging with (b) everyday objects. As a result, candidates responded personally through recording, investigating and analysing. The overall level of refining and communicating final intentions, even at the lower levels of attainment, demonstrated the candidates' abilities to make meaningful connections across all four assessment objectives. Both development and personal responses were mainly limited in the Short Course to painting and collage, with limited evidence of drawing. Very little 3D work was seen as a response to this question. One candidate completed a quirky illustration piece entitled 'Mr Brain' as a cartoon storyboard. Comics were analysed and various 'characters' were considered, showing an understanding of imagery, fonts and graphic styles. The everyday life of Mr Brain with all things related to his day from getting up to going to bed were covered successfully in this personal response.

2. Marine Life

A very popular choice; however the distinct lack of reference to primary source material and personal involvement meant that work seen remained at a more limited level of attainment. Compositional ideas were often quite imaginative but lacked sufficient understanding of form, or the characteristics of marine life, to enable many outcomes to evidence all of the assessment objectives. Some exciting and entertaining three dimensional outcomes were attempted in this question. There was an abundance of painted, printed and mixed media constructed fish, but again in many cases the candidates' lack of experience and use of time showed some limitation in the use of various media. This question certainly appealed to lower attaining candidates. Assessment objective two was well attended to as learners gave great attention to exploring the ideas through a variety of media. There were however, some limitations in evidence for AO1, where contextual investigations and a more in depth study of the named artists would have steered the creative journey and opened up greater opportunity for personal response. Many learners created scrapbooks of images downloaded from the internet that were then directly used to develop practical outcomes.

3. Self Image

Digital imagery was used predominantly in this question, both as part of the source material and to record individual poses and portraits. Candidates demonstrated their ability to use computer programs as a part of the recording and analysing elements of the question. The majority of personal outcomes seen were interpreted through two dimensional media. There was limited evidence of written, personal understanding and communication here. Chuck Close, one of the named artists, was frequently referred to in responses to this question and in one example seen, Barbara Kruger and Chuck Close had inspired a successful distorted self portrayal. In many cases, however, the analytical and recording elements did not develop the personal response with great imagination, and many candidates elected to produce a literal self image in the style of an artist. AO1 and AO3 were evidenced with some confidence and AO2 and AO4 with a lesser degree of success.

4. Signs and Symbols

Candidates related their source material to their own youth culture and to non European culture. Frequent use of source material such as street signage and popular logos together with maps and their key of symbols were used. Candidates made reference to graffiti artists and showed great

interest in the named artist 'Microbo'. Many candidates used African, Aboriginal, Chinese or American Indian references. Pattern based outcomes were witnessed in most centres with good results. In one Muslim school the signs and symbols question had been chosen by candidates so they could explore Islamic patterns within their own culture. In this centre, the investigation and development was very thorough and rich throughout candidates' sketchbooks and all candidates who attempted this question produced a textile piece based on Islamic pattern.

In much of the work seen, candidates did not evidence the assessment objectives to the highest of levels and although there was broad coverage of the assessment objectives there was evidence of missed opportunities to develop confident and highly developed personal responses. Where named artists had been investigated, many candidates reverted to conventional graffiti and tagging rather than recognising greater design possibilities. Candidates with more ability did display some encouraging personal responses, and here outcomes often had a strong graphical interpretation.

5. In Series

This question was quite popular with candidates who preferred to source their work through digital photography, using Photoshop to manipulate a series of images using different colour schemes, making reference to the work of Andy Warhol. The four seasons were seen as a stimulus for producing Monet inspired work which captured environments at different times of the year. Candidates recorded the changes through atmospheric painting and photography. Work seen showed that the majority of short course candidates responded to this question in quite a literal manner preferring to answer the option (b) where they could choose their own approach. Most candidates made small 'sets' of artwork predominantly in two dimensions. The named artists Claude Monet, Lisa Milroy and Andy Warhol were frequently referred to.

6. Imprint

The majority of candidates who responded to this question used traditional Nigerian patterns, as seen in ceramic surface design, and as mentioned in the question. Work seen showed incised and built ceramic tiles, mixed media repeat pattern, relief artwork with some block printing on fabric and papers. Abstract replication of Nigerian patterns was also seen, translated through a variety of media. AO1 and AO3 were closely covered with varying degrees of understanding. In the best practice seen, observations from historical and cultural sources informed outcomes with individual practice that made clear connections with the context of the question.

7. Contrasts

This open question provoked mainly literal responses, with most candidates electing to respond to option (a).

(a) Candidates considered themes such as rich and poor, sun and moon, old and new, growth and decay, hot and cold, etc. Outcomes were mainly 2-dimensional. Where candidates had been selective in their referencing, personal responses were highly individual. A candidate in one centre made a fascinating painting which combined New York architecture with Fauvism. The candidate looked to Andre Derain and New York landmarks for inspiration.

(b) Candidates looked at themes such as "rough 1 smooth" using interesting comparisons between the natural world and the man made environment. In the best practice, candidates used observational photography to inform mixed media collage responses. Subject included tree bark, window reflections, contemporary architecture and landscape.

(c) Some candidates responded to this using photography to explore effects of light and shadow with varying degrees of success.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available at www.aqa.org.uk/over/stat.html . The UMS conversion calculator can be found at www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion .