



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

**Art and Design – Photography: 42061
lens-based and light-based
media**

(Specification 4206)

Unit 1 : Portfolio of Work

Report on the Examination

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GCSE Art and Design (4206)

General

It has been another successful year in which centres embraced the flexibility and diversity of the GCSE Art and Design Specification within each endorsement. Many centres developed new courses that accommodated a variety of teaching approaches and were tailored to suit available facilities, staffing strengths and creative enthusiasms, as well the needs of students. In other centres, courses similar to those used during the legacy specification were retained.

Teacher Standardisation allayed any uncertainty about the requirements of the 'new' specification, and as a result many courses have become more holistic and less rigid or linear in design. Examples included initial skills-based experiences allowing students to investigate such things as the use of materials for different purposes; specific visual elements; mark-making and sources of design. Workshop-style approaches allowed students to build up a bank of skills in readiness for extended collections of work or projects, designed to show coverage of the four Assessment Objectives. Even where all students followed the same project, moderators reported evidence of much more diverse journeys of enquiry and personal responses building on confidence gained during the introductory phases of their courses of study.

Unit 1 portfolio work showed appropriate and well-structured responses to the Assessment Objectives. Moderators reported a good range of tasks evident in projects across the endorsements. Themes were wide-ranging and varied from familiar schemes based around the natural world, portraiture and landscape, to issues-based topics and individual assignments based on students' personal interests, identities, cultures and beliefs. Sources were, in the best instances, integrated within the theme and provided rich focuses for investigation, exploration, research and analysis. Past paper starting points featured extensively, and allowed centres to refresh the themes used with students on an annual basis instead of re-presenting the same projects year on year.

There were fewer reports of students experiencing visits to galleries and exhibitions, especially where travelling great distances was required. Some centres made better use of local visits, and there was evidence of extended "sources" being integrated into schemes and programmes of study, where local woodland, city centres, ports, harbours and seashores were used to engage students and inform the development of ideas.

Visiting artists made a valuable impact on some courses, to provide stimulus and lead workshops, involving activities such as life drawing, printmaking, 3D construction and the exploration of textile techniques.

Sketchbooks, working logs, ideas books, design sheets and mounted boards were all very much in evidence, each offering students a way of working and style of presentation that suited their individual needs. It was pleasing to see fewer cases of sketchbook pages or worksheets labelled as "recording"; "AO..."; "Artist Research" etc.

In some instances, sketchbooks were deemed to be "stunning examples" of how students had worked through the creative process and documented their thoughts, ideas and findings in a wide variety of visual means. In other cases, they were seen as problematic in terms of selection of work for moderation. Some students chose to select and mount up work from their books whilst others accepted that they represented a journey of personal development and maturity and presented them as that within their portfolio.

Some moderators highlighted 'selection' of work as an issue in a number of centres. It is a requirement of the specification that students present "a selection of thoughtfully presented work that demonstrates the breadth and depth of the course of study". In some cases no selection had taken place and work from the entire course was submitted, whilst in others there was too much, so submissions were sparse and disjointed.

In Unit 2, the unlimited preparatory time available was used by teachers to tailor the time to students' individual needs. It was the case that in a number of centres' students overlapped some weeks with

work for both Unit 1 and preparation for Unit 2. In others, students were given the maximum time available. Flexibility was deemed to be the key to success, by allowing centres to organise timing for the preparatory period and the 10-hour sessions to meet the wider needs of both the centre and the students.

The Externally Set Task papers for each endorsement were well received. It was evident, though, that some centres had restricted access to some questions from papers. Whilst there may be reasons why students might be guided in their choices, it is a contravention of Awarding Body rules if students are not issued with a full copy of the E.S.T. paper.

Teacher Standardisation Meetings

Delegate feedback this year indicated that the distribution of a CD containing even more extensive 'visual reminders', as well as sections containing information about dates and deadlines, administration details, copies of important documents and links to specification materials, was very well received. The process is an on-going one; ideas and suggestions received have been taken on board, to continue to improve what is already seen to be a highly valued AQA resource.

The fundamental focus of each meeting was to illustrate standards by giving teachers the opportunity to see examples of 'live' work from each endorsement and both Unit 1 and Unit 2. "Training rather than testing" was one comment received following the decision not to collect in marks. The inclusion of an "anchor set" for the purpose of group marking in both the Training and Marking exhibitions was also unanimously welcomed. Reinforced at Teacher Standardisation, and used much more effectively by teachers during centre marking this year, were the terms "just", "adequate", "clear" and "convincing" for awarding differentiated marks within each Assessment Objective band.

The initiative for meetings to be hosted in schools and colleges was generally successful. Funding received for this was positively used by participating centres for a wide range of educative purposes. During moderation, samples used at previous Teacher Standardisation Meetings, illustrating different approaches within endorsement presentations, were seen to have influenced both portfolio work and responses to the Externally Set Task. Teachers had, on occasions, encouraged students to move away from traditional responses and to integrate new materials or new ways of working with media. Soft sculptures to accompany work within Graphic Communication portfolios as well as three-dimensional presentations of photographic material were seen, and students had been more adventurous in their choice of media within three-dimensional design submissions.

Administration

Administration was deemed to be good this year despite problems caused by national holidays. The majority of centres ensured that moderators received the necessary two copies of mark sheets by the 31 May deadline. This in turn guaranteed that centres received sample information in good time for visits and Area Moderation Meetings. Very few instances of missing or incomplete Candidate Record Forms or Centre Declaration Sheets were reported, and fewer cases of incorrect transference of marks were seen. Any occasions where administration was problematic were generally dealt with by moderators at the time.

Arranging dates and times for visits and meetings was reported to be increasingly difficult. It is hoped that more use will be made of e-mail in future to reduce the problems of contacting teachers during the school day.

Assessment and Moderation

Marking each unit out of 80 is now established and in the majority of cases, marking was deemed to be fair and accurate. Where the assessment criteria were used regularly during teaching sessions, shared with students and seen as an integral part of the course, a familiarity with terminology and interpretation of requirements led to confidence in pitching marks accurately within bands. For some students, an emphasis on the language of art was started during Key Stage 3; this led to excellent foundations for GCSE courses and the coverage of Assessment Objectives.

Most centres had understood the process of sample selection across both units and the principle of marking and moderation taking place in numerical order from lowest to highest, regardless of whether they were portfolio or Externally Set Task samples. In the majority of cases, centres had taken on board the requirement for quiet and uninterrupted conditions for effective moderation to take place. Problems arose when work had been exhibited in areas that were difficult to access or samples had been poorly or incorrectly labelled. Whether samples are presented in folders of work or as an exhibition, or in some cases as electronic portfolios, ease of access is essential.

Area Moderation Meetings were generally successful and provided centres with an alternative moderation process.

Assessment Objectives

Students are required to evidence all four Assessment Objectives in both Unit 1 and Unit 2. By using the terms “develop”, “refine”, “record” and “present”, students showed an understanding of the requirements in their submissions. A better understanding of the integration of the Assessment Objectives enabled a more flexible approach and evidenced more holistic submissions of work.

Assessment Objective 1

Many subjects provided the starting point from which ideas were developed, including images; artists; craftspeople; artefacts; visits; materials and techniques. Evidence seen exemplified the breadth of sources that had been made available to students or that they themselves had selected. Relevant contextual influences informed very individual personal journeys of enquiry, and in the best examples, students independently discovered contemporary references that both enhanced and extended their work. Less successful submissions relied heavily on downloaded biographical narratives, much of which had been neither read nor understood and made little if any connection to the student's own work. As a result there was little evidence of how work had progressed or ideas had been developed in relation to the findings.

Assessment Objective 2

This was seen to be the most successful in some submissions and the least successful in others. The most successful students had accessed a wide range of media, materials, techniques and processes with which to progress and expand their developmental journey. Evidence of thoughtful review and refinement through clear and considered selection and rejection of media and processes was a prominent feature. Digital media had been used both to chart the progress of work and also to show discriminating changes and decisions made during 3D and textile construction, large-scale paintings and assemblage. In less successful cases, media, techniques and processes had been simply addressed by way of repeated images in a range of media and colour-ways with little evidence or reference to judgements or decisions made.

Assessment Objective 3

Recording in its widest sense was seen this year. The cross-over between endorsements where students have used wide-ranging techniques and media manipulation to record ideas, thoughts, developments and outcomes, was noticeable. These took the form both of traditional drawing techniques through the use of graphite, charcoal and other dry materials, to drawing with wax, sand, glue and mud. Sewing machine stitching, carving and modelling, constructions in paper and card as well as printing and mixed media techniques were all used to record from both primary and secondary sources. Above all, digital recording was at the forefront as a tool to record progress, intent, development and realisation. The instant access to a visual record was used to excellent effect in the most successful submissions and offered a whole new dimension to the concept of recording. Highly rendered drawing still featured, as did drawing for design purposes and as personal responses to projects. Recording through annotation was in the best examples insightful and expressive whereas in other cases it was merely descriptive. In some instances, annotations were simply re-presentations of existing information copied directly from secondary sources such as the internet.

Assessment Objective 4

In both Unit 1 and Unit 2, personal responses varied from well-executed and considered outcomes resulting from extensive exploration and development of ideas, to unrelated pieces that showed no links with the focus of study. Projects, assignments, briefs and starting points generated some exciting, innovative and inventive responses. These included collections of related work, large scale paintings, detailed and decorative books, story boards, textiles, sculptural forms, ceramics, mixed-media and digital displays by way of photographs, animation and show reels. Students responded to a range of critical and cultural sources in well-organised and reflective submissions where connections had been thoughtfully embedded in the work and materials had been chosen appropriately.

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Moderators continue to report a steady increase in uptake for the Photography endorsement and there were many comments about the very high standards seen. This was evident in the delivery of the specification and students' work presented for both Unit 1, the Portfolio submission and in response to the Externally Set Task starting points of Unit 2.

Unit 1: Portfolio of Work

Predictably there was a significant use of digital media in Portfolio submissions. However, moderators also commented on an increase in the number of centres where traditional silver based processes were being explored with darkroom skills enabling students to extend their personal strengths and approaches to the subject. This year many comments referred to an increase in the use of other lens-based skills and innovative approaches being developed. Various forms of animation and presentation of outcome were noted.

There was clear evidence of the innovation and enthusiasm of students and teachers in sometimes difficult and demanding learning contexts. By drawing on the expertise of visiting artists and other creative professionals as well as visits to local media venues, exhibitions and other locations (produce), centres made a rich variety of experiences available to students to stimulate their ideas and imaginations. These experiences also provided opportunities for students to develop a range of Portfolio evidence enabled by the enhanced provision of the present specification.

There was good use of contemporary and traditional sources for contextual references, and a range of media was used in combination with photographic imagery. This innovation was seen as both cause and effect in students' creative approaches to the use of lens-based media.

Varying levels of pastiche were still evident in a number of submissions. Sometimes this was highlighted by the indiscriminate use of downloaded material. All too often this manifested itself as part of a digital and/or paper based collage, evidencing few skills and very little understanding of the source or media employed. It is worth teachers and students noting the presence of the word 'ideas' in the assessment objectives. This presence has clear implications for course planning and the nature of students' engagement with their learning opportunities and evidencing of attainment.

Some issues remain regarding the organisation, access and navigation of the work produced by students in this endorsement. This often happened where a response was stored digitally. The issue is perhaps one of 'housekeeping', but students should be encouraged to discriminate between evidence that supports their development and exploration of ideas on the one hand, as opposed to that which merely adds to the volume of work on the other. The issue is also about selection, or lack of it, and the consequent volume of images that can so easily be presented for assessment. The plea is to encourage students to make a judgment about the presentation of their work, whilst ensuring effective coverage of the assessment objectives. They must also ensure that work is well labelled and documented in order to ensure that effective assessment can take place.

It was very interesting to note an increase in the number of students using audio visual software to present a narrative of their processes and reference sources.

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 .