

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCE

Edexcel GCE Art & Design
(8030-8036/9030-9036)

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GCE A/S, A2 Art and Design Examination Report 2008

Introduction

This report provides an overview of the findings of the 2008 GCE Art and Design 8030 - 8036 and 9030-9036 Moderation series.

Background - The Specification

In August 2006, Edexcel launched its revised specification for GCE Art and Design after close consultation with relevant bodies, reducing the number of unitary requirements to be assessed from six units to four. In response to centres' recommendations, the most unwieldy aspects of the old specification and the assessment documents were addressed to form the current specification.

The first full award for the current Specification was August 2007. The last award for the current Specification is August 2009.

Feedback from centre staff to moderators, together with delegate evaluations at National Training have shown the current four-unit specification to be very popular with all. The assessment burden has been significantly reduced and the extended single coursework units have given candidates greater opportunity to present more in-depth personal ideas with well-documented and better quality outcomes.

The extra time afforded in the coursework units and the Externally Set Assignments has restored a framework that has allowed candidates to explore ideas and to experiment and develop their work with greater freedom. In particular, candidates now have valuable time to acquire more competent control over the formal elements and to achieve better quality visual and critical skills.

Centres are reminded of the importance of accurate application of the assessment matrices in their assessment of candidates' work. Where criteria were applied incorrectly, there was a consequent adjustment to the centre's marks.

Report on units

6031 Coursework Unit 1

Centres appeared confident in their interpretation of this extensive, single AS coursework unit. The assessment objectives generally had been fully addressed in mainly coherent, well-structured courses.

Frequently centres had followed a structured induction module followed by more independent and personal enquiry. This approach was found to develop the skills and understanding candidates needed to develop their subsequent personal work. It was commendable to see many centres incorporating visits to art venues locally, nationally or internationally in order to give their candidates rich opportunities to select a range of sources and contexts. The resulting folders of work contained thorough investigation and research alongside personal developments and exciting realisations. Centres regularly used a broad theme for the initial taught skills input, which then became the springboard for candidates to focus their ideas towards a personal response. Moderators have commented on the range and diversity of work across this unit, as well as commending ambitious pieces achieved by some candidates across the different endorsements.

Centres performing less well tended to be somewhat formulaic and prescriptive in their approach to delivery of this unit. Contextual references tended to be imposed by the centre, rather than explored with a sense of genuine enquiry. Information from sources was sometimes collated as cut and pasted imagery and text, where personal, meaningful analysis tended to be replaced with superficial biographical detail. These candidates then lacked the purpose, intention and direction necessary to develop a personal response.

The most successful centres appeared to be those where a balance had been struck between formal teaching of skills and processes and allowing candidates the opportunity to develop their own ideas using the confidence gained through the initial 'taught' section.

In some centres, however it was noted that candidates were entered without the foundation of the basic principles of art and design required at this level. For such candidates, the induction period of building skills in manipulating the formal elements and developing visual language understanding, might significantly aid higher achievement.

6032 Externally Set Assignment

This unit is intended to represent the culmination of the AS course. The paper consists of one broad-based thematic starting point. The timed element of eight (8) hours may be carried out at the centre's discretion any time after the paper has been released to students. The AS Theme for 2008 was 'Links and Connections'.

Moderators reported that the theme had been welcomed by centres and had provided a rich range of starting points for candidates across all the endorsements. Generally moderators found that the quality of candidates' responses reflected centres' understanding of the specification requirements and standards for this unit. Many candidates' responses to the set theme were largely personal and energetic, where they were encouraged to develop ideas independently within a structured preparatory period.

Centres who had used the permitted, extended preparatory period to structure well-designed courses of study, were more successful in developing their candidates' ability to select and sustain their investigations in depth towards the final timed examination.

It was noted that the stronger candidates had recorded extensively from primary sources in pursuit of their ideas. These sources included gallery visits, workshops and field trips from which candidates had selected and recorded a rich range of relevant imagery to inform and inspire their work. Where candidates across endorsements had employed digital technology the most successful were those using design software as a creative tool to pursue and develop their intention. These candidates also clearly evidenced their understanding of complex techniques of manipulating imagery and text, through the use of storyboards, annotated studies and printouts.

However moderators found some candidates' supporting studies for this unit rather thin and not reflecting the potential time now possible, for centres to prepare their candidates for the final piece. These candidates tended to rely on internet downloads for their contextual research with little sense of genuine enquiry or informed personal comment. There was some evidence that candidates struggled with the concept of 'Links and Connections' and the vast mind-maps created in the early stages of the assignment remained unfocussed, lacking direction and resulting in obvious and literal outcomes. Insufficiently structured preparatory studies tended to result in visually uninformed final decisions.

Where time is at a premium leading up to the eight-hour examination, candidates who had written long descriptive evaluations might have more gainfully employed analytical review of their on-going progress. This process might have helped them to concentrate on the vital decision-making necessary for a well-developed final outcome. Where candidates had employed on-going reflection and refinement through annotated studies and notes, there was a genuine sense of a focused direction with evidence of progress towards the timed piece.

6033 Coursework Unit 3

There were many good examples of in-depth investigations for both the elements of this unit: the Practical work and the Personal study. In the second year of the specification, centres generally appeared to have a clearer understanding of the requirements of this unit, and there tended to be less confusion over assessing the two elements under one assessment grid.

Commendably, many centres appeared to encourage their candidates to spend a good part of the academic year on this unit. Often starting it in the summer term, candidates had the time to experiment widely and creatively explore ideas. This also helped candidates to sustain and focus their work in depth, producing well-developed outcomes for both their practical and personal studies.

However, candidates' achievement in this unit was not as high as expected and this may be due to a number of reasons. The key issues appeared to be in the interpretation of the Personal study and the relationship between the Personal study and the Practical work. There was also evidence that candidates had insufficient grasp of what is required at A2 for a critical, analytical study of others' work.

The least successful interpretations of the Personal study element of Unit 3 tended to be where candidates had made a descriptive, often biographical run through of others' work, with little meaningful investigation or purposeful analysis. In some cases, research material tended to be pasted directly from a wide range of internet sources, but with little selection. These candidates practical work tended to suffer similarly from a lack of focus, with only tenuous connections to their personal study. Consequently both elements remained undeveloped with weak final outcomes.

Some centres had interpreted the Personal study solely as a long evaluation of their ongoing practical work for the unit. Candidates following this approach tended to lack critical and analytical study of others' work. Their studies lacked a sense of an in-depth focused investigation into a specific aspect of art, craft or design relevant to their own practical development. Other centres considered the notes in their candidates' sketchbooks to be sufficient evidence of a study. Centres would be advised to read the specification guidance on this unit where the requirements for the Personal study are clearly outlined.

Sometimes the time consuming process of gathering a gamut of information led to less involved and sustained development of ideas, materials and processes in candidates' own work resulting in less ambitious practical realisations. Candidates in these cases might benefit from a more focussed selection for their personal studies more closely related to their ongoing practical enquiry. In this way the Practical work and Personal study elements required for this unit might more successfully inform each other.

In the more successful centres candidates had been prepared for A2 at the end of AS, having evaluated their prior learning and negotiated a personal and individual theme to pursue. Here centres had often arranged a course of visits to venues locally, nationally and internationally to bridge the gap between the two levels. Centres displayed a range of exciting outcomes, demonstrating good use of technique and advanced levels of understanding, particularly where candidates had successfully interlinked the personal study and the practical work. There was an emphasis on developing and researching focused ideas for their studies at the same time as generating their own practical responses. Candidates at these centres showed risk taking in their experiments with

media, demonstrating a mature understanding of visual language as well as exploring and developing in some cases, quite complex conceptual work.

It was clear from Moderators' Reports that centres would benefit from support in their interpretations of this unit. There were examples of rich and inspiring approaches to the personal study. However, many centres need to recognise that this element of Unit 3 is an investigation into a selected aspect of others' work that is closely related to their candidates' ongoing practical work. Centres might be assisted in their understanding of the many ways this element can be approached through exemplars offered at national and local training.

6034 Externally Set Assignment

This unit represents the culmination of the GCE course. The paper consists of one broad-based thematic starting point. The timed element of twelve (12) hours may be carried out at the centre's discretion any time after the paper has been released to students. The Theme for 2008 was 'Transition'.

Moderators across the country reported finding some good responses to the externally set assignment theme and there was generally a sense that this unit appeared to reflect the culmination of candidates' skills and understanding. Many candidates had used their acquired knowledge and experience to produce interesting outcomes linked to their choice of artists, designers and movements. There were examples of in-depth supporting studies to evidence candidates' visual thinking together with a rich range of experimental samples, swatches, test pieces and maquettes across the endorsements. There were commendable examples of candidates continuing to pursue their ideas from their coursework Unit 3. Where centres had encouraged this practice, there was a sense of continuity and coherence across their candidates' work for A2.

Although candidates generally understood the importance of visual research, moderators reported an over reliance on second hand sources in a number of centres. Candidates in these cases might have benefitted from accessing primary sources and contexts for more in-depth and meaningful recording. In some cases, candidates' ideas were strong, but there was generally a lack of sufficiently informed source material to take their ideas forward. Greater practice in manipulating the formal elements from primary sources might have given candidates the confidence they needed to develop their visual language skills of composition, structure and form. Subsequently the short cuts taken in adequately sourcing their work together with lack of technical skills, hampered the flow and focus of these candidates' investigations.

From moderators' reports, there was clearly obvious enthusiasm for many aspects of candidates' practical and theoretical work for this unit. However it was also noted that more successful submissions demonstrated a purposeful journey and a strong sense of pursuing a focussed idea. Some candidates might have benefitted from a clearly stated intention followed by a more in-depth and analytical review of their on-going progress. These candidates had often referred superficially to influential contextual references, but lacked the analytical vocabulary required to demonstrate their critical understanding. Insufficient subject knowledge in these candidates' submissions resulted in their investigations being abandoned too early with only tenuous connections with the work of others.

However where centres were now tackling the full Critical and Contextual Studies endorsement, moderators reported finding some excellent, in-depth dissertations in response to 'Transition', which employed imaginative selections of contextual images for candidates' investigative studies. For the practical endorsements there were also reports of praiseworthy use of critical vocabulary and in-depth analysis in candidates' pursuit of their intentions.

Assessment and Training

In general centres seemed to understand the unit requirements of the specification at AS and GCE now in its second year. Moderators have reported that the assessment training workshops provided free for centres across the country earlier this year, were deemed to be generally very helpful. There was some evidence that discrepancies between centre marks and the national standard had occurred in their final assessment of the units at both AS and A2, where centres had not made use of this early, shared assessment opportunity.

Centres' assessment of their candidates' work for the AS and A2 units this year was found generally to be reasonably accurate. However, there were some examples of centre assessment that demonstrated a lack of understanding of the standard required for the particular level. In these cases, centres would do greater justice to their candidates, were they to recognise and apply the National standards at the different levels of achievement. This process of centre assessment must also be validated by internal moderation.

It is vital that centres keep up-to-date with the latest guidance, information and exemplars available at National Training events. Attendance at these events will give centres the opportunity to bring their own examples of candidates' work at AS and A2 for shared discussions on delivery and assessment.

Also essential, is the need for centres to access the Edexcel website for the frequent updates on assessment; for example, the Examination papers, the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examination and the Chief Examiners' report. Centres working in isolation can have problems with assessment and the mandatory paperwork. These centres should regularly visit the Edexcel website for guidance and updates or contact the informative 'Ask the Expert' service.

Most particularly it is vital that centres keep abreast of recent changes, particularly in the light of the new Specification 2008, to be launched across the country this coming September.

Administration

The Assessment Guides for AS and A2 are vital tools for successful moderation and it was reassuring to see both being used effectively in the majority of centres visited.

It was good to see so many centres returning to the exhibition format as a means of presenting their candidates' work. Such hard work and commitment deserves this celebration, which can be enjoyed by others. Obviously some very large centres have the constraints of space etc and are unable to display the work of all candidates. It is therefore commendable that so much time and effort is taken to present the submissions in their best light.

It was helpful during moderation when centres had presented the work in 'order of merit' and had made a clear distinction between the coursework sample and the ESA. Many centres separated and labelled work clearly in order to make it easily identifiable and provided helpful maps indicating the location of each candidate's work. It is also worth noting that the centres that did not encourage candidates to select and edit their folders of work may be disadvantaging them.

International Centres

Again this year visiting moderators reported an overwhelmingly positive response to the changes in the specification. Centres performed well, demonstrating outstanding qualities in many instances. More and more International Centres are attending Assessment Training opportunities or organizing customized training to suit their needs. Centres appreciated and valued having a visiting moderator in their centre.

There were a few problems in relation to Postal moderation. Paperwork, in some cases, does not accompany the Practical work, presenting difficulties for moderators.

In summary it is commendable to report on an excellent performance from the majority of centres visited , the quality of candidates' responses and generally accurate assessment.

Statistics

Unit 1 Coursework (6031A-G)

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	80	69	60	51	42	33
Uniform boundary mark	180	144	126	108	90	72

Unit 2 Externally Set Assignment (6032A-G)

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	80	69	60	51	42	33
Uniform boundary mark	120	96	84	72	60	48

Unit 3 Coursework (6033A-G)

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	80	69	60	51	42	33
Uniform boundary mark	180	144	126	108	90	72

Unit 4 Externally Set Assignment (6034A-G)

Grade	Max. Mark	A	B	C	D	E
Raw boundary mark	80	69	60	51	42	33
Uniform boundary mark	120	96	84	72	60	48

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