GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**GCSE
ART & DESIGN**

SUMMER 2022

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ART & DESIGN

GCSE

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UNIT 1 - PORTFOLIO

General Comments

Changes in this year's submission

It will come as little surprise that moderators encountered a plethora of different scenarios on their moderation routes; centres had explored a range of solutions over the past two unpredictable years that were particular to their own circumstances, all with the intention of maximising the chances of success for their candidates. Nonetheless, there were some very general conclusions that most moderators would subscribe to.

While the quantity of work might have been less than in previous years, in general terms, the quality remained constant. There were centres where the extra time resulting from the removal of the Externally Set Assignment had been used particularly effectively to consolidate existing studies and then to develop new 'threads' within the portfolio. Candidates had amassed a wealth of quality work, well in line with the best seen in previous years. Outcomes were extremely personal and meaningful, often referencing their own particular circumstances within the pandemic. These candidates could respond at first hand to their immediate environment and had managed to maintain a coherent creative journey throughout their work.

It was also clear that some candidates had been able to respond much more positively and proactively than others to the periodic withdrawal of teaching, support and resources. It was in the middle to lower ability ranges that there was greater evidence of unfulfillment and the likelihood of fractured project work. Here, personal responses were more limited than in previous years (perhaps inherent weaknesses were exacerbated) and development and experimentation could be intermittent, lacking a degree of rigour and direction. Final outcomes often did not necessarily realise potential.

There was also evidence of differentiation through title; the lockdowns impacted particularly on Textile Design and 3D Design, where access to workshop facilities had clearly impeded progress.

Strongest features of the Portfolio work

Many moderators commented upon AO1 featuring strongly within the submissions of candidates this year, having witnessed a refreshing departure from more traditional google lines of enquiry to investigating more diverse and contemporary contextual references. Social media platforms such as Pinterest and Instagram have proved to be particularly valuable resources for candidates in this regard.

Photography, particularly digital, continued to be a major method of recording across all endorsements, enabling candidates to gain useful marks at AO3 by generating sources first-hand.

Considerable focus and attention had been given by centres to work from observational recording during lockdown with candidates being obliged to use their own home environments for inspiration; this often led to highly personal and exciting outcomes based upon apparently banal subject matter.

Responses to the pandemic and mental health issues were a strong feature of many portfolios, enabling candidates to pursue their artwork through engaging creatively with their experience of living through an anxious time. In effect, Covid often pushed candidates into selecting themes that suited their individual interests and most of all personal experiences, often demonstrating very mature and sophisticated results. Candidates had been obliged to work more independently on generating primary sources and less teacher-directed themes. Consequently, the portfolios have often been more original and personal to the candidate, thus gaining valuable marks at AO3 and AO4. This has been a positive development and it will be important to not regress nationally in this regard as we move to an increasingly post-Covid era.

Weakest features of the Portfolio work

Most candidates had not been able to gain access to specialist materials, guidance, and facilities at various times during the pandemic. Consequently, it is unsurprising to relate that many moderators believe that this had impacted negatively on AO2 and AO4. Candidates had often struggled to gain experience of media and to hone techniques through experimentation and practice, thus impacting standards at AO2. Likewise, this may be seen at AO4 where final outcomes had often lacked the rigour and refinement of previous years.

Moderators also reported an increase in the use of structured, whole class approaches with templates being employed for various stages of the creative process. Whole cohorts had been prescribed each task page by page. This hindered many candidates' ability to explore their own identities and obstructed the natural journey to well established outcomes. Courses that were too teacher led inhibited the ability of candidates to develop work that was original and personal; this concern has been commented upon in previous annual reports prior to Covid. It is, however, fully understandable that many centres had felt the need to adopt such an approach during the pandemic as a pragmatic response to the challenging situations of disrupted contact with candidates. It is hoped that a return to more successful methods of delivery will be in evidence again in future years.

AO1, when undertaken properly, forms a natural extension to a candidate's enquiry, contributing not only to their contextual understanding but also to their creative development. Moderators commented that some candidates continued to regurgitate biographical details that did little to further their understanding. In many examples, the excessive volume of this material expended hours of time that could have been more profitably spent on more creative and imaginative activity.

Ways in which candidates might have improved their performance

There were perhaps as many different responses to this question as there were moderators, but two clear strands emerged from their comments.

Firstly, clearly in evidence, was the desire to encourage candidates to establish and then explore their own personal and meaningful ideas. Secondly, was the desire to see a greater and a wider ranging examination and exploration of those preliminary ideas.

Both of these responses can emerge from the understanding gained from relevant contextual sources alongside the judicious collection and selection of appropriate primary and secondary sources.

These suggestions appear to focus upon the start of the candidate's journey: how AO1 and AO3 can 'work' together to nurture and sustain a variety of initial ideas. It was also felt that this focus was pertinent across all of the titles.

With regard to the first point, reference is made to encouraging candidates to make personal responses at several stages throughout the course, but particularly using their analytical investigations and understanding as a springboard to generate their own ideas. One good contextual source could launch a range of personal ideas that could immediately be augmented with relevant primary and secondary sources; further contextual sources might be introduced by the candidate as the work progresses. Indeed, there was a slight concern raised that, on occasions, the very repetitive nature of examining a series of contextual sources constrained the candidate's options. Alternatively, moderators also pointed to successful starting points that focused entirely upon gathering appropriate sources to study and explore in depth; relevant contextual sources would grow naturally from the candidate's investigations.

The second point links more firmly to AO3 – 'the recording of observations, ideas and insights in line with intentions.' At any stage in the early part of the process, there is benefit in recording initial ideas in appropriate formats – thumbnails, annotated doodles, compositions, examinations of surface and texture, paper maquettes to explore 3D form. This 'reflection' of a candidate's thinking is relevant to all titles and provides evidence of 'drawing' as a means of communication.

Experience has shown that these initial ideas and thinking become a rich source of inspiration to return to as the main idea develops and matures.

Ways in which blended learning and/or other resources have been used

In general, moderators have commented that most of the Portfolio work had differed little from pre-Covid portfolios and that while blended learning had not been a particularly visible component within the submissions, the candidates' use of technology to enhance their studies was much more prevalent.

Blended learning, at its best, was regarded as a positive development with regards to the menu of provision offered to candidates; innovative and effective methods of teaching and learning had flourished during the pandemic and were now established within several departments. One of the most successful methods of blended learning enabled candidates to work from first hand sources, and then to explore online material to enhance and personalise their investigations and explorations, giving them a stronger sense of ownership and autonomy. Photography was particularly well suited to blended learning, encouraging a plethora of lively responses from candidates' immediate environments whilst directing them to inspiring support material online using QR codes.

Moderators have commented upon how candidates were able to switch from sketchbooks to more digital based portfolios using platforms such as PowerPoint, Prezi and Google slides which allowed them to work from home in a more accessible way. Candidates made use of mobile phone apps and their own environment to create samples of relevant work. QR Codes had been used extensively to direct candidates to sources of information e.g., online resources around related topics, further reading, web content and how-to-videos to enrich the content taught.

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Ways in which restrictions of the past two years have impacted upon candidates' work

There was plentiful evidence of candidates undertaking their own visits to places of interest often within the local environment in order to gather resource and moderators witnessed pleasing work undertaken from accessing online virtual galleries; these 'virtual' visits provided candidates with opportunities to select contextual sources independently and to relate the work purposefully to their own creative efforts.

Nonetheless, in many centres, the pandemic had significantly impacted upon the timings of established programmes such as gallery visits, visiting artists etc. Many candidates did not have access at home to materials, equipment and resources to undertake creative making tasks.

Centres reported many candidates did not engage with education during the lockdown period and no work was attempted by some candidates during this time; they also reported that it was very difficult to re-engage candidates when schools re-opened. Covid rules differed between centres and LEA's, whilst some candidates could re-enter specialist classrooms others were unable to undertake practical art making tasks during this time. It was evident that centres struggled to provide candidates with the usual wealth of experiences outside of the classroom and this impacted upon AO1 in particular. Contextual references were not always studied in sufficient depth to inform creative ideas. Shared critical sources provided by teachers through distance learning, limited the ability of candidates to show genuine research and independent discovery. It seemed a chore at times rather than a rewarding personal experience.

It was evident that the gap in attainment had widened between candidates who had the necessary means, context and self-motivation to work independently and those who were in less fortunate circumstances and who required the close support of their teachers to flourish.

Ways in which centres redesigned learning programmes to compensate for the effects of the restrictions

Moderators consistently commented upon the resourcefulness and ingenuity of art teachers in devising resources and programmes that would go some way to compensating for the lack of class time.

In general, teachers had encouraged candidates to take a closer look at their immediate environment for inspiration and, on occasions, to respond to their particular Covid-induced situation to stimulate creative thinking. Themes associated with mental health were in evidence, as were titles such as 'Order: Disorder' and, at the other end of the spectrum, 'Small household items!' Photography and Photoshop tasks were popular: there was a greater focus on digital media in general.

Support was also in evidence through a variety of scaffolding techniques and step by step guides. Most centres organised extra-curricular activities on a regular basis, within the constraints that their particular centre had imposed on all staff involved in practical activities.

Moderators also therefore commented upon the changes that they saw in practice that under normal circumstances would not have taken place. These centres through circumstance, changed their approach to a much more structured and prescriptive delivery with whole class themes, similar artists and art movements, and the development of specific techniques. Written tasks relating to contextual sources became more prevalent.

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Exploration of media was limited to materials and techniques which could be completed at home. Some centres commented that some techniques had not be explored with usual rigour e.g. print making.

Ways in which the removal of the Externally Set Assignment has impacted upon teaching and learning programmes and candidates' performance and work quality

Without doubt, the overwhelming majority of centres felt the removal of the ESA this year was a very positive move enabling candidates to produce a considerably more meaningful and coherent body of work for the Portfolio. Many submissions were seen as more ambitious and imaginative as candidates deepened and developed their technical skills, establishing a clear sense of direction and a secure creative journey. As a consequence, outcomes were considered to have been far stronger than they might have been had the ESA remained in place. More pertinently it was also pointed out, several times, that the removal of the ESA was' brilliant for candidates' wellbeing'.

The timing of the announcement to scrap the ESA was of critical importance as several centres, on the assumption that the ESA would continue, were bringing their candidates' Portfolio work to a conclusion. Teachers were in an unfamiliar situation with regard to the programming of the extra time available. Candidates who were able to change tack and regenerate their existing coursework through the extra time were most successful. Those who started a new task/project were less so. In some instances, an extra project was added that didn't really benefit the candidates. Centres reported a 'post-Christmas lethargy' rather than the focused approach that was demanded from an exam.

A minority of centres expressed disappointment that the ESA was not taking place – candidates had lost impetus due to the portfolio dragging on – personal exploration had diminished, and the opportunity had been lost for candidates to 'let go' and discover their creative pathways. All of which goes some way to reinforcing the value of the ESA under normal circumstances, which was a comment that was frequently expressed by many centres – 'for many candidates, their most sustained, creative and skilful work is produced in the final period of the course – the ESA.'

Summary

Moderators observed how both centres and candidates were able to adapt highly resourcefully and creatively to the extremely challenging learning conditions created by the pandemic. Many candidates were able to produce outstanding portfolios of considerable quality and rigour taking advantage of immediate environments for subject matter and social media such as Instagram and Pinterest for research. As always, this also reflects individual centres' ability to provide a constructive framework in which candidates could develop successfully.

Key points for further development

- Continue to encourage candidates to establish and then explore personal ideas in a meaningful way. Teachers and candidates may consider opportunities to blend AO1 and AO3 together to enable ideas and personal responses to develop from the understanding of relevant contextual sources at several points in candidates' portfolio.

- Candidates should aim to avoid the simple reproduction of biographical detail with little relevance to the meaningful development of their personal explorations.

- Continue to encourage candidates to record observations, ideas and insights in appropriate formats. Digital photography can constructively be used as part of this process.

- Centres are strongly advised to become fully conversant with national standards in relation to internal assessment; our CPD events, Assessment Videos on Lightbox and the wealth of Exemplar Materials and resources on the Eduqas website should help to facilitate this.

Finally it remains to me to express my gratitude to teachers for their significant part in the success of this examination series, completed under extremely challenging conditions. Moderators have reported very few administrative problems and exhibitions have been characteristically organised to enable effective moderation. As always, it is a pleasure to have the opportunity to encounter your candidates' work, which is testament to your considerable efforts and resourcefulness (particularly in the past two difficult years).