
A-LEVEL ART AND DESIGN

7201–7206 ART/U Non-exam assessment – portfolio
Report on the Examination

7201–7206 ART/U
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General

Work seen in schools and colleges was an engaging and uplifting celebration of student achievement in art and design. The dedication, expertise and enthusiasm of art teachers and the achievements of students, contribute to the continuing success of this specification. Evidence of students' enjoyment of art and design was clear to see.

The half-day sessions introduced to Teacher Standardisation meetings proved to be popular as they eased teachers' release from schools and colleges. The opportunity to see live marked work is greatly valued by teachers. This year's large exhibition and the additional material included in delegate booklets were well received. There was positive feedback from teachers for the AQA specification in Art and Design, its extensive support material and the provision of a dedicated NEA Coursework Adviser assigned to each centre. Teachers are reminded that sources of accurate information with regard to the specification are AQA or the NEA Coursework Advisers.

Many teachers welcomed Component 2 and related that the majority of students appreciated and enjoyed having a new challenge to work on. Positive comments were received about the variety and quality of question papers in all six titles and the scope which they provide to students of all abilities.

There was little evidence that disruption due to Covid impacted the ability of the majority of students to address all four Assessment Objectives. However, in some schools and colleges teachers cited the effects which low or erratic attendance, poor motivation and mental health issues, had on the work produced by students of lower ability. Some students produced less work than usual in Component 2 but in the majority of centres, the work seen by moderators was comparable with that produced in the 2019 series. Many students produced their most successful responses in Component 2 as the culmination of their course of study.

Teachers commented on the clarity and flexibility of the specification and its ease of access to students of all abilities and to art departments with varying specialisms and resources. The majority of centres design courses that are appropriate in their interpretation of specification requirements. The variety and richness of work seen in centres represents a wide range of approaches to the specification.

In the earlier part of the course, introductory tasks and assignments provide students with opportunities to explore ideas, materials, processes and techniques alongside developing understanding of formal elements and skills, without the pressures of assessment. A number of courses include specialist workshops, gallery visits and residential field-trips. The majority of students begin the Personal Investigation in either the Spring or Summer terms of Year 12.

Moderators report that a minority of centres continue to include additional work from earlier in the course that is not related to the investigation. Teachers are reminded that any additional work included for assessment must directly relate to the investigation and will be assessed at A-level standard. Where sketchbooks included earlier work, the majority of teachers ensured that the start of the Personal Investigation was clearly indicated.

The practical work was often supported by annotation. Meaningful and concise annotation provided insight into students' intentions and their thinking and additional evidence of the AOs. Less successful were examples of unnecessarily lengthy annotation, on occasion in minute and

illegible handwriting, when more evidence of practical work would have been appropriate. In a number of centres annotation was excessive.

AO1

The majority of teachers provided students with a choice of stimulating starting points which included open-ended themes and ideas. There were many examples in which students responded to objects or specimens, aspects of the natural or built environment, or cultural artifacts. Some students based their investigations on abstract concepts such as time and space which led to interesting and occasionally intriguing responses. Many students produced thoughtful responses to contemporary issues and world events. Concerns about conflict, poverty, homelessness, gender, race, health and well-being, prompted responses that were personal and sensitively handled.

Portraiture was a popular theme though some students under-estimated the challenges of source material that was easily available and convenient. Some investigations were based on relationships or a parent or grandparent. A large number of students undertook fieldwork in their local environment or in less familiar locations.

A student who responded to the theme of Sleep based their work around cocoons and their own photographs of a wasps' nest. The investigation, informed by the work of Louise Bourgeois, Henry Moore and Doris Salco, resulted in an installation comprising a series of three-dimensional cocoons which included layers of wire construction, Modroc, fabric and stitch. Scorching and burning depicted smoking-out the wasps from their nest.

It was clear that some students seized opportunities to explore ideas based around their own interests and obsessions. A student fascinated by sports photography focused on combat sports and his personal interest in wrestling. Work by the photographer Oli Sandler supported the development of ideas, exploring complex narratives both in and outside of the ring. Details of facial expression and investigation into low and high contrast resulted in a series of high quality printed images.

As working documents, sketchbooks were often lively and revealing. Some students purposefully laid down carefully considered grounds on which to work by staining the paper or creating surfaces with a variety of materials. In contrast, pages decorated with ill-chosen colour washes and largely unnecessary title pages with either laborious or untidy lettering, occasionally obscured or detracted from the students' work. In one centre, delicate and refined fashion drawings which revealed the developing idea were partially obscured by clumsily handled washes of garish colour.

In successful work, the investigation of appropriate contextual sources informed ideas and students' understanding of visual language and formal elements. Relevant examples often provided inspiration and helped students to consider different approaches to their ideas and source material. Understanding the purpose of investigating contextual sources contributed to the investigation and development of ideas and helped successful students to develop their own personal language. Some students referred to contextual sources that were of doubtful merit and contributed little to their work. Fewer references were made to historical sources, including the twentieth century.

Some students appear to have limited awareness and understanding of visual language and the relationships between elements which leads to a lack of cohesion in compositions, layouts and image-making.

Moderators reported that in some centres, students produced numerous research pages of copies and mimics of work by other artists that substantially outweighed evidence of investigating and developing their own ideas. In successful work, students' abilities to respond to contextual sources were evident in the understanding and learning demonstrated in their own work.

Collections of disparate sources often had little connection with students' intentions. Evidence of learning from work by other artists and designers faltered when copies were significantly more successful than students' own work. Limited learning and understanding most often led to pastiches of work by others.

Successful students were able to demonstrate their abilities to investigate and develop ideas that were informed by appropriate contextual sources. Students investigated sources which provided inspiration or were examples of different approaches to their chosen idea or source material. Particular aspects of work by others helped students to develop their understanding of visual language. Some students considered several appropriate examples of work produced by a particular artist. Others considered examples produced by several artists. Purposeful references were made to composition or layout, eye-level, focal points, tonal values, contrasts, the handling of a particular medium or technique and the management of space and scale, which helped students to explore, develop and refine their ideas.

Successful practical work included evidence of analytical and critical understanding in the responses to source material, in choices and decisions as work progressed, in connections between images, and in the way that one image led to another. Successful examples revealed students' thinking and were clear and easy to follow. Emerging possibilities and alternative avenues were considered as work progressed.

Successful examples of the Personal Investigation written material provided a rationale for the practical work. Students explained their choices and decisions as work progressed and how contextual sources informed the investigation and development of ideas. In some centres, students posed a question as the title which established a clear focus to their writing. In thoughtful, considered and articulate examples, students demonstrated their ability to analyse in-depth with an assured understanding of critical vocabulary. In less successful examples, students simply described what they had done and lacked the skills and subject vocabulary necessary to demonstrate analytical and critical understanding.

AO2

Successful students provided ample evidence of their ability to select appropriate resources and to explore materials, techniques and processes that enabled them to develop and refine their ideas. The continued development and honing of assured and confident skills was evident in successful work. Exceptional skills were seen in accomplished and mature responses.

Whilst in some centres, students continue to explore media which have little or no connection with their intentions, the purposeful selection and focused exploration of appropriate materials and techniques was generally more evident this year.

Exploration in drawing and painting, sculpture and modelling materials, photography, digital media, printmaking, collage and montage, enabled students to advance their work and refine their ideas. Alongside traditional media, moderators report seeing examples of multi-media work, videos, projections, animation, GIFs, and immersive installations. Confident skills were seen in photography, graphics, three-dimensional design and textile design, when using computer software to manage, manipulate and refine ideas and images.

Exciting work was seen in some textiles courses where students used heat to transfer images onto surfaces such as wadding and netting to create distortion. Textiles materials, acetates, layered images and fabrics, shrinkable plastic, expandable paint, embroidered Lutrador and Organza, were exposed to heat in order to create distressed surfaces. Interesting methods of dyeing were also seen which included 'rust' dyeing and natural dyeing that were used to good effect

A variety of methods and techniques were used to refine ideas and successful students made clear their choices, decisions and changes as work progressed. Studies of passages of paintings explored techniques and the handling of paint to resolve problems and clarify details. Compositions were refined in sketches, working drawings and colour studies. Working drawings and maquettes provided evidence of refining ideas in sculpture. Proof-prints enabled printmakers to review and improve their ideas. Carefully considered planning and reviewing were seen in successful installations.

In graphics, students refined ideas using software to manipulate images and layouts, most often including thumbnail sketches, design roughs and scamps. However, understanding of the importance of margins continues to evade many students. Alterations and adjustments to type, scale, space and layout are important. Skills were evident when managing traditional materials and both digital and electronic media.

Samplers, drawings, collage and software were used to refine ideas for textile hangings, fashion designs, and designs for wallpaper and furnishing fabrics. Maquettes, models, samples, test-pieces and CAD, were used effectively to resolve problems and improve the chosen idea in three-dimensional design.

In photography, multiple photoshoots, contact sheets, computer software and discrimination when selecting images, enabled students to successfully review and refine their ideas. Evidence of selection through the lens and in post-production was an important element in successful work.

Refining ideas is often the least understood element of this AO. In spite of evidence of exploring and refining their management and handling of materials and techniques, some students provided little evidence of refining or improving their chosen idea leading to the finished outcome.

In the Personal Investigation written material, it is important that students review and refine their ideas in responses to work by others and in the way that they edit, revise, and direct their work leading to a conclusion.

AO3

Successful students were able to record the development and refining of their ideas in a logical and coherent manner which made it easy to follow their thinking from initial impulses to finished outcomes. On occasion, imaginative leaps prompted by emerging possibilities, a chance discovery, or a happy accident, were well documented. High levels of visual understanding and

communication was seen. Reflection that was perceptive demonstrated insight that often resulted in changes in direction or initiated further work.

Approaches to recording ideas and observations included a wide range of traditional, digital and electronic media and techniques that were appropriate to students' intentions in the different areas of study. Purposeful and meaningful recording provided a starting point and source material for the development of ideas. Different recording methods and materials were used for different purposes.

Examples of accomplished drawing skills included surgically observed analytical studies and large, expressive drawings from plant-forms, fruit, seed-heads, fish skeletons, tree roots and fragments of bark. Recording from the human figure was often refined and sensitively handled. Examples of large, vigorous and expressive drawings were seen in charcoal or conte crayon. Fieldwork elicited some powerful and atmospheric drawings and photography which evoked a sense of place. The effects of time, light and the weather were explored and recorded in some of the examples seen.

In textiles design, many students recorded their observations of natural forms using drawing and photography to provide material for the development of ideas. Some highly articulate, fluent studies in a variety of media provided evidence of high levels of observational skills and the confident handling of media. However, there were many examples in which students' abilities to successfully record observations was hampered by a lack of drawing skills. Some students produced confident fashion drawings which clearly recorded their ideas and how they were developed and refined. Line was handled in a fluent and controlled manner. Sinuous line drawings occasionally included delicately handled watercolour or coloured pencil. A number included collage or fragments of digitally produced pattern. Ideas were recorded in drawings, collage, samplers, and in patterns and surfaces created using software.

In photography, carefully produced sketches and diagrams, hand-drawn or using computer software, recorded planning for photoshoots and studio lighting. Some students produced sketches or storyboards when reflecting on compositional ideas and problems, and when planning a narrative for sequential images or footage. Clear evidence of recording was seen in contact sheets where mark-ups supported by annotation documented the selection and rejection of images. In some examples, contact images were too small to fully appreciate and understand. Editing and the manipulation of images were successfully recorded in carefully presented sets of images or in a separate file.

In graphics, students recorded ideas and observations using a variety of materials and techniques which included drawing, photography and computer software programs. In illustration there were examples of character development and logotypes in which students amply demonstrated their observation and recording skills. When developing ideas for animation and motion graphics, including animated logo designs, students recorded their planning in a storyboard or recorded the process in a set of images. Emerging ideas for layouts, labels, packaging designs and promotional material, were successfully documented in carefully organised work.

In three-dimensional design, students recorded ideas and observations in sketches and diagrams using traditional drawing materials and demonstrating high levels of skill when confidently managing computer software. Drawing skills were often quite basic but in some centres measured diagrams, fluent sketches and visuals were meticulous. Some students were adept at recording their ideas in articulate, free-flowing ink drawings which documented their initial responses and the

development and refining of their chosen idea. Maquettes, models, test-pieces and samples provided additional evidence of recording ideas.

In the practical work, students' abilities to record ideas, observations and insights, and to reflect critically, were evident in their choices and decisions as work progressed. Evidence of reflection was seen in the way that one study led to another which revealed changes in direction, choices in favour of one initiative over another and the rejection of ideas and solutions.

The majority of students supported their work with annotation which provided additional evidence of critical reflection on work and progress. Successful examples provided helpful insight into students' thinking and a rationale for their choices and decisions. It was clear that reflection on

what had been produced enabled students to consider how they might progress the work towards the finished outcome.

In both sketchbooks and the written material, the majority of students recorded details of the contextual sources they referred to, usually in the form of artist, title, date. A small minority of students meticulously recorded additional information that included the medium or media, the dimensions of the work, and its location. Details that identify when a work was produced, the dimensions of the work, what medium was used and which gallery or collection it is in, can aid students' contextual understanding. It is surprising that many students are apparently given little or no guidance in how to do this.

In the Personal Investigation written material, it is important that students understand and use appropriate language and terminology when recording ideas, observations and insights in response to work by others and when explaining connections with their own work. It is a specification requirement that students must provide a bibliography or a list of sources that they have used in the production of the written material. However, there is little merit in recording a long list of sources that have not been used. Acknowledgement of the authorship of books, articles and recordings, is important. It is insufficient, for example, to list 'Wikipedia' as a source.

AO4

In successful work, finished outcomes were creative and displayed originality and individuality. They were often very personal, imaginative, well informed, meaningful, and expressive. The most successful students realised their intentions with accomplished levels of skill. In less successful examples the finished outcome did not realise the potential of the supporting work. On occasion, elements of contextual sources were plagiarised and combined into an image for the finished outcome.

Students who identified an appropriate scale for their work were likely to produce a more successful finished outcome. The ambition to create larger pieces to achieve more impact is understandable but students should consider what they can produce in the time and what is within their capabilities, acknowledging when an image may be more effective and successful on a smaller scale.

A great deal of work focused on mental health issues, body dysmorphia and societal issues. Some students produced work based on their personal experiences. Thought-provoking work based on concerns about the environment often had an implicit message and made a clear visual statement. One large-scale painting and mixed media submission was of a well-considered landscape partially obscured by pylons which made a blunt statement about the human impact on the natural world.

High standards of painting, sculpture and printmaking were seen. Confident skills when handling and managing materials and techniques enabled students to produce personal responses that were either polished and refined or powerful and expressive. Samples included very successful examples of etching, relief printing and screen printing. Sculptures based on the human figure, natural objects and processes, animals and abstract form, were produced in clay, wire, wax, resin, metal, Perspex and wood.

Installations were most successful when students had a clear understanding of contextual material and the intentions and thinking of the artist who created it. Some installations revealed a genuine depth of thinking, investigation and understanding, when manipulating elements to create a narrative, an environment, a walk-through construction, or an interactive experience based on time and space. An example of projection mapping onto a card installation created an ever-changing composition that produced a dynamic, synesthetic experience combining image and sound effects. In response to the theme Homeless, one student used a tent to enclose a series of fine paintings of

homeless people. A few less successful examples were little more than set-dressing with apparently hastily assembled found objects in which there was little evidence of meaning, purpose or understanding.

Confident and occasionally accomplished examples of illustration using both traditional and electronic media included responses to children's stories, nursery rhymes, novels, films and television dramas. Intentions were realised in book covers, sample page layouts, album sleeves, poster designs and advertising material. Illustration was seen in imaginative designs for print and publishing, playing cards, packaging designs and logotypes.

Successful examples of branding fictitious companies or rebranding existing ones were comprehensive in outcomes and thorough in investigation. Students demonstrated their understanding of design elements and their abilities to manage them into coherent and cohesive designs. There was clear evidence of learning from contextual sources and the development of a personal language which enabled students to communicate ideas, information and image. Effective outcomes supported by visuals of hoardings, ad shells, labels and packaging, revealed students' awareness and understanding of purpose and design context. The majority of successful students demonstrated their ability to select typefaces and fonts appropriate to purpose. Connections between type, image and space, were managed successfully and with understanding in examples of cohesive and convincing designs.

Traditional and upcycled materials and a variety of processes and techniques were used to produce garments, fashion accessories, imaginative wall hangings, printed textiles and fabric designs. Examples of textiles outcomes using combinations of dyeing, distressing and constructing fabrics inspired by the work of Sue Hotchkins were seen in one centre. In-depth investigation and exploration of material properties led to ambitious garments that evoked the characteristics of textured natural forms which inspired the investigation. Some very effective work was produced in response to the textures found in moss, algae and rock-structures.

Examples of relief-printing, screen printing and digital printing were seen in successful examples of designs for fashion textiles, wallpaper, furnishings and interiors. Vibrant and exciting designs were seen alongside outcomes in which students manipulated subtleties of colour, tone, and texture. Machine and hand-stitch were often skilfully used to create embroidery or textiles illustration. Successful students realised intentions in finished outcomes that were informed by their understanding developed from investigating appropriate contextual sources. Students based their

responses on a clear idea or concept and understood the importance of context, purpose, and the manipulation of design elements in an informed and cohesive manner. Fashion items were often accompanied by high quality photographs of students wearing the garments.

Successful architectural designs and examples of product design, jewellery, furniture and ceramics provided evidence of students' understanding of form, function, aesthetics and context. In the most successful examples, students demonstrated their awareness and understanding of the design process, informed by contextual sources that were appropriate to their intentions. Intentions were realised in well-designed and skilfully crafted outcomes which included interesting examples of ceramics. One student who had completed a live brief to produce cup and plate designs for Twycross, created successful designs inspired by Clarice Cliff which followed a field-trip to a zoo.

The importance of producing finished product and furniture designs that are attractive to see and to handle, and which fulfil a function, eluded some students. Although designs for bookcases, coffee tables and chairs provided evidence of skills when planning and managing processes and materials, finished outcomes often showed little evidence of understanding and learning from examples of good design.

One student produced an interesting design for a guitar in which shape, form, and surface design, were influenced by investigation into Art Deco. An example of design and manufacture for a propelling pencil included meticulous investigation into mechanisms and ergonomics. The student demonstrated exceptional skills when producing aesthetically successful prototypes and presentation packaging. Successful designs for lamp shades, table lamps and light fittings were informed by historical and contemporary examples and inspired by a variety of source material. Students carefully considered design context and visual language when presenting a personal response which realised intentions.

Interesting and, on occasion, inspired examples of architectural design were seen, some of them based on forms found in nature. Students produced imaginative designs for shelters, stadia, shopping centres and eco-friendly dwellings, most often realised in skilfully produced drawings using computer software which led to well-crafted models.

In photography, the majority of students produced a finished outcome in the form of a single image or a series of related images. High levels of awareness and understanding were seen in exceptional examples of image-making which successfully communicated an idea. Some students projected still or moving images onto a screen or a surface or in an enclosed space. A number of installations provided an immersive experience in which images were accompanied by sound in the form of a deliberately barely audible monologue or conversation, or electronically produced sound effects. Successful examples included evidence of assured technical skill when managing photography processes and techniques. Students demonstrated their understanding of lighting, aperture, depth of field, exposure, ISO settings and composition. Highly personal work was seen in response to a wide range of ideas, issues and locations. Reliefs, three-dimensional constructions and embellishments to images, were occasionally less successful than the skills that were evident in students' photography.

The organisation and presentation of electronic files continues to improve with many centres successfully using secure electronic storage systems or PowerPoint. In one centre, students designed and produced their own books of carefully selected images which gave them complete control of layout and presentation. In a minority of centres, students continue to present folders which include hundreds of images with little evidence of organisation or selection. Successful

realisations were supported by evidence of several purposeful photoshoots and material which clearly documented the processes which led to the finished outcome. A minority of students produced too few photoshoots which limited the scope for the development of ideas. One student produced twenty shoots in which it was difficult to identify a sense of purpose and clear intentions in order to progress the investigation effectively.

In the Personal Investigation required written material, successful students demonstrated their abilities to present a personal response that realised intentions and made meaningful connections with the practical work. Some examples were exceptional, informative, and a pleasure to read. The most successful students provided evidence of investigation and reading accompanied by confident analytical skills. A small minority of students produced examples of extensive written material in the form of History of Art essays which were not related to the practical work and did not fulfil specification requirements.

It was not uncommon to read essays that were descriptive responses to contextual sources that concluded with a short paragraph in which students attempted to explain their impact on the practical work. There was limited evidence of providing a rationale for the practical work, analysing sources in depth, explaining choices and decisions, and explaining the connections between contextual material and the development of ideas. It was clear that in some centres, students are

not given sufficient tuition or guidance on how to successfully prepare and address this task. Helpful guidance and requirements are available on page 11 of the specification.

Presentation of the written material was almost entirely in the form of loose-leaf A4 sheets in a plastic wallet. There were few examples of imaginatively produced written work using a variety of formats.

Administration, marking and moderation

In most centres, marks were received by the 31 May. Centres completed Candidate Record Forms (CRFs) and Centre Declaration Sheets (CDSs) before the moderation visit. Teachers' comments on the CRFs were often very helpful, particularly when they referred directly to the AOs and used the language of the assessment criteria. A small number of CRFs were not signed by the teacher(s) or students and some did not match the work displayed.

There were some arithmetical errors on CRFs and transcriptional errors between the CRFs and e-subs. It is important to check that they are entered correctly and agree with the marks on the CRFs. Errors identified during moderation can result in a revised sample which is inconvenient, time-consuming and can be stressful.

Preparation for moderation visits was generally very good and often outstanding. Samples were displayed as an exhibition or presented in folders. Displays were usually well organised. Where space was limited, teachers went to great lengths to make best use of what was available. Samples presented mostly in sketchbooks sometimes accompanied by mounted sheets were carefully organised on tables and space was set aside to lay out the work. The majority of centres arranged the clearly labelled sample in rank order which aided the moderation procedure and was greatly appreciated by moderators. Audio commentaries and video based walkthroughs were used effectively in a few centres.

Work laid out on the floor even when well organised is neither helpful nor reasonable, particularly when a suitable workspace is not provided. Centres must consider the Health and Safety and Equality of Access implications. It is not reasonable for a moderator to work on the floor for up to six hours. The moderator may be physically unable to do so.

Labelling was usually very clear, but there were exceptions. Work displayed on panels or walls was not always identified clearly. When both components produced by a student were displayed together, it was not always straightforward to identify which work belonged to which component. It was most helpful when sets of work were separated on different screens or separated by coloured cord or ribbon, a length of string, or strips of paper.

Work produced in the period of supervised time was, in the majority of centres, identified by a coloured dot or a label. It is a specification requirement that work produced in the supervised period is identified. This was overlooked or ignored in a small minority of centres.

It is important that students are provided with copies of the ESA question paper and given access to all of the starting points. Evidence suggests that in a small minority of centres, students are unfairly restricted in their choice of questions.

Although it is not a specification requirement, the majority of centres organised the sample in rank order. Some centres organised each component separately, others presented the sample in a single rank order across the two components. Where the sample was not presented in rank order, teachers provided clear and easy to navigate maps or plans to assist the moderator.

Moderators commented on the overwhelmingly positive approach of teachers to the moderation process and to the warm reception they received in the majority of centres. Most moderators were provided with a quiet, private space to work in. Teachers are reminded that moderation is a confidential process and the moderator must not be asked to mark work in public thoroughfares.

Understanding of the assessment objectives resulted in marking that was accurate or broadly in line with the AQA standard exemplified at Teacher Standardisation. Discrepancies generally occurred when teachers credited their most able students with high marks when a lower mark was appropriate. This most usually occurred when marks were credited in the 21-24 mark band when evidence provided by the work did not match the criteria for exceptional achievement on a national scale.

It is clear that many teachers mark to the previous year's grade boundaries. Some add marks to the limit of tolerance which contributes directly to grade creepage and results in changes to grade thresholds. Changes are sometimes necessary to ensure that standards year-on-year are maintained. It is important to note that where evidence in the sample does not match the higher marks credited by the centre, regression can impact other marks where there is a minor discrepancy between the centre marks and the moderator marks.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.