**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2011**

Art and Design – Graphic Communication

42032

(Specification 4203)

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.

Graphic Communication 4203

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The familiar structure and content of the questions in this year's test paper was a constant in a year of change, and appeared to be well received by teachers. All of the questions were attempted, with questions 1, 2, 3(c) and 7(c) proving most popular with candidates of all abilities.

The unlimited preparation time did not result in a noticeable improvement in the quality of final outcomes, indeed many centres preferred to impose a time limit of four to six weeks for preparatory work, similar to the legacy entitlement, in order to retain candidates' focus.

Where the additional time was used productively, candidates were able to show greater depth of analysis, recording and experimentation, particularly in Assessment Objectives 1 to 3. The extra time available was used by some candidates to investigate a broader sweep of cultural and historical sources to inform their ideas. As in Unit 1 the time spent on reflection and planning was often recorded in both written and visual forms.

Question Paper Starting Points

1. The Everyday

The question was popular throughout the ability range, partly because of the immediacy of the subject matter and partly because the outcomes had often been used in projects for Unit 1. Both options were attempted. The suggested reference to Michael Craig-Martin dominated much of the research: his clean, colourful simple linear style appealed particularly to lower attaining candidates, but other appropriate artists, stamp designers and illustrators also informed the development of ideas to good effect. Some excellent painted and printed outcomes resulted.

2. Self-Image

This was another popular question. Both the personal subject matter demanded by the question and the intended outcome inspired some excellent investigation into celebrity, fashion and other contemporary cultural references, and often focused on issues surrounding young people. Some outstanding computer generated cover designs were seen, executed with skill and imagination. Candidates' use of mirrors and picture frames was thoughtful, and photographic techniques such as montage and image superimposition were effectively combined with Photoshop layering and text positioning, style and colour. The context of the question was very well understood, and was reflected in many of the lively, youthful magazine cover designs that were submitted.

3. Playing Cards

All three possible outcomes proposed in this question were represented, with Nursery rhymes being by far the most popular. The question appealed to candidates across the entire ability range, although those at the lower end had most difficulty engaging with appropriate sources of information from which to develop and refine their ideas. Typically, these candidates derived much of their inspiration from existing or historical nursery rhyme illustration, but were unable to go much beyond copies and pastiche. Higher attaining candidates were able to explore the directive implicit in the question to challenge conventions of style shape, layout and scale. The suggested references were used well as a starting point, but Tim Burton and Paula Rego also figured prominently with some dark, menacing and mysterious designs produced as a result.

4. Signs and Symbols

The lack of specific sources suggested as a stating point in this question resulted in a broad range of approaches attempted: it was liberating to some candidates, and a barrier to others which proved difficult to overcome. There was an obvious enjoyment from the engagement with a range of sources

at higher levels of attainment. A more obvious and at times pedantic flavour to the selected sources and outcomes was apparent in the lower mark ranges, References to road signs predominated but rarely stimulated the development of thoughtful or complex imagery. Some of the designs produced were predictably literal and directly functional, while others explored visual language in a more abstract sense, using colour, shape and pattern to inform the intended audience.

5. Corporate Identity

Many candidates from centres that delivered graphic oriented, product led projects within their courses opted for this question. Research tended to focus on familiar leading high street brands and logos, though only at the higher levels of attainment was the development of ideas fully or appropriately contextualised through the intelligent selection and use of a range of relevant sources.

6. Imprint

There were relatively few responses seen in answer to this question, but many of those who took up the technical challenge were rewarded in the higher mark bands. Printmaking and collagraphs proved a rich source for initial stimulus, and candidates developed ideas creatively using presses, cut-out stencils, seeds and dried vegetation on hand-made paper and other surfaces. Effective development work resulted in the creation of some subtle and sophisticated package designs.

7. Contrasts

The more open style of this question suited those candidates who were able to construct their own brief specification. It proved more challenging for those who had followed a heavily directed course for Unit 1 and those who were unable to structure the development of ideas without guidance. All three suggested options were attempted.

(a) Some candidates used this starting point to replicate a project from their portfolio, but rarely did so with originality or accomplishment. More effective and inspired examples included photographic analysis of derelict buildings and urban decay compared with new urban architecture and development. Other examples explored visual contrasts between the bands, fashions and celebrities of different eras.

(b) Candidates were able to use the unlimited preparation time to full effect in answering this question. Starting points were based on a range of subject matter, and outcomes showed good knowledge of photographic time-lapse techniques and digital technology.

(c) This was a popular choice. Some limited, predictable and derivative work based on punk and other music sub-cultures was presented, but there were also good examples of candidates using their own photographic images of clubs, bands and youth culture which had been imaginatively manipulated and refined into fully resolved outcomes.

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 .