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Art and Design – Graphic Communication

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(Specification 4203)

Unit 2: Externally Set Task

Report on the Examination

GCSE Art and Design (4203)

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.

Graphic Communication 4203

Unit 2: Externally Set Task

The question paper was well received both by teachers and students this year, with all of the questions being attempted. Questions 1, 4 and 6 proved to be the most popular with students of all abilities.

It was apparent that students were more familiar with the requirements of Unit 2. Some had used the unlimited preparation time productively. It gave them opportunities to make visits to galleries and museums and use the local environment as a starting point for their chosen question. There was considerable evidence of photography being used to record primary sources for many of the questions and for the most part this made the projects more personal and creative than those of students who only used secondary source materials. Recording in sketchbooks and on preparatory sheets enabled students to document clearly their creative journey and initial responses to chosen starting point. In the best examples, sources were annotated and photographs were clearly marked, where appropriate, as the students' own work. Some of the less able students had not ordered their work and handed in files of loose, unedited sheets, which made little attempt to clarify the development of ideas.

It was noticeable in many centres this year that students had not always used the suggested sources included in questions; some students had investigated a very limited range of graphic designers. It is important that students show an understanding of the sources they have accessed and the ability to analyse these critically.

Question Paper Starting Points

Question 1 - Sense of Place

This was a popular question and led to a variety of outcomes across the ability range. In most submissions, the sources suggested in the question were investigated and this led to some very creative responses. Typography, both hand drawn and digitally layered, was used by students as well as a whole variety of illustration techniques in a wide range of materials. The final outcomes used self-identity, the local environment and holiday locations as a focus and the students had produced scrolls, altered books, concertinas and pop-ups as a form for their 'artist's book'. Some excellent work was seen in response to this question.

Question 2 - Composition

This question tended to be chosen by students who already had an interest in letterforms; work was generally executed to a high standard. Responses were well-researched and developed, looking at pattern, shape and colour in relation to letterforms. Overlays, transparencies and continued refinement of ideas led to some sophisticated outcomes and high quality sketchbooks. Students in one centre had investigated Islamic letterforms and produced some very personal work with cultural significance. In another context, students had produced poor copies of Celtic designs and tattoos, which relied too heavily on images found on the internet.

Question 3 - Packaging

Research into packaging associated with major computer brands was a feature of some submissions, but it was not always used effectively by lower attaining students to inform their own intentions. This in turn led to the development of some uninspired packaging designs. Where the students had used computer generated typography and their own photographs to create imagery, outcomes were well developed and refined. Some students presented their packages as three-dimensional scaled prototypes. Others presented their designs as flat artwork or glued these to the surfaces of existing boxes.

Question 4 - Music

This was by far the most popular question and it certainly 'hit the right note' with students of all abilities and with many teachers, who commented that it related well to those experienced by students in their Unit 1 courses of study. The work was often informed by the students' particular interest in music and what they had learnt previously. There were excellent opportunities for in-depth research. At its best, this informed the outcomes and gave students further creative approaches and lines of enquiry to develop, which were eagerly exploited in many cases. Imaginative uses of the students' own photographs, manipulated in Photoshop along with experimental approaches to materials, typography and techniques such as stencilling, were employed successfully to produce creative and exciting outcomes. Some lower attaining students, however, saw the question as an opportunity to download a large number of album covers which they then failed to use; their work tended to be predictable and largely derivative.

Question 5 - Public Information

This question enabled students to follow a clear path of research and development, and the suggested designers provided valuable sources for investigation. Both illustrative and computer-generated

responses were submitted and individual students used their own starting point to explore issues of personal relevance. These included environmental concerns, bullying, racism, prejudice in sport and eating disorders. The students explored their ideas through manipulated photography and fine art approaches using collage and paint. Typography was well integrated in the visual work and in higher attaining responses the importance of the message and communicating ideas was seen as vital.

Question 6 - Animals

This was another popular question across the ability range. Most students responded to part (b) of the question by producing illustrations and book covers. The students had been asked to research a variety of relevant sources. Examples seen included the paintings of Henri Rousseau, works by a range of children's book illustrators and Disney characters. Where students had used their own drawings and sketches of animals as a starting point for experimental work informed by their chosen sources, resulting work was highly creative and inventive. These students had confidently worked through the process of research, development and refinement and had explored materials and techniques effectively. This question allowed students to combine fine art with graphics processes and typographic elements through a process of new media scanning and manipulation of illustrations. There were also examples of interesting presentation techniques to promote the new book. Lower attaining students relied too heavily on secondary sources resulting in the frequent presentation of predictable cartoon-style outcomes.

Question 7 - Here and Now

This question was generally attempted by higher attaining students, as it required them to determine their own briefs and selected sources. Often as a result of a well-taught course that had covered a range of graphic activities for the Portfolio unit, students had gained the confidence to work to their own brief. This produced a wide range of responses that were based on in-depth studies and developed from analytical research. Popular themes included holidays, the local environment, youth clubs and the modern woman, as well as music events. Primary source photography and drawing enabled students to bring a very individual approach to the project and all four Assessment Objectives were well met. Experimental work undertaken in both digital and hand-rendered illustrative form was noted and popular culture was often used as a basis for this work. There was little evidence that the students had responded to sections (b) and (c) of the question but section (a) was well represented. This question allowed students to explore in depth their own interests in graphic communication; a range of magazine covers, posters and publicity materials were produced. The appeal for students to work from their own interests was evident and it was good to see that, in the best examples submitted, students had sourced their work through relevant graphic designers.

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 .