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Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCSE in Art & Design
(2AD01- 2GC01)
Pearson Edexcel GCSE in Art & Design
Short Course (3FA01-3GC01)

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Introduction

This report reviews the 2015 series of GCSE Art & Design 2AD01-2GC01/3FA01-3GC01 examinations.

The Pearson/Edexcel GCSE specification aims to provide, for all centres, a framework (appropriate and accessible to a range of levels of candidates' experience and ability) which encourages an adventurous and enquiring approach to art and design.

The GCSE specification forms part of an educational continuum. GCSE builds on art practice at Key Stages 1, 2 and 3.

GCSE candidates should be able to

- develop practical artistic skills and abilities
- demonstrate an understanding of past and contemporary art and design practice
- produce a personal response that embraces a range of ideas
- reflect on their work and on the work of others.

Reports submitted by moderators in 2015, informed by the essential initial discussion they held with teachers in centres at the start of their visit, together with the subsequent study of candidates' work, have supplied evidence of the success of the 2015 series. In 2015 centres once again offered encouraging GCSE courses for their candidates.

Moderators recognised that numerous centres built on sound and good quality practice to assemble appropriate courses of study for their candidates.

Undoubtedly, those teachers who

- examined the specification carefully and thoroughly
- attended national training programme events or requested centre based training offered by Pearson/Edexcel

- scrutinised the wealth of informative support documents available on the Pearson/Edexcel website
- sought clarification from the Pearson/Edexcel Subject Advisor

found they were well placed to bring together suitable courses of study sustained by long-established good practice.

Centres that had not considered the specification thoroughly, or taken advantage of the support outlined above, may not have fully understood some aspects. It is certainly worth urging centres to visit the Pearson/Edexcel website and obtain, for careful and detailed study, the GCSE Art and Design Controlled Assessment Teacher Support Book.

Successful courses of study encouraged candidates to complete visual research using primary and secondary sources and record observations, experiences and ideas in varied, appropriate and skilful ways. Good quality candidate submissions showed an ability to observe, select and interpret with discrimination, imagination and understanding. Moderators noted that candidates certainly flourished in centres where teachers stressed, to their credit, the value of working successfully from first hand experience.

The importance and value of pursuing and documenting a creative visual journey, informed by critical and cultural contexts, is clearly acknowledged by successful centres to be crucial. Notable submissions showed sufficient convincing evidence that candidates achieved striking growth in the development of their ideas and realised quality outcomes as a result of fully exploring and reviewing a range of possible solutions and then suitably modifying their work as it progressed.

The significance of the individual intention, the final outcome, for GCSE artists, was definitely valued in successful centres. To their credit many centres showed they recognised that a detailed intelligible visual account of the creative journey was an important component of candidates' submissions. Some centres clearly appreciated that exceedingly large volumes of evidence were, without doubt, not a requirement and, as a

result, enabled their candidates to allocate an adequate amount of time to produce convincing final statements.

It is worth emphasising that although it may be unnecessary to present every single piece of work for assessment and moderation, it is in every candidate's best interest to select sufficient convincing evidence to reflect their best performance and therefore plausibly substantiate teacher-examiner assessment decisions. An imperfect understanding of controlled assessment may still have led a few centres to omit some conspicuously good quality evidence for moderation. Centres should note that support for a full understanding of controlled assessment is available from the GCSE Art and Design Controlled Assessment Teacher Support Book obtainable from the Pearson/Edexcel website.

In 2015, as in earlier years, many candidates showed they understood how to use a range of materials, processes and techniques, including information technology, to add to their knowledge and use of visual language.

The degree to which candidates knew about and understood a range of work from current practice, past practice and different cultures and demonstrated an appreciation of continuity and change in art, craft and design was undeniably evident in the 2015 series. Centres frequently recommended that candidates made critical and contextual references. In some cases centres were, to their credit, encouraging candidates to move further toward investigating and analysing contextual encounters for the most part through the use of visual language and therefore resisting the inclination to submit extensive amounts of written text. As pointed out in all recent reports, movement away from dissertation (a lengthy and formal written treatment) and toward annotation (a short explanatory or critical note added to visual evidence) is welcome. It is, perhaps, worth stressing that a central purpose of investigating and developing understanding of the work of other practitioners is persuasively discovered in the degree to which contextual exploration informs the growth of candidate's personal ideas and outcomes.

It is important to recognise, in this report, those GCSE candidates awarded the highest mark available.   Candidates of high quality repeatedly provided teachers and moderators, in 2015, with heart-warming chances to see astounding outcomes that revealed exceptional ability, understanding, imagination and creativity.

Candidate work from 2015 GCSE Art and Design

Administration and Moderation

The Centre Guidance (CG) document is updated each year taking account of lessons from the preceding examination series. The CG is available to centres on the Pearson/Edexcel website. Unquestionably, where centres read the CG very carefully and in detail, assessment and moderation processes were accomplished easily and efficiently.

Moderators are no longer permitted to offer verbal feedback as part of the moderation visit or prior to the issue of results. Moderators continue to provide, for centres, a detailed feedback report (E9) available via Pearson/Edexcel Online. Centres must study the feedback report in detail and respond appropriately to its contents for support in achieving persuasive assessment decisions and, consequently, a suitable moderation result.

An Assessment Guidance Grid (AGG) and an Authentication Form must be completed correctly for each candidate and made available for moderators when they visit the centre. Centres should note that the Authentication Form enables the candidate not only to declare the work submitted for assessment has been carried out without assistance other than that which is acceptable under the scheme of assessment but also, importantly, gives permission for Pearson/Edexcel to use their Art and Design work (principally, but not exclusively, in the form of photographs) for vital standardisation, training and exemplar purposes. Centres found it very useful that the CG, AGG and Authentication Form are all available on the Pearson/Edexcel website. Many centres photocopied the AGG and the Authentication Form 'back to back' and this helped to reduce paperwork.

Candidate marks may be submitted to Pearson/Edexcel using the OPTEMS forms provided or by direct input online. Moderators have commented, again in 2015, that where centre marks had been submitted online there was a welcome opportunity for them to prepare for the moderation visit. It is worth reminding centres of the need for scrupulous accuracy in

transferring teacher examiner assessment marks from the AGG to the Optems or direct online input.

The bulk of centres offered candidates' work for moderation in the form of an exhibition. Candidates' hard work and enthusiasm certainly justified the celebration, presented by an exhibition, for others to enjoy. The use of an exhibition to present work certainly provided an important opportunity for candidates to arrange outcomes to 'tell the story' of their achievements convincingly for both the teacher assessor and the moderator. Centres subject to constraints of space and unable to display candidates' work as an exhibition submitted the work in folders. Candidates who had been encouraged to arrange their folder carefully to reveal evidence of their creative journey and achievements convincingly, helped uphold the rationale underpinning teacher examiner assessment decisions.

All moderators welcomed centres' readiness to provide a separate order of merit for each unit (Personal Portfolio and the Externally Set Assignment) for the moderation visit. It was always helpful where centres had made a clear distinction between the work offered for the Personal Portfolio sample and the Externally Set Assignment (ESA) sample. Many centres took great care in placing unobtrusive labels with a candidate's work to make it easily identifiable. Helpful maps enabled moderators to locate each candidate's work easily. The time and care that many heads of department took to describe and explain in some detail, for moderators, the approach taken in their centre toward course design and delivery, assessment and internal standardisation measures was always appreciated. Centres should recognise the genuine value of the initial discussion as it always offered a vital opportunity for the visiting moderator to seek full understanding of the character and standing of the visual evidence offered, by candidates, for the assessment objectives.

It is vital that centres mark their candidates' work using the assessment guidance available on the website together with the assessment guidance grid. Centres that followed this practice scrupulously showed a progressively more accurate understanding of fitting mark levels. Where

the assessment guidance was used carefully to arrive at assessment decisions teacher examiners achieved sound and accurate internal marking and reliable standardisation across all endorsements, disciplines and teaching groups. It is worth reminding centres that teacher-examiners award marks. In the interests of marking precisely, centres should carefully steer clear of any temptation to make grade assumptions as a guide to assessing the evidence found in a candidate's body of work.

The moderation sample is a computer generated random selection of candidates. The work of all candidates must be readily available for the moderation visit. The work of the highest and of the lowest candidate, for the Personal Portfolio unit and for the ESA unit, must be presented with the selected sample.

It is worth saying again and indeed highlighting, as in previous reports, the significance of precise internal standardisation. Where this has not taken place within the centre it may result in significant changes to the overall centre marks affecting all endorsements. Centres must take care to painstakingly internally standardise, otherwise candidates' final marks may be compromised. A secure merit order (within an endorsement or across endorsements where a centre has candidates for more than one endorsement) is clearly very helpful to centres in their search for reliable internal standardisation. A compellingly secure merit order encompassing the total candidate entry for each unit and with the sample identified within it is of particular value insofar as it may provide, for the moderator, credible evidence and support for a centre's successful and precise internal standardisation.

It is vital for centres to note that faithfulness to assessment guidance must function consistently for both the Personal Portfolio and the ESA. Although the quantity of work presented for the two components may be different, the assessment guidance requirements remain constant.

Candidates performing at the lower levels of attainment commonly showed simple ideas considered from straightforward starting points. Development

was informed by simple research and evaluation of a modest range of sources. Minimal exploration of resources and processes and hesitant experiment and refinement underpinned the literal development of ideas. Weak technical control hampered the potential of personal work and research showed elementary connections to intentions. Deliberate responses led to adequate straightforward realisation of intentions. The simple beginnings in the work of lower performing candidates led to superficial understanding. Connections with the work of others were restricted, more often than not, to the surface appearance of artefacts.

In the work of better candidates ideas provided some reasonable starting points for evident growth. Work was progressed using sufficient skill and was based on adequate research. Evaluation and analysis showed a degree of straightforward understanding and a clear-cut appreciation of creative concerns and qualities. Appropriate, somewhat predictable, selection and experimentation showed, unlike weaker candidates, that chances to adapt and refine through resources and processes were obviously taken up. Discernible focus underpinned relevant selection and the recording of sufficient information from sources and growing technical control supported and communicated intentions. Work was technically sound and intentions were appropriately realised and showed credibly informed individual connections with the work of others and a growing appreciation of some interesting aspects of artefacts.

At the higher levels of candidate performance ideas were supported by a comprehensive journey of perceptive, sustained investigation. Independent and sensitive understanding was underpinned by the skilful use of material from which to develop ideas at length through thoughtful exploration. Here a rich resource bank was used to support in-depth review and comprehensive experimentation resulting in unmistakable progress. A wide-ranging appreciation of the potential of materials, techniques and processes was unmistakeable. Persuasive and personally selected concerns, perceptive engagement with ideas and convincing technical proficiency were commonly found in higher performing candidates. The potential of materials, techniques and processes was credibly recognised and secure

technical command ensured intentions were completely realised. Personal outcomes revealed some visually exciting qualities and were informed by appropriate connections that signalled the aspiration to understand artefacts beyond their surface qualities.

It is vital that centres secure a realistic grasp of the visual characteristics of Limited, Basic, Competent, Confident and Fluent attainment in the national context for GCSE Art and Design. Pearson/Edexcel not only makes available exemplar material on its website but also training for centres designed to promote a sound appreciation of standards within the national context.

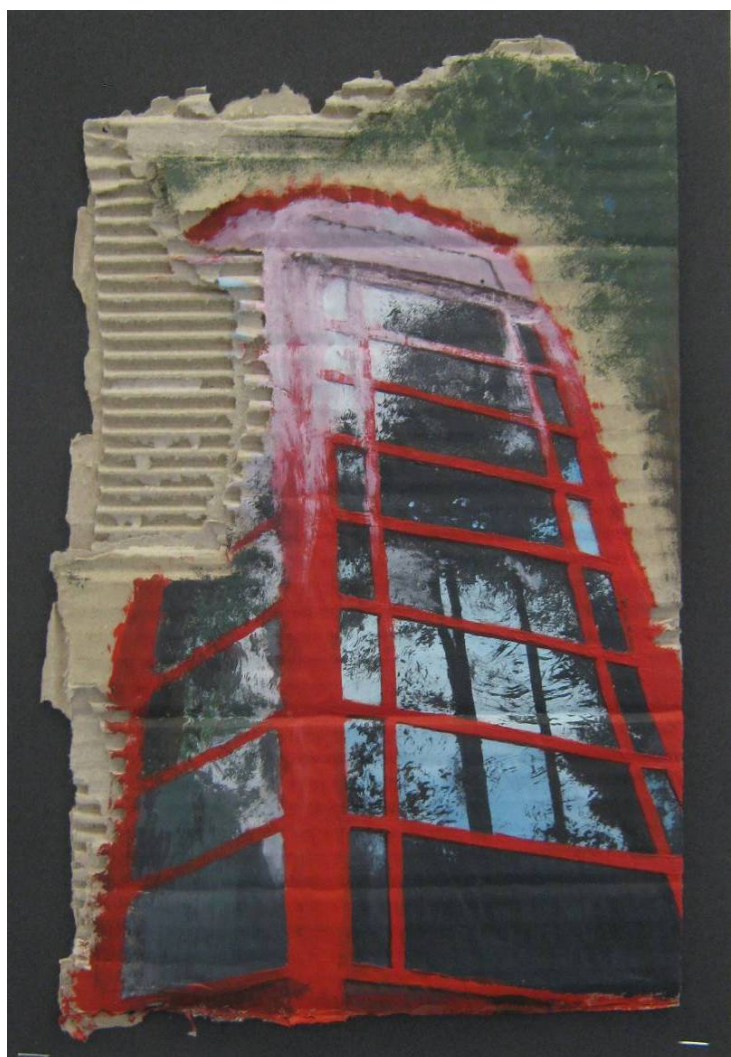**Candidate work from 2015 GCSE Art and Design**

Strengths:

- Complete candidate submissions
- Rigorous observance of assessment and moderation processes set out in the CG
- Precise and complete AGG, Optems and Authentication Forms
- A persuasive order of merit
- Personal Portfolio and ESA clearly identified with a map to enable moderators to find candidates' work
- An informative discussion with a head of department or centre representative that details the centre's approach toward course design and delivery, the character of the visual evidence, assessment and internal standardisation procedures
- Accurate use of assessment guidance and a good grasp of the visual characteristics of Limited, Basic, Competent, Confident and Fluent attainment in the national context for GCSE Art and Design to sustain assessment decisions
- Credible internal standardisation for Personal Portfolio and ESA within and across all endorsements and teaching groups.

Weaknesses

- Partial candidate submissions
- Failure to adhere to CG assessment and moderation processes
- Inaccurate and incomplete AGG, Optems and Authentication Forms
- An unconvincing order of merit
- The lack of an informative dialogue with a head of department covering the centre's approach toward course design and delivery, the character of the visual evidence, assessment and internal standardisation procedures
- Imprecise use of the assessment guidance and a poor grasp of the visual characteristics of Limited, Basic, Competent, Confident and Fluent attainment in the national context for GCSE Art & Design to arrive at secure assessment decisions
- Unconvincing internal standardisation for the Personal Portfolio and ESA within and across all endorsements and teaching groups.

Candidate work from 2015 GCSE Art and Design

Unit 1 Personal Portfolio

For Unit 1 (Personal Portfolio) of the Pearson/Edexcel GCSE Art and Design (2AD01-2GC01/3FA01-3GC01) candidates complete a body of work for assessment.

Unit 1 covers work produced from activities, theme(s) or projects. A personal portfolio is defined as a body of practical research and development, applicable to the chosen endorsement, leading to one or more outcomes or to a variety of resolutions.

Unit 1: Personal Portfolio in Art and Design (together with Unit 2: Externally Set Assignment in Art and Design) would normally provide evidence of two years' full-time study at Key Stage 4. Each unit must contain supporting studies and personal response(s).

For the Full Course Personal Portfolio unit evidence of working in at least two disciplines should be presented for assessment. For the Short Course Personal Portfolio unit evidence of working in at least one discipline should be presented for assessment.

Centres can devise the content of Unit 1 and plan, select and develop their own theme or themes/projects appropriate to their candidates and resources. The work for Unit 1 projects may be separate in focus or interconnected. Candidates should be encouraged to develop their personal ideas. Supporting studies should show the candidate thinking through the growth of their ideas. Centres must ensure the authenticity of work submitted for assessment.

In 2015 the majority of centres continued their determination to use informed judgment to appreciate the concept of a unit as best fitted their own art education setting. Some centres planned their course so that the combined constituent elements for the Personal Portfolio unit evidenced different approaches. One ingredient of the course with the overarching theme of, for example, 'Natural World' might be primarily experimental and

to all intents and purposes be concerned with developing and securing skills through exploring materials and techniques. Other elements would emphasise the opportunity to explore and pursue individual ideas generated from a theme such as 'Man Made World' and, therefore, inspire exciting and perceptibly varied candidate outcomes.

Centres commonly made sure that the flexibility of their preferred Personal Portfolio theme, or themes, allowed each candidate to make personal and well-informed responses. Moderator reports note that centres employed a range of Personal Portfolio themes in 2015 including, to name but a few, Still-Life, Environment, Structures, Places and Spaces, Surfaces, Identity, Nature, Heroes, Fantasy Landscapes and, A Taste Sensation.

Course organisation in successful centres clearly embraced the interests of a wide range of abilities. As in previous years, moderators noted they often encountered courses that promoted high expectations in relation to practical skills, effectively developed self confidence, made sure that outcomes reflected the true level of a candidate's ability and enabled the successful documentation and communication of creative intentions.

Once again in 2015 Unit 1, on the whole, proved to be a strong element of each candidate's submissions. Many centres had created sympathetic, carefully designed and challenging schemes of work and wide-ranging teaching programmes to provide candidates, across the ability range, with opportunities to bring forward convincing evidence of their achievement in all the assessment objectives. Candidates gained most from carefully arranged courses that made available a structure for them not only to develop their knowledgeable analysis and understanding of artists' work that served the growth of rationally focused ideas and individual outcomes, but also to extend their grasp of processes, methods for research and ways to secure the compelling use of media. Many centres with authoritative and resourceful approaches clearly engaged candidates in the pursuit of individual and personally relevant concerns. Individual work of quality arose where centres had, in addition to a well thought-out framework, also successfully provided opportunities for candidates to decide on their own

routes to probe and develop individual responses using varied scale, media and technical processes. Talented candidates given free control may, undeniably, produce compelling work of high quality. However, as noted in earlier reports, the work of successful candidates across the ability range was encouraged best within a structured, although non-prescriptive framework, where there were ample opportunities to investigate and extend autonomous and personal responses.

Centres frequently made use of themes from a previous Externally Set Assignment (ESA) in their course design. Moderators noted that, where centres took individual ownership of a past ESA theme and developed and built on it as a starting point suitable for their setting, they often encountered successful and engaging candidate outcomes.

In 2015 there was convincing evidence of centres building on the good practice of thoroughly incorporating contextual encounters and references within Personal Portfolio projects. Used as a starting point for assignments, the wider context, through educational visits or artists in residence, often resulted in many candidates securing authentic insight into a range of creative practices. Candidates' sound judgements and responses enabled them to go on to reveal the significance of their understanding of contextual issues for the explicit purposeful development of their individual outcomes.

Moderators reported, again in 2015, notable examples of candidates resisting the temptation to simply copy or transcribe the work of a practitioner. Conspicuous examples of candidates going beyond simple attempts to copy were met. Some candidates, as in 2014, having discovered an exciting painter, rather than unmistakably copying examples using paint, had gone on to make their own direct personal interpretations inspired by that encounter which, on occasion, made noteworthy and indeed exciting practical use of different media and ways of working. It was striking, therefore, that successful courses explicitly supported candidates in appreciating that the essential purpose of a contextual encounter was to use it as a means of encouraging individual creative endeavour rather than

as a starting point for a straightforward and occasionally rather sterile studio exercise.

Once again in 2015, moderators have drawn attention to how visits to galleries, museums and other places of visual interest really did help encourage and motivate many candidates and inform the progress of their personal work.

Many centres showed an ever-increasing confidence in supporting candidates in their quest to research, react, respond and reflect. Visual analysis and evaluation was, to many centres' credit, found in candidates' work. Unfortunately there remained a predilection, in some centres, to stress writing at the expense of visual analysis and evaluation accompanied by succinct annotated explanation. Moderators sometimes encountered, principally amongst weaker candidates, a propensity to offer large amounts of text simply copied from a website as evidence of contextual research, analysis and response. Moderators also pointed out, perhaps again most notably for weaker candidates, there was a tendency to over-reward explicitly biographical evidence which revealed little in the way of contextual understanding or, significantly, the value of contextual encounters for the growth and achievement of personal candidate outcomes. Art and Design is fundamentally a visual subject and a visual response through the use of visual language should be encouraged.

Centres, by and large, ensured that candidates gave the review, refinement and modification of their work as it progressed sufficient attention to support the production of the best outcomes. Many candidates, having generated exciting ideas from a contextual encounter and information gathering or from a visual research starting point, persuasively developed the potential of individual themes through experimentation and investigation. Moderators noted, in 2015, that many centres helped candidates to make the most of well founded and meaningful development and therefore avoid any tendency to make rushed, uninformed and puzzling leaps to the final outcome. However, once again in 2015, in some cases to the clear disadvantage of the quality of final statements, a scrupulous

process of review, refine and modify was treated superficially and ideas could, therefore, be secured too early. Where candidates moved straight from conception to the realisation of final statements the result could often be poor in quality. Reviewing, refining and modifying offer essential opportunities for candidates to not only refine skills but also decide on fitting media and ascertain the best focus for realisation. The skilful use of ICT provided another supportive way of developing ideas. Moderators reported that some candidates not only manipulated images, but also thoroughly developed ideas using ICT techniques in advance of producing persuasive final statements. A range of materials and ways of working was frequently offered to candidates. However, moderators noted they encountered examples where confidence and expertise in using materials and ways of working may undoubtedly have been compromised by deficiency in the quality, intensity, range and depth of the developmental process leading up to realisation.

As in 2014, many candidates showed they understood the importance of sufficient visual research by recording first-hand observations utilising a range of media, materials and processes. Candidates clearly gained from structured courses endorsing the thoughtful collection of information and recording of observations from an array of primary and secondary sources. Many centres supported candidates in the discriminating and clever use of digital photography to bring together visual evidence of first hand experiences (evidence that might previously have been found entirely second-hand) and make use of this evidence to successfully sustain themes. It should be emphasised that where centres encouraged a wide range of first hand research and opposed the extensive use of secondary sources, candidates achieved real individual progress not only in respect of increasing technical proficiency but also in the ability to completely develop the potential of engaging personal themes. Moderators reported persuasive examples of good practice where the innovative although by no means exclusive use of digital photography actively supported first hand visual research. Where candidates had carried out first hand research in several different ways, generally speaking, the quality of the complete body of visual source material was enhanced. The intelligent, selective and focused

use of photography for gathering observations was praised, in 2015, first and foremost in settings where this mode of visual research was one of a number of techniques employed by candidates. It should be noted that visual research of quality, using photography as an investigative tool, usually came about in centres where the significance of composition, angle of view, lighting, shutter speed and technical know-how had been tackled successfully with candidates and, as a result, moved them away from the basic snapshot. Many centres clearly encouraged their candidates to recognise that the range, depth and quality of primary and secondary research had, in the end, a direct and positive impact on the merit of final outcomes.

It must be highlighted, in this report, that centres really must take great care not to over reward, particularly but not exclusively, in the work of weaker candidates, the evidence offered by photography (particularly in art and design, fine art, textiles and three-dimensional design) for visual research skills. Moderators noted, again in 2015, a striking tendency to over reward in assessment decisions concerned with visual research principally where scant evidence was offered. Working in GCSE art and design undeniably encourages candidates to explore a wide range of appropriate relevant materials and ways of working. Centres should urge candidates to investigate the plethora of available opportunities to discover and indeed present convincingly, in their body of work, their expertise in realising visual equivalents in recording observations, experiences and ideas. It is important to stress, therefore, that moderators commented that some candidates presented, alarmingly, a significant volume of digital photographs to the almost total omission of other types of first-hand evidence. Evidence for visual research, in the form of exclusively digital photography sources, meant that some centre assessment decisions could definitely not be credibly sustained. Evidence for first hand visual research in a candidate's body of work constantly upheld germane assessment decisions best where some expertise in the management of the special characteristics of a range of media was clearly evident. Sadly, again in the 2015 series, moderators reported a dispiriting weakness, on the part of some candidates, to rely totally on mediocre secondary sources.

An increasing number of centres have secured a deep-rooted understanding of assessment criteria. Generally speaking, when all of the assessment objectives were seen to be mutually supporting in the manner in which they underpinned the work presented for the Personal Portfolio unit, candidates performed at their best across the whole mark range. As noted in previous reports, where assessment objectives appeared to have been tackled as a series of separate tasks, moderators reported that candidates may not have reached their full potential.

It is worth stressing that the assessment objectives are interconnected and they may be approached in any order in Personal Portfolio and, indeed, ESA activities. It is perhaps obvious that project themes might begin with specific research activities from first hand sources. However, projects could commence just as effectively, for some candidates, from working experimentally with materials or, indeed, develop from personal responses to contextual starting points.

Supporting studies essentially serve to provide evidence of the candidate's 'journey' and have the potential, as do final statements, to reveal the quality of research, contextual encounters, visual analysis, review, refinement, selection, exploration, development and realisation. Supporting studies could evidence a candidate's progress and development of ideas using some or all of the following

- work journals
- sketchbooks
- notebooks
- worksheets
- design sheets
- different scale rough studies
- samples
- swatches
- test pieces
- maquettes
- digital material

Moderators reported, in 2015, that many candidates focused their supporting studies on well-considered and relevant contextual encounters, applicable visual information capture, a careful process of review, refinement and, commendably, personal, imaginative and perceptive development of ideas and final outcomes.   However, reports from moderators have highlighted, in some centres, a propensity to over-reward final statements.   In some cases, outcomes did not sustain centre assessment decisions insofar as sufficient convincing evidence, of the sound use and understanding of the potential of materials to realise intentions, was by no means compellingly perceptible. Indeed, moderators reported in 2015 an unmistakable general inclination for centres to somewhat over-reward in their assessment decisions for candidates' work for the Personal Portfolio.   It is vital, in an effort to prevent leniency, that assessment decisions are securely established using the assessment guidance available and credibly substantiated by sufficient persuasive evidence. It is surely clear that, in making plausible assessment decisions, there is an important distinction to be drawn between identifying the simple presence of evidence for an assessment objective and judging its quality and, indeed, value in a candidate's work.

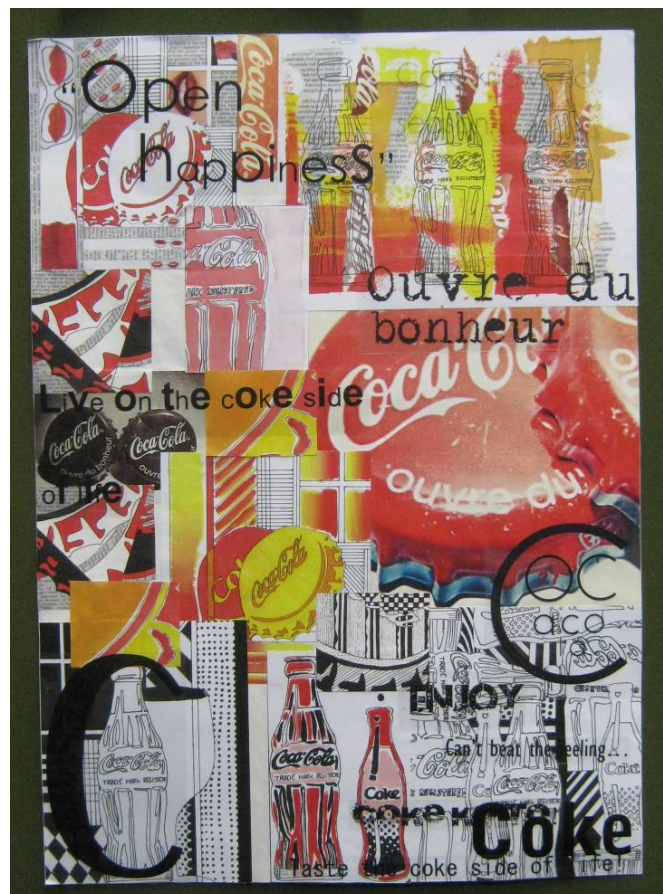**Candidate work from 2015 GCSE Art and Design**

Strengths:

- Well-structured and flexible courses that provided candidates, across the ability range, with sound visual language skills

- Courses that made available to candidates chances to show their grasp of a range of processes and methods for research, the use of a variety of media, analysis of artists' work and development of ideas

- Courses that highlighted the function and importance of visual research and the use of primary sources such as first-hand observational studies and visits to galleries and museums

- Work in which relevant contextual study was tellingly linked to the focus of projects and development of individual ideas

- Supporting studies that were individual, enlivened and informative, expressing thoughts, ideas, experimentation, contextual links and showing review, refinement and development.

- Courses which stressed and promoted the production of ambitious and imaginative final outcomes using a variety of media and scale

- Secure understanding of the inter-relationship of the assessment objectives and sound appreciation of the need for sufficient, plausible and appropriate evidence of a candidate's level of achievement
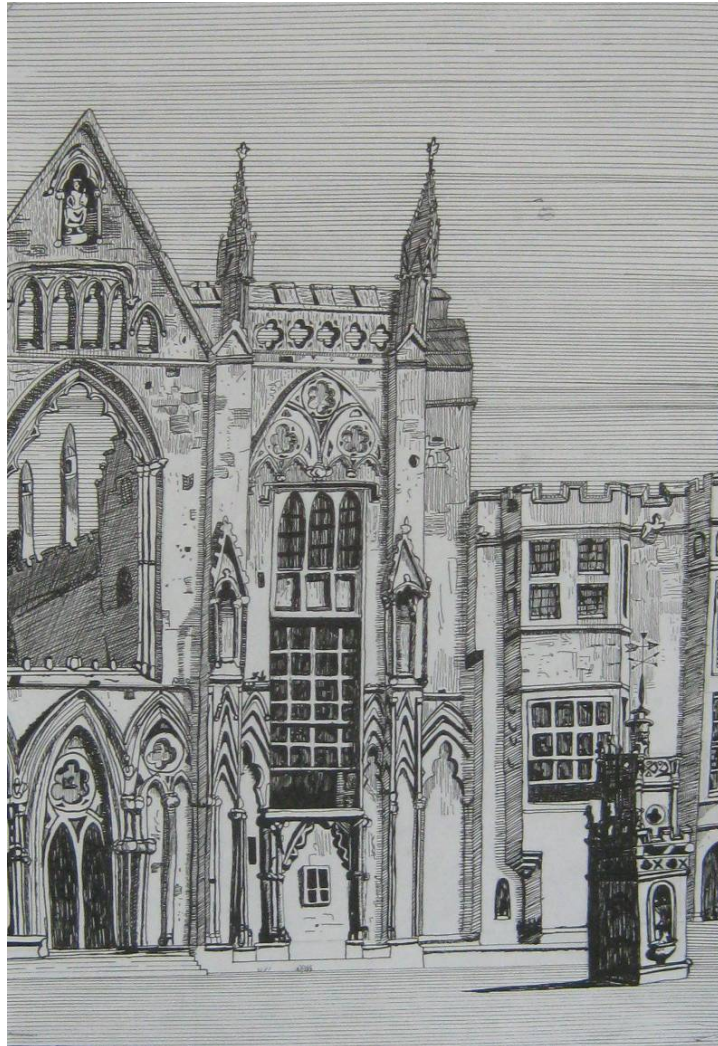
Weaknesses:

- Courses that betrayed a lack of structure or were excessively prescriptive and that did not provide candidates across the ability range with a secure foundation of visual language and skills

- Courses that did little to move candidates away from over-reliance on copying from second hand sources with little or no creative purpose

- Unselective photographic recording of the entirely 'snapshot' variety

- Disproportionate written evidence for analysis and evaluation

- Contextual evidence that was comprised principally of unrelated biographical studies of artists copied from texts or the internet

- Shallow responses resulting from insufficient review and refinement

- Weak understanding of the inter-relationship of the assessment objectives and poor appreciation of the need for sufficient, credible and appropriate evidence of a candidate's level of achievement

Candidate work from 2015 GCSE Art and Design

Unit 2 Externally Set Assignment

The Externally Set Assignment (ESA) theme in 2015, 'Apart and/or Together', received a positive reaction from the majority of centres. The ESA theme was seen to be accessible to candidates. Many centres commented on how the theme had proved to be suitably broad and, as a result, motivating insofar as it allowed candidates to use their personal experiences and interests in the growth of their ideas and the production of outcomes. Once again, in 2015, the format of the ESA question paper met with widespread approval. The ESA question paper was judged to be well set out with visually thought-provoking colour photographs of suitable images, pertinent contextual references and supportive sub sections.

The reaction of centres to the range of suggested artists and contextual references in the ESA was, for the most part, positive. It was certainly gratifying to hear again in 2015 that candidates did not rely wholly on the suggestions offered in the ESA. Many candidates, to their credit, carried out pertinent individual research centred on other contemporary practitioners and cultural references germane to their personal interpretations of the theme.

Many candidates clearly engaged with the theme in a creative way to develop individual and often very personal solutions. The work submitted for the ESA certainly showed a determination, on the part of large numbers of candidates, to demonstrate their understanding and appreciation of the potential of the theme for a personal response. The theme brought forth a mixture of individual responses ranging, as expected, from the cautious and somewhat literal to the refreshingly unexpected. Candidates' responses were, more often than not, fostered where centres used the guidance and suggestions contained within the examination paper as a way of encouraging a deeper level of personal engagement with the theme.

Unfortunately, as in 2014, some candidates spent a disproportionate amount of time exploring a large number of starting points at a surface

level. Disappointingly, some candidates undertook unnecessarily at the outset, to work systematically through several suggestions outlined in the ESA question paper. This approach, unsurprisingly, could lead to an obstacle for a candidate seeking a personal focus and hence too little time being available for thoroughly reviewing, refining, modifying and developing not only ideas but also realisation skills before the production of individual final statements. Centres and candidates should be aware that the theme in no way seeks to limit outcomes. Candidates should look upon the theme, and the suggestions given in the paper, as encouragement to select and explore the best direction in which to go, for them personally, to achieve their best individual responses.

The ESA theme provoked refreshingly varied responses. Moderators reported that some candidates developed ideas that engaged with the portrayal of family togetherness, interactions in sport, interpersonal relationships and, groups of food related objects. Some responses explored 'issues based' ideas in the context, for example, of loneliness and isolation within society and, religious differences and similarities. Elsewhere candidates explored urban settings, landscapes, plants and other natural forms. Moderators noted repeatedly that informative references to the work of a wide range of creative practitioners featured in the development of candidates' submissions. Contextual links to Andy Warhol and the work of Wayne Thiebaud prompted, again in 2015, the development of outcomes featuring sweets or cakes.

Quality responses were unquestionably the result of the way in which centres supported candidates in their organisation of the preparatory period with carefully designed and imaginative activities. Where teachers worked with their candidates during the formative stages, rather than leaving them to their own devices, a high quality approach helped them to resist a shallow response to the theme. Some centres, for example, opened the preparatory period with opportunities to carry out appropriate first hand visual research. Elsewhere the preparatory period began with centres introducing candidates to the work of a range of artists. Without doubt, sympathetic preparatory period activities, developed by teachers with

candidates, really supported attempts to go deeper into the theme and develop personal responses underpinned by the experience gained through Personal Portfolio projects. Where candidates built on strengths and experiences gained through the development of their Personal Portfolio unit, they adopted a secure and reliable approach to realising convincing supporting evidence that documented their journey through visual research, experimentation, development of ideas and, focused encounters with artists and cultures. The finest ESA work had undeniably grown from the high standard of best practice Personal Portfolio unit experiences. Opportunities, during the GCSE course, for candidates to experience a 'mock examination' framework (similar to the one they would be required to adhere to in the ESA) unmistakably supported the management of their work for Unit 2 to produce preparation and outcomes of quality.

It should be stressed, therefore, that candidates often gained from a dependable, supportive structure and well-judged guidance during the preparation period and, as a result, achieved their most successful, independent and inventive results. The ESA is part of the whole GCSE course. Centres are reminded that, although a candidate's work must be unaided during the ten hour period of sustained focus, supportive advice and guidance should be available throughout the preparatory period. Weaker candidates in particular, unquestionably, profit from guidance at the initial stages of the ESA to support them in identifying an appropriate personal focus and pathway for their studies. Moderators noted that centres with supportive preparatory frameworks helped those candidates for whom time management is a genuine difficulty to work systematically and successfully to produce sufficient convincing evidence for the assessment objectives.

However, once again in 2015, the need to review, refine and modify work in progress was not always well met in the ESA. Candidates occasionally did not assign enough time to meaningful research, exploration of ideas and thorough development before producing their final realisation. Results would definitely have been better, for some candidates, if the closing days of the preparatory period had been used more effectively. Selecting and

'fine tuning' the very best development of an idea and at the same time sharpening technical skills frequently underpinned the production of final outcomes of the best quality.

Centres implemented a range of approaches to give all their candidates the opportunity to follow a purposeful journey of discovery. Stronger candidates made self-directed choices when investigating work by other artists and they offered their research and analysis in well-informed ways that established evocative links with their own practice. Many candidates fully appreciated the process in which they were engaged by collecting, recording and presenting information with high levels of skill. In many cases a range of media, materials and techniques was used to consider ideas and develop responses.

Visual research obtained through a candidate's own photography was certainly influential where it was selective, well thought-out and purposeful, rather than randomly captured with little evidence of sensitivity or consideration. Once again, it should be emphasised that centres must take great care not to over-reward the evidence offered by photography (notably in art and design, fine art, textiles and three-dimensional design) for attainment in visual research. Moderators commented that where candidates presented a substantial volume of digital photographs to the almost total absence of evidence from first-hand resources that exploited the special characteristics of other media, some centre assessment decisions could not be convincingly sustained. Working in art and design, without doubt, raises the value of investigating a range of suitable pertinent materials and ways of working. Centres should advocate that candidates explore practically the many opportunities available to discover, develop and indeed show, in their body of work, their skill in realising visual equivalents in recording observations, experiences and ideas.

Moderators reported, once again in 2015, a disappointing liking, for some candidates, to rely exclusively on pedestrian secondary sources.

Contextual sources for the ESA encompassed a mixture of artists, photographers and designers. Some centres and candidates limited their exploration of contextual sources to those provided in the ESA paper. Centres should be aware that the contextual references provided with the theme are offered just as suggestions and candidates should certainly be encouraged to look beyond them to identify beneficial avenues for themselves. It is worth emphasising again that for the ESA, as for the Personal Portfolio unit, writing is only one of many ways through which candidates' thoughts, observations, evaluations and analyses might be captured and revealed. Critical and contextual responses may be presented advantageously primarily in visual terms. Extensive written documentation is certainly not a requirement.

Some moderators reported, in the 2015 series, a conspicuous tendency, in a number of centres to over-reward in the assessment of candidates' work for the ESA. Clearly, assessment guidance must function consistently for both the Personal Portfolio and ESA units. The amount of work presented for the ESA may differ from that offered in the Personal Portfolio unit but the assessment guidance requirements remain constant. As noted already in this report, it is crucial, in an effort to counter leniency that ESA assessment decisions not only draw on the assessment guidance available but are also compellingly substantiated by sufficient plausible evidence.

Strengths:

- A well planned, centre devised and teacher led programme for preparatory studies that enabled candidates to achieve sound, compelling and well-crafted, imaginative personal responses

- Suitable and evocative contextual encounters and analysis often supported at first hand through gallery or museum visits

- Comprehensive first hand observation and research, including (but certainly not exclusively) that obtained from the proficient use of a candidate's own photography, to support the development of outcomes

- Sufficient, focused, meaningful and sustained preparatory work that continued the growth of ideas

- Persuasive application of media and techniques that enabled a high standard of realisation of creative ideas and intentions

- Accurate centre marking corroborated by convincing evidence

Weaknesses:

- Insufficient support and guidance given to encourage candidates' time management during their developmental journey resulting in too little time for essential review, refinement and modification

- Safe and literal interpretation of the theme that constrained candidates

- The pursuit of a disproportionate number of 'starter' exercises designed to cover the assessment objectives but which discouraged individual choice, failed to engage candidates and frequently consumed precious development time

- Overwhelming reliance on secondary sources or unrelated primary sources

- Meagre command of materials and techniques that ultimately reduced the quality of realisation of imaginative ideas and intentions

- Imprecise centre marking decisions based on insufficient credible evidence

Candidate work from 2015 GCSE Art and Design
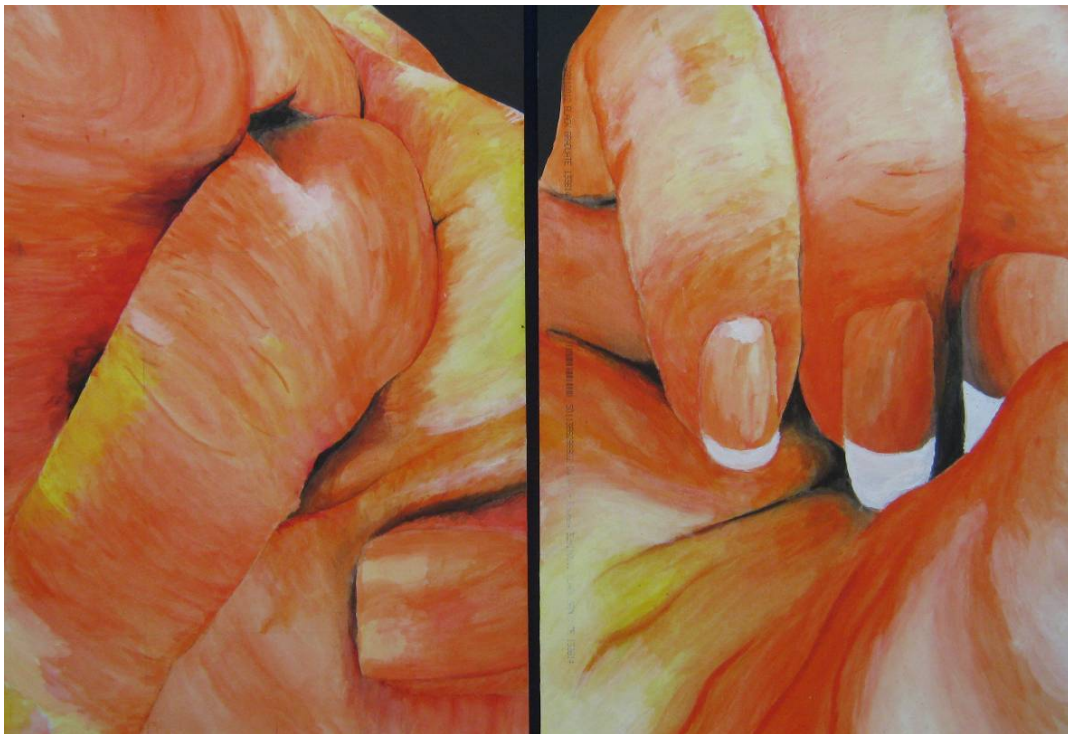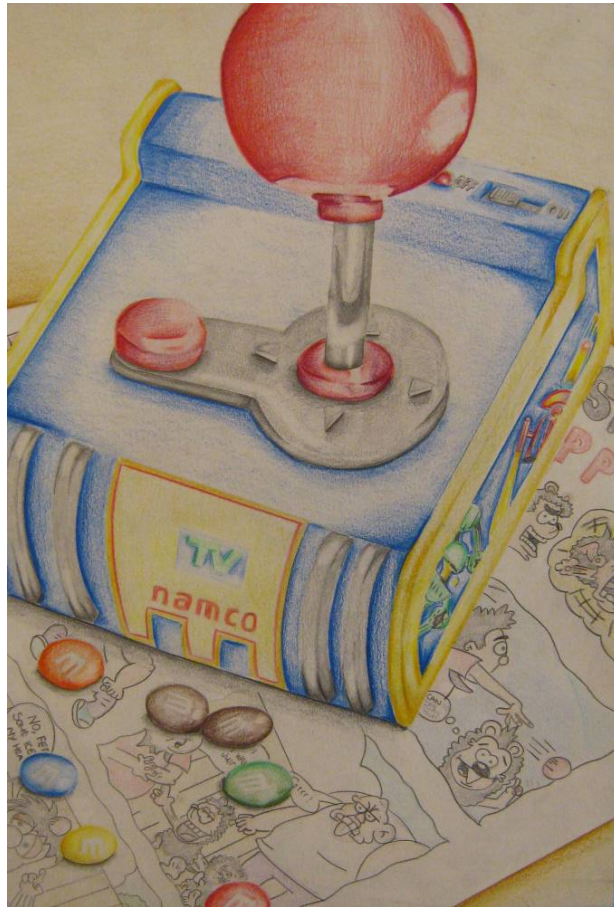
Summary

Many centres showed they have developed confidence in their knowledge and understanding of the specification and the demands it makes on both teachers and candidates. In general centres have built on time-honoured good practice to build appropriate courses of study.

First-rate teaching, thorough and appropriate Personal Portfolio and ESA arrangements, the application of a considered approach to the coverage of assessment objectives and fitting resourcing made sure that many candidates performed to the best of their ability in both components of the GCSE examination. Candidates who achieved first rate results did so because centres provided helpful support that emphasised recording visually, in a range of ways, from first hand experiences in order to sustain assessment decisions. Noteworthy contextual encounters provided candidates with encouragement for individual and personal outcomes. Sustained, careful and discriminating research, visual analysis, thorough development of ideas and the sharpening of technical skills, invariably resulted in high quality work.

Centres are reminded that careful scrutiny of the specification, the range of support available on the Pearson/Edexcel website, scrupulous study of the GCSE Art and Design Controlled Assessment Teacher Support Book, taking part in the training offered by Pearson/Edexcel and the help available via Pearson/Edexcel's Subject Advisor for Art and Design, all provide routes to developing precise understanding of the specification and assessment.

There remains the need for maintaining a suitable balance, between the volume of supporting studies and preparatory work and adequate opportunity to develop the realisation of final outcomes. Some candidates may, for example, perhaps spend a disproportionate amount of time and effort, during their course, on journal based work. This means that a large quantity of some candidates' work is restricted in terms of both scale and media and their artistic development may therefore be, to some extent, condensed. It is worth remembering that the growth of a candidate's

creative visual journey continues and undoubtedly may well be enhanced during the production of final outcomes.

As noted earlier in this report, extremely large volumes of evidence are not a requirement. It may, after very careful and thorough consideration, be deemed unnecessary to present every single piece of candidate work for assessment and moderation. Judicious and shrewd selection from the complete body of work produced by a candidate can undoubtedly tell the story of a creative journey in a persuasive way. It is, on the other hand, in every candidate's best interest to be absolutely sure that a sufficient quantity of convincing quality evidence is offered for assessment to credibly and undeniably uphold teacher-examiner assessment decisions.

It would, no doubt, be helpful to highlight once again that the Pearson/Edexcel GCSE Art and Design specification calls for visual responses from candidates. Written notes may well, to some degree, support a number of candidates' submissions, but large amounts of text are, without doubt, not a requirement of the specification. It is worth repeating that movement away from dissertation (a lengthy and formal written treatment) and toward annotation (a short explanatory or critical note added to visual evidence) is welcome. All assessment objectives, right through the entire mark range, may be convincingly evidenced chiefly through a visual response. Candidates can, and indeed do, reveal visually persuasive evidence of their technical skill, creative reflection, independent working, aptitude for problem solving, evaluative ability, powers of sequential thinking and creative practice. Visual research, visual reaction, visual response and visual reflection are always appropriate in GCSE art.

Finally, it must be said that centres are to be applauded once again for the encouraging ways in which, through the provision of sound courses, they faced up to the challenge of supporting their candidates in achieving remarkable personal creative successes in the 2015 series.
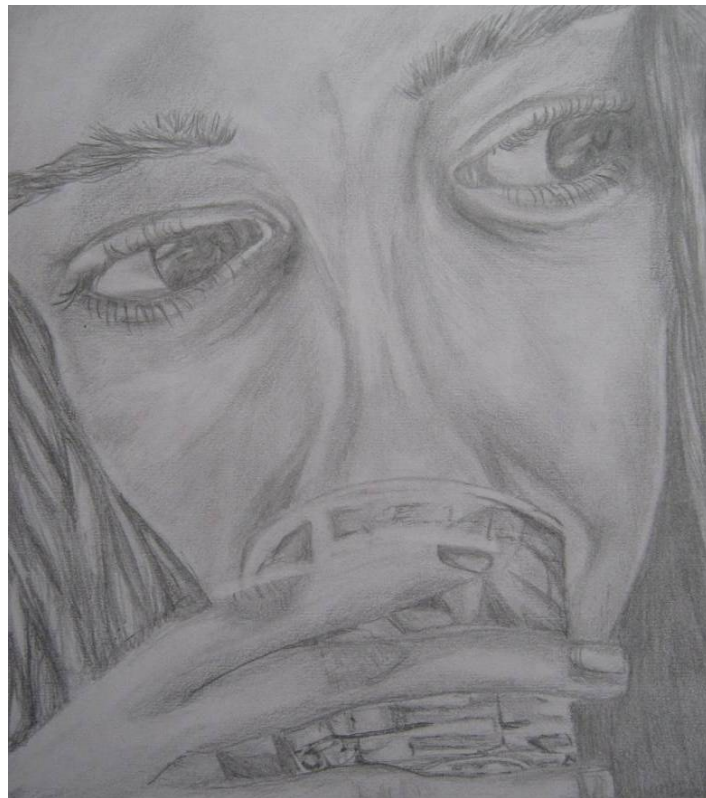
Strengths:

- Precise assessment using the available guidance and a secure grasp of the visual characteristics of Limited, Basic, Competent, Confident and Fluent attainment in the national context for GCSE Art and Design to arrive at credible mark decisions

- Reliable active centre support for the moderation processes set out in the CG

- Well-structured, non-prescriptive and flexible courses that provided candidates across the ability range with a secure foundation of visual language skills and best practice time-management support for the process of development of both their Personal Portfolio and ESA outcomes.

Weaknesses

- Inaccurate assessment resulting from a failure to make use of the available assessment guidance and a weak appreciation of the visual characteristics of Limited, Basic, Competent, Confident and Fluent attainment in the national context for GCSE Art and Design.

- Unsatisfactory application of the requirements for moderation visits set out in the CG

- Courses that either lacked a coherent structure or were very prescriptive and did not provide candidates across the ability range with a secure foundation of visual language skills and best practice time-management support for the process of development of both their Personal Portfolio and ESA outcomes.

Candidate work from 2015 GCSE Art and Design

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx