GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ART AND DESIGN
A LEVEL

SUMMER 2023

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Annual Statistical Report

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ART AND DESIGN

GCE A LEVEL

Summer 2023

PERSONAL INVESTIGATION & EXTERNALLY SET ASSIGNMENT

General Comments

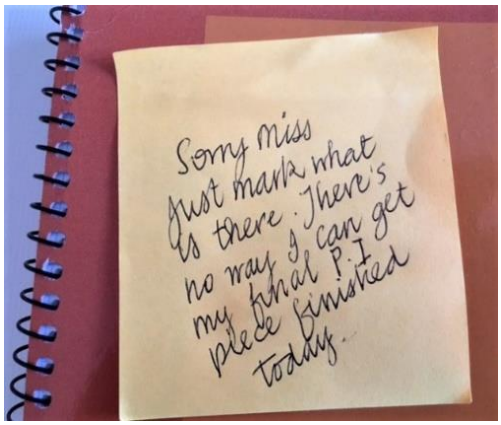
Since the current Specifications for GCE were launched in Autumn 2015, we have experienced changes in the educational environment we could not have previously imagined. With pandemic restrictions now an ordeal of the recent past, we have returned to at least a semblance of normality in terms of re-establishing all the assessment components in GCE art and design. As we resume our time proven procedures, the lasting impact of Covid 19 on our candidates, continues to be a source of concern.

As our experienced team of moderators visited Centres this summer, they occasionally became aware of certain changes in what was being presented for assessment. These included a reduction in the amount of portfolio evidence submitted, less focus on assessment criteria and inability to meet internally-set deadlines. Of course, there isn't much that is new in these findings, it's just that we saw more of these features than we are accustomed to. It's important to emphasise that these possible residual effects of Covid 19 were not seen in most Centres visited, neither were they evident across every candidate in a sample within a Centre.

So how might these issues be addressed by teachers with the small minority of candidates that could be affected? In terms of the amount of work presented for assessment, there is no fixed requirement, provided the evidence is such that it fully meets all assessment criteria. The emphasis, as always, should be on quality, not on quantity. Reference to the many online exemplars will provide a useful guide to what might be a suitable amount. Certainly, the response should not be one of 'padding out' thin submissions with reproduced images and other material that is not the original work of the candidate. Neither should it be a matter of extensively cutting out work from sketchbooks to fill gaps in presentation sheets.

As to the apparent lack of focus on assessment criteria, there is a plethora of resource material that can be used to refresh and sharpen awareness. As well as the generic descriptive bands in mark sheets, the two AO Checklists and Indicative Content for each title, there are Knowledge Organisers and NEA Walk-Through materials in the form of PowerPoints, with audio commentaries that can be used, along with some teacher input, to good effect.

Ensuring certain candidates meet deadlines has always been a challenge and there are no easy solutions to be offered. However, time management is an important life skill that candidates of all abilities should acquire. The Externally Set Assignment has been re-introduced this summer and its return has generally been welcomed. It is incorporated in our assessment framework to provide, amongst other things, the experience of working creatively within time limits. The ESA is a different kind of assessment than the Personal Creative Enquiry and Personal Investigation and it is vital that its different requirements are respected and followed. Further guidance about the four main purposes of ESA requirements is given in the published teacher guidance document which is available online.



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The failure of candidates to present their work in time to meet deadlines can make the task of teacher marking extremely difficult and can have serious consequences, such as disrupting the rank order of a group of candidates. Arriving at fair and accurate judgements requires adequate time for considered comparative assessments to be made and reflected upon before the final submission of marks. It is certainly not something to be rushed, due to late submission of evidence.

There appears to be an increasing number of Centres switching from entering candidates for GCE Design and Technology to Textile Design and Three-Dimensional Design titles within GCE Art and Design Specifications. This is not always a seamless change, as there are important differences between these specifications that need to be taken fully into account. In art and design there is strong emphasis placed on creative personal responses and the evidence of exploratory processes that lead into these. In general, assessment criteria in design and technology are of a different order. Centres that have undertaken this change and those considering doing so, should study in some detail the online resources that explain the assessment objectives for art and design, as well as the marked exemplars representing 3D and textile design disciplines. Ongoing discussion of assessment criteria with colleagues who are delivering art and design specifications is strongly advisable.

Important changes in certain moderation processes have been introduced this year and we ask for forbearance as we implement these as smoothly as possible. The withdrawal of spoken feedback at the conclusion of moderation visits has been discontinued in order to fully meet regulatory requirements. Although well intentioned, there has always been the possibility of verbal feedback being misunderstood or misinterpreted.
To compensate, at least in part, for this withdrawal, more comprehensive written information has been given in the form of extended Centre reports. Essentially, these are intended to provide reasons where and why any adjustments may have been necessary in order to align Centre marks with nationally agreed standards established each year immediately before moderation visits. Additionally, most reports will recognise the strengths identified in the evidence presented for moderation, so that the centre can build on these. They also may include suggestions of where development might be undertaken to further raise standards.

During discussion sessions organised as part of CPD events held during the last year, the 100 or so teachers who attended were asked for their views on current Centre reports. In general, they approved of the *Strongest, Achieved and Develop* comments, but asked that more detail be provided, particularly where Centre marks were adjusted.

Compiling these new style Centre reports to achieve our objective of being as helpful as possible, has not been an easy task and constructive responses from teachers to help us improve them will be appreciated. This should enable us to provide clear and concise feedback that is fully supportive of teachers in their future delivery and internal assessment of GCE art and design.

In the context of providing support for teachers, we wish to acknowledge the distinguished service that our Subject Officer, Mari Bradbury, has given over many years and in different ways to teachers across the UK. She has now taken early retirement from her post, and we wish to express huge gratitude for all she has contributed to our subject and to those who deliver and assess it. We wish her well as she embarks upon new adventures in her retirement.

As we look forward to the future of our subject, yet another challenge is presenting itself- that of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Having successfully harnessed new technologies, from photocopying to *Photoshopping,* we can embrace AI as another opportunity for exciting creative developments. We are aware, of course, of the misuse of such technology and we must quickly establish ways of dealing with this. However, it must not be at the expense of limiting the huge creative possibilities it offers for art and design. The Joint Council for Qualifications has recently published a document that provides a useful source of reference: *Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use in Assessments: Protecting the Integrity of Qualifications.*

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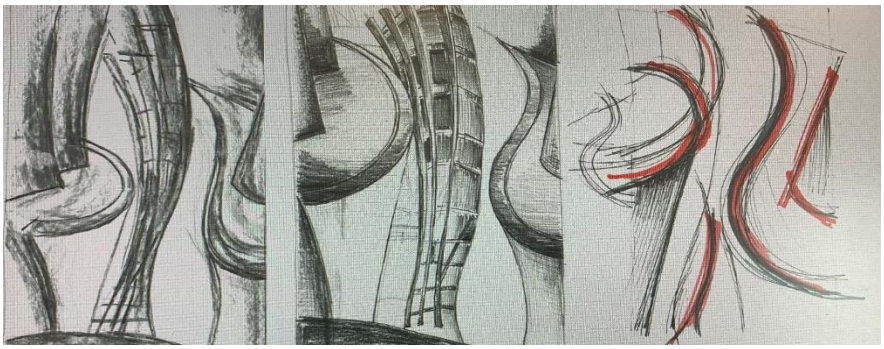
DRAWING

The specification requires candidates to develop skills to *'record experiences and observations, in a variety of ways using drawing or other appropriate visual forms'*. They should be encouraged to appreciate the significance of drawing in the widest sense by recognising and reviewing how it feeds into the creative process across disciplines. Drawing skills should be an integral part of all courses and across each title to ensure candidates are able to confidently use this fundamental aspect of the creative process. This should also strengthen their practice, support progression, and prepare them to meet the demands of higher education and/or the creative industries.

We draw for many different purposes. One important purpose for drawing is to record from first-hand observations or experiences. This is not the same as drawing from photographs or from images produced by others. Drawing from direct experience is not simply an act of recording what is seen with technical accuracy. It requires, from the person drawing, a personal response and an element of interpretation of the subject being studied. We draw to explore, research and visualise ideas, develop possibilities such as in problem solving, designing or composing, and to explore and express emotions and feelings.

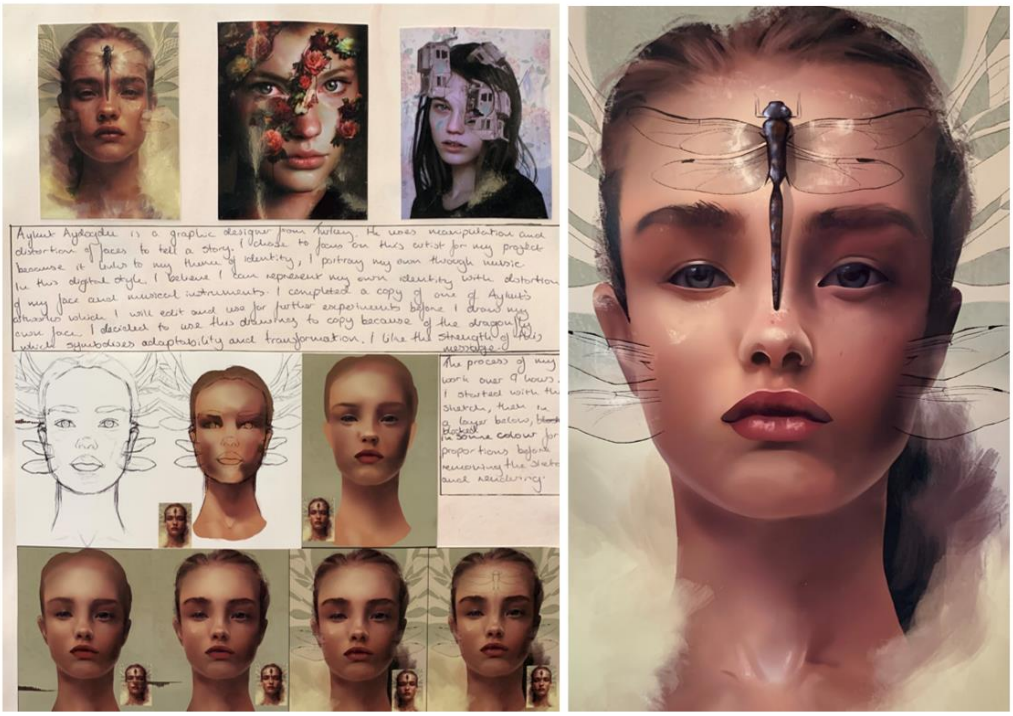
Within many submissions this year, drawing was used as a visual tool for exploring primary sources and developing ideas towards the realisation of creative outcomes. Moderators highlighted the following as a result of centre visits:

- Purposeful drawing was demonstrated by candidates across the full range of the titles. This was often based on their own photographs of first-hand experiences (including gallery and museum visits).
- Effective use of drawing skills for various purposes was seen in photography submissions. Candidates used drawing for planning shoots to visualise their intended shots, including composition and lighting considerations. Drawing was also employed for planning the presentation of final outcomes, such as layout, scale, and sequence.
- A growing trend of Digital Drawing and Computer Aided Design (CAD) was seen. 3D Design Portfolios in particular, showed a distinct shift towards the use of CAD software for drawing, suggesting that candidates have embraced this form of technology within their creative process. In other titles, such as Fine Art and Graphic Communication, candidates had approached drawing digitally through the use of applications such as *Procreate* which showcases a varied and exciting range of approaches to drawing.



Purposeful use of digital drawing to explore Cubism, shape and movement as a result of a first-hand visit (Frank Gehry). The candidate demonstrates excellent recording of ideas and makes valuable connections to their own personal responses.

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An example of highly effective use of Procreate to explore creative making (in response to a contextual source) with drawing underpinning the process. A rigorous and imaginative exploration of a range of creative possibilities was presented by the candidate.

LEARNER STATEMENTS

The Learner Statement is a vital component of the qualification, serving multiple purposes that facilitate the consideration and communication of candidates' underlying thoughts and actions in their submission. In essence, the Learner Statement:

- Offers significant value to candidates by providing a positive incentive and a helpful framework for initial and ongoing planning throughout the unit.
- Assists teachers in gaining a concise overview of a candidate's plans, enabling them to provide guidance more effectively.
- Proves invaluable to moderators as it allows them to swiftly familiarise themselves with a candidate's intentions and assess progress towards their realisation.

Ideally, the Learner Statement should be viewed as a live document/planning tool, undertaken for the candidate's benefit. It can be initiated at the outset of the unit, revisited during its development, and concluded upon the investigation's completion. Regrettably, when perceived merely as a form-filling requirement completed at the end of the course, its value is diminished, as witnessed on occasion this summer. In many centres however, there was commendable completion of these documents across both units. These statements proved highly useful in prompting candidates to formalise their approach and rationale, effectively complementing their sketchbooks and lines of enquiry.

Digital completion of Learner Statements once again emerged as a popular practice this year, with relatively few centres opting for handwritten approaches. Some candidates enriched their statements by including accompanying images of their work, providing clarity regarding the creative path followed when the submission was viewed and analysed. In many centres, candidates used Learner Statements to introduce their themes and included the use of sophisticated language to consolidate and communicate their written responses.

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A LEVEL COURSE STRUCTURES

Only a limited number of centres now deliver the AS qualification, but those who do usually achieve high standards that are subsequently taken through to A Level. Moderators reported that the A Level course had been delivered as follows:

- In general, centres delivered a 2-year course where the building of skills formed the basis for the first year before candidates moved onto a more focused, personal investigation in the second year.
- In the first year, skills-building activities introduced candidates to new processes and analytical skills in many centres.
- Centres seemed pleased with the re-introduction of Component 2, Externally Set Assignment and adapted schemes of learning to return to pre-pandemic delivery formats to allow time from February to address the component.
- Many centres welcomed the return of, and took advantage of educational study visits, either to galleries or other places of interest. Personal engagement with these sources was encouraged and from these candidates developed individual projects and starting points.
- Many centres approached the extended writing component as a standalone element, often as an illustrated essay, closely linked to practical enquiry. Where other formats were used, such as zines and journals, they often demonstrated a greater level of engagement and stronger personal response.
- Physical and digital sketchbook-making was encouraged in equal measure. Digital sketchbooks were used to undertake research and reflect on the development of their own work and tended to be used more widely in 3D Design, Graphic Communication and Photography titles.

Component 1: Personal Investigation

Written element within the Personal Investigation

As in previous years, centres employed a variety of strategies to enhance candidates' critical analysis, with many favouring it as a standalone written element. In the majority of submissions, examples of extended writing were based on the contextual understanding of the work of artists, designers and crafts people which then enabled a comparison to be made between two or more practitioners, followed by candidates presenting their own opinions. It was positive to see within submissions, that extended writing was often used to influence the development of creative making.

Many candidates considered the presentation of the extended writing component to reflect the subject matter which they had explored. Frequently, the written element was in the form of a word-processed illustrated essay which was then bound as a booklet. It was interesting to see other formats considered as part of the creative making process, as discussed below.

Often, centres encouraged candidates to present their written element in line with the creative making that had been produced. For example, a series of postcards and letters was observed (below). Here, it was evident that the subject of the presentation, together with the desire to capture audience interest, were carefully considered by the candidate, sensitively planned and beautifully executed.



An example of the written element within the Personal Investigation, produced in line with creative making processes as an 'outcome' in its own right.

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On occasion, centres used the Learner Statement to present the extended writing element. In a minority of cases, written submissions did not progress past evaluative commentary or, at the lower range of marking, simply a step-by-step account of how the investigation was undertaken. Some candidates relied on paragraphs within sketchbooks as a means of addressing, but not always meeting, the extended writing requirement.

Strengths

- Candidates developed deeply personal and meaningful themes and ideas, addressing social issues, personal experiences, and contemporary concerns. Submissions often showed drive, focus, and energy whilst covering a wide range of topics.
- Candidates demonstrated well-documented development of ideas, including investigative sketches, annotation, and research. In doing so, they made relevant connections to artists/practitioners, utilised primary sources, to effectively realise their intentions.
- Candidates engaged in a range of experimental work, exploring a variety of materials, techniques, and methods. They demonstrated a breadth of research, media, and experimentation, leading to personal and meaningful outcomes.
- They displayed strong contextual research and analytical skills, critically examining the work of artists, designers, and crafts people. As part of this work, candidates visited exhibitions, analysed artwork, and often engaged in discussions regarding the work of others, enhancing their contextual understanding.
- Candidates often demonstrated strong written ability, with well-developed extended writing, essays, and learner statements. This was often integrated into sketchbooks which effectively explained the purpose of their lines of enquiry.
- Sketchbooks and investigative sheets were put to good use. These were visually exciting and often showed methodical approaches to study.
- Many candidates exploited the use of technology to their advantage, aiding their investigations. Digital sketchbooks documented the creation and development of artworks and design software/applications supported creative making and drawing.

Shortcomings

- Contextual references were not explored in sufficient depth to aid visual lines of enquiry and creative making. At times descriptions, rather than analytical or evaluative contextual analysis, of artists and own work were presented. Often, candidates produced visual works that too closely resembled the work of the artist/designer they were inspired by.
- Submissions lacked critical reflection within the development process and lines of enquiry would often transition directly from the research phase to a final piece, without sufficient consideration of alternative options, formats, layouts, or compositions.
- On occasion, submissions lacked observational drawing from life, which limited the input of fresh ideas and constrained creative development.
- Candidates did not sufficiently review and refine their ideas, use of materials, and skills, which resulted in less sophisticated outcomes and did not always fully realise intentions.
- The progression of ideas was not always thoroughly explored; the penultimate stages of development were sometimes rushed or not fully realised, with final outcomes sometimes appearing from nowhere.
- Candidates did not always dedicate adequate time to presentation. Most notably, candidates sometimes lacked consideration for how the audience would view and interpret their work. As a result, the effectiveness of conveying intended messages was hindered.
- Selecting and presenting work was sometimes lacking, with discrimination not being applied. As a result, all work completed throughout the qualification was submitted, not all of which was relevant or significant.

Suggestions for improving achievement.

- Encourage candidates to research the work of others in sufficient depth to provide analytical and evaluative contextual analysis which informs ideas and the creative making process.
- Provide opportunities for candidates across all ability levels to engage in drawing for a range of purposes, including opportunities to observe, test, record, and plan.
- Provide further opportunities for candidates to review and critically reflect upon their own work regularly, allowing time for refinement to take place to improve the quality of creative making.

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- Encourage candidates to consider more carefully the penultimate stages of development in order to achieve higher quality and more sophisticated outcomes.
- Encourage candidates to consider the presentation of their visual investigations and how their work will be viewed and interpreted by an audience.
- Remind candidates to be selective when preparing/presenting their work for assessment/moderation to ensure all elements and outcomes are relevant to intentions.

Component 2: Externally Set Assignment

Strengths

- Candidates made good use of primary sources, such as gallery/museum visits and personal interviews with artists, designers and crafts people. Such activities proved purposeful and informed ideas and creative making.
- Often, candidates demonstrated personal, meaningful, and imaginative outcomes that showcased their individual identity in response to the starting points.
- Candidates presented a broad range of outcomes and individual responses to the starting points, resulting in a rich variety of ideas.
- Candidates presented well-documented developments of ideas which demonstrated a thorough creative process. In doing so, they communicated their development through investigative sketches and reflective annotation.
- They explored a variety of techniques and processes. These showcased originality and a deep interest in the subject matter being explored. Candidates often extended and developed the skills and processes they had developed within Component 1.
- Candidates utilised their time effectively throughout the Externally Set Assignment to produce creative bodies of work and outcomes which were often to a high standard, realising their intentions.

Shortcomings

- Some candidates did not adequately explore different techniques, media and materials. An over-reliance on reference photos was observed which sometimes resulted in outcomes that lacked depth and meaning.
- Some candidates did not effectively plan their work or manage their time during the 15-hour Sustained Focus Period. As a result, some were unable to complete their final outcomes and fully realise their intentions.
- In some cases, a lack of developmental work and planning in the lead up to the final piece was observed. Individual elements were not thoroughly tested or experimented with, leading to outcomes that were not fully realised.
- In some submissions, written analysis lacked depth and as a result, failed to fully aid the creative making process and the development of ideas. This left submissions with missed opportunities to extend visual lines of enquiry.
- Some submissions were shorter than expected, lacking sustained effort and sufficient evidence of development.

Suggestions for improving achievement.

- Provide opportunities for candidates across all ability levels to explore a range of techniques, media and materials as ideas develop.
- Prompt candidates to sufficiently plan for the 15-hour Sustained Focus Period in the lead up to realising their visual investigations.
- Encourage candidates to fully interrogate their starting point as well as materials to be used. They should demonstrate the development of a range of ideas in order to refine their creative making and achieve higher quality outcomes.
- Encourage candidates to research and record primary source materials that will inform the development of ideas and the creative making process.
- Provide candidates with opportunities to research the work of others in sufficient depth to provide analytical and evaluative contextual analysis to inform ideas and creative making.

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Most popular questions

Across centres, the set assignments were covered fairly evenly, demonstrating a diverse range of artistic exploration. However, it is worth noting that the themes of *'Entertainment' 'Light and Shade'*, and *'Attachment'* stood out as particularly popular among candidates.



An example of a Fine Art title that explored the starting point, ***Attached****.*



An example of a Fine Art title that explored the starting point, ***Magnification****.*



An example of a Graphic Communication title that explored the starting point, ***Entertainment****.*

These themes provided candidates with the opportunity to delve into subjects that resonated deeply, resulting in vibrant and engaging responses. Many submissions showcased not only artistic skill but also demonstrated thoughtful and comprehensive introductions to their work, setting the stage for a thorough examination of their creative process. Furthermore, these exceptional submissions included detailed final evaluations, allowing for a comprehensive reflection on the artistic journey and the significance of the outcomes produced.

As one very experienced moderator commented: *'Moderating can sometimes be challenging, but I always enjoy walking into a centre and seeing the amazing creativity of young people'.*

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