GCE A Level Examiners' Report

Art and Design

A Level

Summer 2025

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Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.[1]

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.co.uk)

[1] ***Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.***

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Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.eduqas.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner | Eduqas

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Executive Summary

In the 2025 series, candidates produced consistently high-quality submissions for Component 1, Personal Investigation, demonstrating strong personal engagement and sustained development across both practical and written elements. Many approached investigations with confidence and effectively explored materials, techniques, and ideas. A notable shift toward digital formats—particularly in Photography, 3D Design, and Graphic Communication—allowed for enhanced clarity and a broader presentation of their creative journeys.

AO1 was most successful when contextual research was purposeful and integrated throughout the project, with candidates showing depth of enquiry and critical analysis. However, formulaic engagement with contextual sources weakened outcomes in some cases.

AO2 was best demonstrated through thoughtful experimentation and refinement, documented via sketchbooks and journals. Candidates who reflected critically on trials produced more coherent developments, though some submissions lacked this depth or showed only final outcomes without process evidence.

In AO3, the strongest work included varied and technically skilled recordings—drawing, photography, mixed media, and digital processes—used as investigative tools. Reflective analysis linked recordings to intentions, elevating conceptual development. Weaker entries relied on secondary sources and lacked discernment or purposeful reflection.

AO4 success stemmed from outcomes that clearly reflected the entire creative journey. These submissions showcased technical accomplishment, conceptual clarity, and personal voice. Conversely, disconnected or unresolved outcomes suggested a misunderstanding of AO4's holistic nature.

Moderators recommend promoting independent enquiry, purposeful experimentation, meaningful reflection, and coherent presentation. Reducing prescriptive tasks and encouraging diverse contextual engagement will support ambitious, authentic, and personally meaningful investigations.

In Component 2, the Externally Set Assignment showcased a diverse and ambitious range of creative responses. Moderators noted consistent coverage of assessment objectives across centres, with stronger submissions revealing depth of thought, technical confidence, and conceptual resolution. Many candidates demonstrated high personal engagement, extending initial prompts to explore cultural identity, social issues, and personal interests.

AO1 was effectively met through critical contextual research, particularly where gallery visits and independent inquiry informed personal themes. However, some candidates explored too many sources superficially, leading to weaker connections with creative intent.

AO2 revealed confident handling of media, with drawing, painting, collage, printmaking, textile manipulation, and digital processes well represented. Refined experimentation led to stronger outcomes, though time management issues sometimes limited depth and coherence.

AO3 was strongest where candidates used varied recording methods—drawing, annotation, and first-hand photography—to clarify and develop ideas. Strong sketchbook work reflected a visual and written dialogue, while weaker submissions relied on secondary sources or lacked purposeful recording.

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AO4 saw technically proficient, conceptually ambitious outcomes, which clearly linked to earlier investigations. Expansion of ESA starting points through themes such as heritage, mental health, and climate change featured prominently. However, unresolved outcomes were observed where time was poorly managed or initial research lacked focus.
Popular ESA starting points included *Roots*, *Transportation*, *Creatures*, and *Decipher*, with candidates demonstrating creative interpretations. Centres are encouraged to foster critical, reflective practices and coherent development throughout the creative journey to enhance authenticity and impact.

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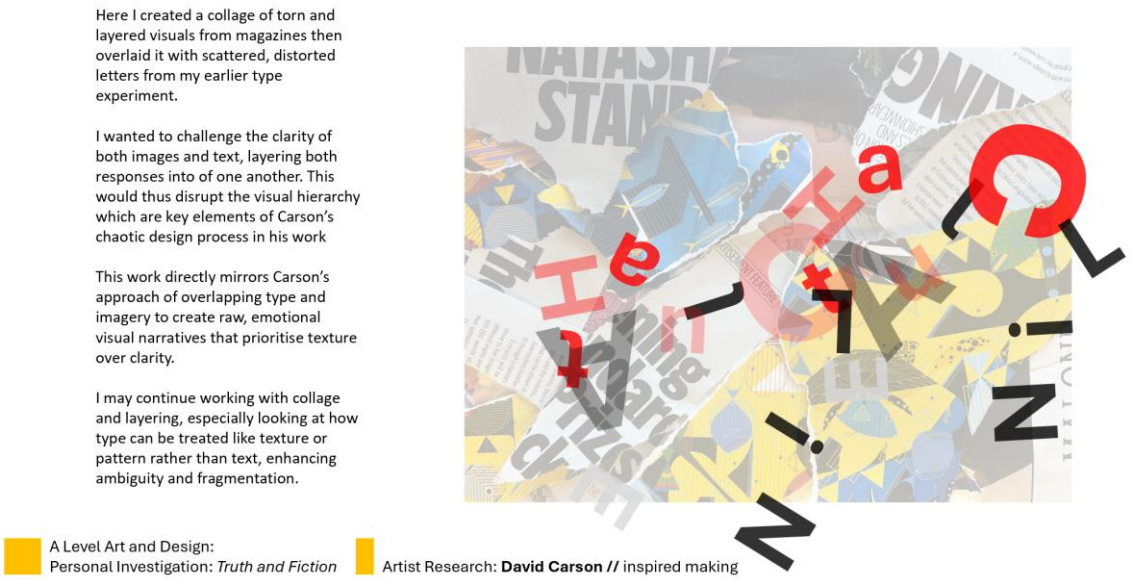
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COMPONENT 1: PERSONAL INVESTIGATION

Overview of the Component

Moderators observed that candidates frequently produced work of a consistently high standard in **Component 1**, *Personal Investigation*. The majority of candidates demonstrated clear and sustained development of ideas, with personal engagement evident in both practical outcomes and critical written elements. Many candidates approached their investigations with confidence, showing effective exploration and the manipulation of materials, techniques, and processes.

A noticeable trend was the increased use of digital formats, particularly in Photography, 3D Design, and Graphic Communication. Digital sketchbooks, presentations, and documentation often replaced traditional formats. In some cases, and seen at times in Fine Art and Art, Craft and Design, candidates submitted both physical and digital formats, which provided moderators with a broader view of the investigative journey. This approach enabled candidates to present their work in ways that enhanced clarity and coherence.



An example of a digital submission within Art, Craft and Design

The extended writing element of the component generally showed thoughtful connections between practical and contextual research. Candidates who fully integrated their analysis with their creative making processes often produced more insightful and purposeful investigations.

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In comparison to the 2024 series, moderators observed that there was a slight increase in the depth and individuality of candidate responses, particularly in the personal engagement shown throughout the investigative process. Many candidates demonstrated stronger development in AO3, with more purposeful recording and a clearer integration of contextual references.

Moderators saw many examples of personal and sustained investigations where candidates engaged thoughtfully with contextual sources, explored materials purposefully, and developed ideas with critical reflection. Where work was strongest, candidates demonstrated genuine ownership of their creative process, resulting in outcomes that were both technically competent and personally meaningful.

However, on occasion, submissions lacked depth, with contextual research appearing superficial rather than a source of genuine inspiration to fuel the creative making process. Experimentation was at times unfocused, with a lack of opportunities for candidates to review or refine. In a few instances, final outcomes appeared unresolved or overly influenced which limited opportunities for personal responses.

Recommendations and Future Considerations for Centres

- Encourage meaningful, critically informed investigations linked to personal themes.
- Promote purposeful experimentation with opportunities for review and refinement rather than surface-level exploration.
- Support candidates in producing relevant, reflective recordings.
- Foster independence and originality by reducing prescriptive, whole-cohort tasks to encourage creative autonomy.
- Emphasise the importance of a coherent journey from investigation to final outcome.

Moderators note that centres should continue to nurture independent thinking, critical enquiry, and authentic creative investigation to support candidates in being highly successful. In addition, the encouragement of candidates to engage with a broad range of contexts and to reflect meaningfully on their work to ensure submissions remain personal, relevant, and ambitious should be promoted.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Moderators consistently observed that when AO1 was fully met, candidates embarked on genuine, sustained investigations that were both personal and critically engaged. The most successful candidates selected contextual sources, or relevant cultural and historical material with clear relevance to their personal intentions and themes. These sources were not simply referenced but interrogated, analysed, and critically discussed, with candidates identifying specific aspects of style, technique, or content that resonated with their own emerging ideas.

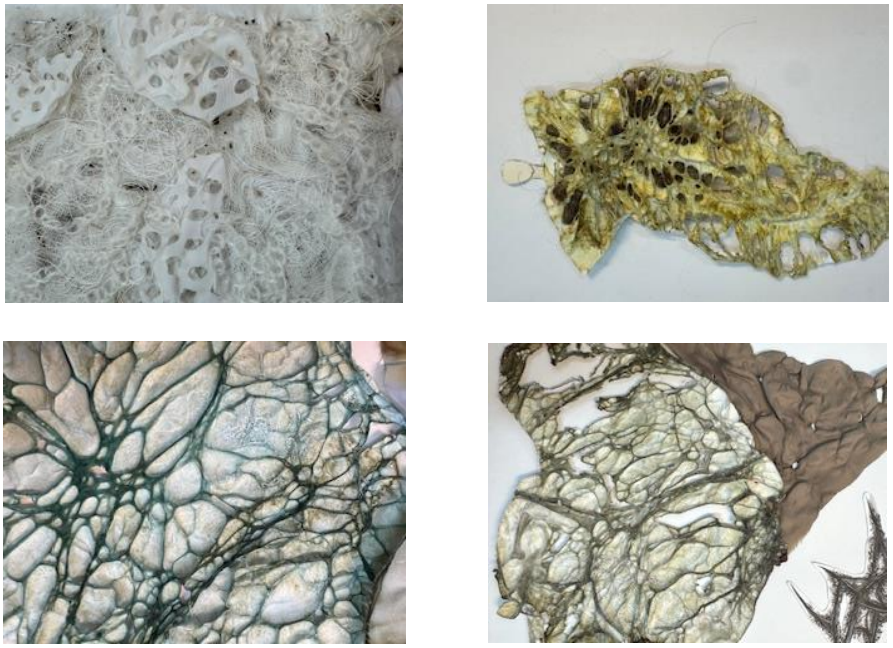
Where AO1 was particularly strong, candidates integrated their contextual research into their creative journey, revisiting it as ideas developed and using it to inform both conceptual and practical decisions. For example, moderators noted candidates who explored an artist's manipulation of materials or thematic concerns, then tested how similar approaches could be adapted or challenged within their own work. The most successful demonstrated depth of enquiry - research was purposeful, reflected upon, and continuously referenced throughout investigations.

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On occasion, moderators identified where contextual study became formulaic. Some candidates selected artists, designers and craftspeople as a cohort, resulting in superficial engagement and uniformed responses where research bore little relationship to the candidates' chosen direction. In these cases, annotations tended to be descriptive accounts or biographical information, lacking critical reflection or analysis. Where this occurred, moderators reported that personal engagement was noticeably absent, and candidates struggled to develop a meaningful understanding of the contextual sources. This frequently led to work where the contextual study had minimal impact on the development of ideas or outcomes.

Moderators noted that candidates who fully met AO2, successfully engaged in the thoughtful exploration of materials, techniques, and processes. These candidates selected resources with clear reference to their intentions and demonstrated an ability to experiment, review, and refine their ideas across a sustained period of time. Evidence of review and refinement was often presented through sketchbooks, work journals and visual diaries, where candidates documented trials with annotation explaining what was successful, what was not, and how this influenced subsequent ways of working.

Where AO2 was strongest, candidates demonstrated a cycle of exploration and reflection: they tested materials and processes in a purposeful way, reflected on outcomes critically, and refined approaches in response to these reflections.



Examples of sophisticated experimentation and creative making within Textile Design. Here, we see the candidate is pursuing the creative potential of materials.

In contrast, on occasion, moderators observed where candidates explored familiar media, minimising creative risk-taking or conducted wide-ranging experiments as a cohort without reflection or purpose. At times, some candidates presented experiments that failed to contribute to the overall development of the investigation, with no evidence of critical selection or refinement. Others tried too many techniques in a superficial way, failing to develop or improve upon initial ideas. Additionally, some candidates presented accomplished final outcomes without showing the process of review and refinement that led to them and as a result, limited the evidence available for AO2.

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AO3 was most effectively evidenced when candidates produced purposeful, high-quality recordings directly linked to their creative intentions. Moderators commented favourably on candidates who used a range of methods - including drawing, photography, digital manipulation, mixed media studies, and written reflection - to record both visual and conceptual ideas.

The most successful candidates demonstrated technical skill in their recording but also showed discernment in selecting methods that were best suited to their project. For example, candidates used expressive sketches to capture movement, tonal studies to explore mood and experimental photography to investigate light and composition. These recordings went beyond technical exercises, serving as exploratory tools within the creative process to fuel ideas. Moderators particularly noted where candidates reflected on their recordings — discussing what they revealed, how they related to the project theme and intentions, and how they informed further decisions.

Where candidates where less successful, they tended to rely heavily on secondary sourced materials, replicating images without critical engagement or acknowledgment of how these supported their intentions. At times, moderators observed a lack of reflection, with candidates failing to comment on their progress or consider how their observations might guide their next steps.

Moderators reported that AO4 was best demonstrated in outcomes that clearly emerged from a coherent creative journey, evidenced across all assessment objectives. In successful submissions, final pieces were not isolated artefacts but the culmination of a sustained process of investigation, curiosity, experimentation, and reflection. These candidates presented work that was both technically proficient and conceptually strong, with a personal voice evident in the way ideas were resolved and communicated.



A strong example of resolved ideas in the form of packaging within Graphic Communication. Here, we see that the packaging is refined and confidently executed by the candidate.

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Where AO4 was less successful, moderators observed outcomes that were either unresolved, lacking coherence, or disconnected from the developmental process. At times, some final pieces were presented as stand-alone works, with little evidence of the journey that led to their creation. Additionally, candidates who prioritised technique over meaning sometimes produced visually accomplished work that lacked conceptual depth, indicating a misunderstanding of the holistic nature of AO4.

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COMPONENT 2: EXTERNALLY SET ASSIGNMENT

Overview of the Component

During centre visits, moderators observed a broad and often ambitious range of work produced by candidates in response to the Externally Set Assignment starting points. In general, assessment objectives were covered consistently, although the strongest submissions demonstrated a clearer depth of thought, experimentation, and resolution. Whilst Component 2 is a more concise unit than Component 1, moderators found that many candidates approached the brief with enthusiasm and a high level of personal engagement.

Moderators saw many examples of thoughtful and personal engagement with the Externally Set Assignment. Candidates frequently explored starting points in imaginative and individual ways, often extending these to focus on personal interests, cultural identity, or social themes to shape responses. Where work was strongest, candidates demonstrated an informed use of contextual sources, critically engaging with practitioners and clearly articulating their influence on the development of ideas. There was also widespread evidence of confident handling of media and materials, with candidates experimenting with a broad range of techniques, processes, and approaches. Final outcomes were often ambitious in concept and scale, and, in the majority of cases, closely aligned to the candidate's original intentions.

Moderators also noted that in some submissions, contextual research lacked depth. In these cases, too many sources were explored with limited critical engagement, resulting in weaker connections to the candidate's own work. At times, experimentation was not always purposeful, with some projects showing little evidence of refinement or critical review before moving to a final outcome. Where time was poorly managed, outcomes occasionally appeared rushed or unresolved.

Recommendations and Future Considerations for Centres

- Support candidates in making purposeful and selective use of contextual sources, avoiding breadth at the expense of depth.
- Promote experimentation that is intentional and reflective, with clear opportunities for review and refinement throughout the creative process.
- Develop candidates' ability to record ideas and observations in varied, relevant, and insightful ways, using drawing, photography, annotation, and other methods to support intentions.
- Emphasise the importance of coherence across the project - from initial starting points through to developed outcomes, ensuring each stage of the process informs the next.

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Comments on individual questions/sections

Within AO1, there was widespread evidence that candidates had engaged meaningfully with contextual sources to inform their project development. In many cases, candidates began with well-chosen starting points and sustained focused investigations, often making references to both contemporary and historical practitioners. Moderators noted that stronger candidates demonstrated critical understanding by analysing rather than simply describing the work of others. This was particularly evident where candidates made explicit links between artists' practices and their own creative decisions.

Candidates explored a range of disciplines beyond their own, with examples including a Textile Design candidate exploring the work of painters, and Photography candidates referencing sculptors and installation artists. Gallery visits and independent research played a vital role in the development of ideas for many candidates, and in some cases, responses tackled broader personal or social issues—such as cultural identity, climate change, and mental health.

However, on occasion, moderator noted that candidates explored too many artists within the time constraints of Component 2. Where this was seen, it often led to weaker development and less time for refinement and the production of outcomes.

Moderators reported that a generally confident and varied use of media and materials was seen across AO2. Most candidates engaged in wide-ranging experimentation, with both digital and physical media being explored. Drawing and painting were particularly well represented, often supported by processes such as collage, printmaking, mixed media construction, textile manipulation, and photography. Digital edits were also commonly used, particularly in Graphic Communication and Photography submissions.

The most effective submissions showed refinement through a purposeful selection of materials that enhanced candidate's intentions. Moderators commented that on many occasions, candidates built on their existing skills. In Photography and Textile Design, for example, techniques previously developed during Component 1 were successfully adapted and extended in Component 2. This continuity supported stronger outcomes.

However, moderators also noted that some candidates did not always develop or refine their ideas fully before moving to their final outcomes. This was often due to a lack of time management or an over-emphasis on initial experimentation without critical reflection. In such cases, outcomes lacked coherence or felt disconnected from earlier investigations.

The recording of observations and insights within AO3, varied across centres. Stronger candidates demonstrated clear, purposeful use of drawing, photography, and annotation to support and clarify their intentions. First-hand photography was a key strength, particularly in responses to topics such as *Transportation* and *Plethora*, where candidates used still life or utilised urban environments to inform their work.

In higher-attaining submissions, there was a clear visual and written dialogue throughout sketchbook and preparatory work. Candidates documented their progress, reflected critically on developments, and made informed decisions to refine their approach. Some recorded personal thoughts and responses to their chosen theme, enhancing the individuality of their projects.

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In contrast, some candidates relied heavily on secondary sources or used drawing in a limited manner, rather than to investigate and inform ideas. Moderators noted that opportunities for "drawing for purpose" were missed in some cases, which impacted the quality of AO3.

In AO4, final outcomes were generally personal, thoughtful, and clearly rooted in the earlier stages of investigation and experimentation. In many cases, outcomes were ambitious—both in terms of scale and conceptual depth. Investigations often tackled themes such as cultural heritage, mental wellbeing, and environmental issues as lines of enquiry moved beyond the Component 2 starting points.

Where AO4 was strongest, there was a clear visual thread connecting research, development, and resolution. However, at times, candidates struggled to fully resolve their outcomes, particularly where time had not been managed effectively or where excessive time had been spent on researching multiple artists, designers and craftspeople. A number of moderators remarked that it was not always clear what work had been completed during the 15-hour supervised period. In these instances, outcomes felt underdeveloped or disconnected from the rest of the project journey.

Component 2: starting points and trends

Candidates responded to a wide range of questions from the Externally Set Assignment paper, with some clear favourites emerging across centres. The most popular themes included:

- **Roots**: Explored both in a literal sense (trees, plant structures) and metaphorically (family heritage, cultural identity). Some candidates successfully blended both approaches.
- **Transportation**: Frequently selected across a wide range of candidates. Some submissions approached the theme in more conceptual ways, such as exploring airports as transitional spaces or visualising the human nervous system as a transport network.
- **Creatures**: Often led to imaginative, narrative-driven work, including fictional or hybrid animal designs. Some submissions ventured into character development or explored the boundaries between human and animal forms.
- **Decipher** – Particularly favoured by graphic design candidates, this theme encouraged more abstract, conceptual thinking. Submissions explored themes of communication, hidden meaning, code, and visual interpretation through a variety of media.

Moderators commented positively on the personal nature of many submissions and the speed with which candidates were able to make meaningful decisions about their chosen starting point. This was often supported by prompt primary research and a willingness to experiment early in the process.

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Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.
Tel: 029 2240 4304
Email: artanddesign@eduqas.co.uk
Qualification webpage: A Level Art and Design | Eduqas

See other useful contacts here: Useful Contacts | Eduqas

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