GCSE Examiners' Report

Art and Design

GCSE

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 unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and component level. 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.
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Executive Summary

The 2025 series saw candidates engage thoughtfully with the portfolio component, demonstrating a clear, methodical approach aligned with assessment objectives. Most centres adopted a structured curriculum, typically beginning with foundational skills in Year 10 and progressing to a sustained project in Year 11. This approach supported strong coverage of all assessment objectives with candidates showcasing a broad range of materials and techniques, including both traditional and digital media. Gallery visits and first-hand research enriched the work and deepened contextual understanding.

Compared to 2024, there was a noticeable reduction in the volume of work submitted, with most centres focusing on a single, sustained project. Component 2, the externally set assignment often yielded more individualised and resolved outcomes, suggesting that greater autonomy fosters stronger personal responses.

Candidates demonstrated confident experimentation and media control, particularly in AO2. However, AO3 was less consistently evidenced, with some submissions lacking clear idea development or final design planning. AO4 outcomes were strongest when candidates made deliberate, imaginative choices that reflected their creative journey.

Key areas for Portfolio development
- Encouraging more personal and meaningful responses to strengthen AO1 and AO4.
- Enhancing contextual analysis beyond surface-level artist research.
- More opportunities for sustained refinement AO2.
- Increasing the use of first-hand observation AO3.
- Improving planning and presentation of final outcomes.

The ESA component demonstrated more focused, personal, and meaningful responses compared to the portfolio. Candidates engaged purposefully with themes such as Me, Light and Dark, and Habitat, producing lively and authentic outcomes. A structured creative process beginning with contextual research, followed by experimentation, recording, and final resolution was seen in many centres.

Compared to 2024, the ESA encouraged greater individuality and depth, though some centres noted reduced volume of work and repetition between component 1 and component 2. Time constraints occasionally impacted refinement and technical execution. Strengths of the ESA included strong personal engagement and individuality seen in AO1 and AO4, balanced AO coverage, and effective use of primary research and digital photography seen in AO3.

Key areas for ESA development
- Deeper, sustained experimentation and refinement (AO2)
- Greater use of drawing for development (AO1/AO2)
- More integrated and analytical contextual research (AO1)
- Stronger critical reflection and review throughout the process (AO3/AO4)
- Improved time management to support outcome quality (AO4)
- Encouragement of creative risk-taking with technical control

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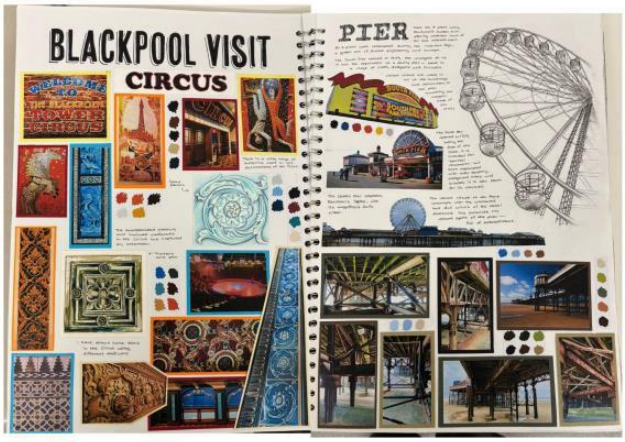
COMPONENT 1: PORTFOLIO

Overview of the Component

Candidates in the 2025 series generally engaged well with the portfolio component, demonstrating thoughtful responses. There was a clear, consistent, and methodical approach to addressing assessment objectives through a "journey" style of enquiry. Many centres adopted a well-structured curriculum, often beginning with foundational skill development in Year 10 before progressing to a main, sustained project in Year 11 culminating in a resolved final outcome. Most centres completed either one or two projects. Overall, all AOs were generally met clearly and effectively, supported by this structured delivery. A good breadth of work and skills was shown, with a strong range of materials used. Gallery visits and trips were a highlight, enriching content and supporting first-hand research.



Example (above).

Portfolio Submission
An effective use of a school trip/gallery visit to enrich the submission by inspiring creative innovation and gathering firsthand visual references, supporting both idea development (AO1) and observational recording (AO3).

Candidates across various disciplines demonstrated a broad spectrum of artistic skills, topics, and content in their work. A strong emphasis was placed on drawing, often used purposefully for observation and idea development, and photography, frequently employed for primary research and digital manipulation. Many submissions showcased a variety of traditional and contemporary artistic skills, including painting, printmaking (lino, mono, screen, etching), ceramics, sculpture (paper, card, plaster, 3D printing), textile techniques (felting, embroidery, fabric manipulation, dyeing, digital patterns), and mixed media experimentation. Digital tools, particularly Photoshop for photography and various apps for design, were widely utilised to develop ideas and refine outcomes.

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The topics explored were diverse, often reflecting personal relevance and individual interests. Popular themes included natural forms (animals, plants, sea), identity (self-portraiture, personal journeys, "Me"), and locality. Other recurring topics encompassed architecture, still life, mental health, environmental awareness, and even specific industries. While some centres guided students with common starting points like "Nature" or "Light and Dark," the most engaging work emerged when candidates pursued self-expression and individual projects.

In terms of content, there was clear evidence of idea development through sketchbooks, which often featured contextual research, artist analysis, and annotated sketches. Stronger work demonstrated a higher level of critical analysis and a clear connection between research and personal outcomes, leading to more refined and individual responses. While some projects showed repetition, greater candidate autonomy fostered more explorative and unique submissions.

Comparison with 2024

- Project Quantity: There was a noticeable decrease in the amount of work submitted for the portfolio, with a significant drop in the number of centres producing multiple projects compared to previous years. Most centres focused on one sustained project after an introductory unit.
- Structure: The approach was more structured than in previous years, with many centres focusing on a multitude of artist led workshops to guide candidates. This could often be dictated too much by the centre.
- Recording of ideas: Compared to previous years, AO3 was not always as evident. For many, a lack of a final design plan or ideas page, led to unresolved ideas.
- Independent responses: While some aspects were more structured, the ESA was felt to have stronger outcomes due to greater candidate choice and diversity of titles, suggesting more individualism, compared to the portfolio projects.

Key Concepts Arising from Responses

- Structured, group-led projects, which provided support, can limit creative independence in producing personal outcomes.
- Sustained investigations: Centres sometimes encouraged multiple themes, which sometimes resulted in a lack of depth, and limited sustained investigation. Conversely, focusing on a single, well-chosen theme allowed for deeper exploration and more cohesive work.
- Balancing Technical Proficiency and Creative Ambition: While individuality of intent was a strength in some cases, the technical quality of the work did not always match the ambition of the enquiry, particularly in final outcomes.
- Process-Led Approach: Many candidates demonstrated confident experimentation, effective control of media, and a clear willingness to review and refine their work– reflecting a strong, process-led approach. In contrast, where experimentation was more superficial, this often resulted in a lack of confident insight, which in turn led to ideas remaining underdeveloped or unresolved.
- Importance of First-Hand Research: The value of primary sources (e.g., observational drawing, personal photography, gallery visits) was highlighted as crucial for authenticity and depth, though its consistent application varied.

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Key Points for Further Development

- Fostering Personal and Meaningful Responses (AO1 and AO4): Providing candidates with greater autonomy in selecting their own themes, sources, and artist references can promote more authentic idea development and enable more personal and meaningful final outcomes. This was evident in the ESA component.
- Enhancing Contextual Analysis (AO1): Candidates should be encouraged to develop levels of artist research beyond surface-level biographical details. This approach better supports the development of personal intentions and ensures that research meaningfully informs the creative process.
- Strengthen Refinement and Development (AO2): While initial experimentation is strong, candidates needed sustained review and refinement, particularly in the penultimate phase of projects, to consolidate technical skills and ensure ideas are fully explored.
- Enhance First-Hand Observation (AO3): There is a need for more direct, first-hand observational drawing and use of personal photographs to support studies, rather than relying solely on copied or internet-sourced imagery.
- Improve Final Outcome Planning (AO4): Candidates often rushed the planning for final outcomes. More thought is needed on how the final piece will be viewed and presented, ensuring it coherently reflects the development journey and fully realises intentions with imagination and sophistication.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 Critical Understanding

Candidates explored a wide range of personally relevant contextual sources.
Effective and meaningful journeys were informed by chosen inspirations.
Good and mostly appropriate contextual inspiration was seen, with some visits supporting critical understanding.
Artist analysis and references were strong in most centres, with comparisons made regularly.
Some candidates focused highly personal journeys.

AO2 Creative Making

Candidates experimented with a wide range of materials and techniques, often through class workshops.
Effective thumbnailing was used for refinement processes, strengthening evidence.
Confident experimentation and control of media were evident.
Willingness to review and refine work was seen, leading to more resolved outcomes.
A good range of processes of making were explored, enriching open-minded experimentation.

AO3 Reflective Recording

Candidates were often prolific in their production of reflective annotations.
An increasing number of candidates employed visual diagrams alongside annotations to record ideas.
Primary source photography was used to record ideas and observations, diversifying assessment opportunities.
Drawing for purpose was fully utilised, and there was an improvement in the overall use of drawing.
Effective review and evaluation through annotations were consistently seen.

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AO4 Personal Presentation

Candidates created purposeful and meaningful outcomes for display.
An increasing number of candidates took the overall portfolio submission as an opportunity to present their responses, often with mini resolved outcomes embedded.
Final outcomes were generally a strength when candidates made thoughtful and deliberate choices regarding subject matter and preferred media.
Individuality of intent was a key strength across centres, especially when candidates branched off to explore themes in their own way.
Presentation in stronger submissions showed the sequence of development.

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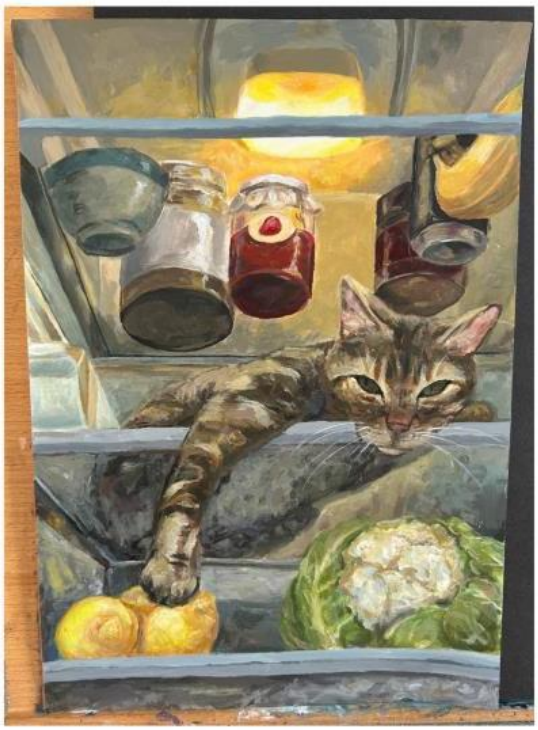
COMPONENT 2: EXTERNALLY SET ASSIGNMENT

Overview of the Component

The Externally Set Assignment generally demonstrated more focused and personal responses from candidates when compared to the portfolio. The shorter timeframe often prompted more direct and purposeful engagement with the chosen theme, supporting stronger outcomes across the assessment objectives. Many candidates showed a clear commitment to their individual creative journeys, resulting in work that was both lively and meaningful, particularly in relation to AO1 and AO4. Popular themes included Light and Dark, Me, Black and White, Habitat, Abundance, Kitchen Life, and Sky and Land. The assessment objectives were typically addressed through a structured creative process, beginning with contextual research and idea development (AO1), followed by media experimentation and refinement (AO2), informed visual and written recording (AO3), and culminating in more resolved and personal final outcomes (A04) that were noticeably improved from previous years.



Example (above).
'A confident outcome in response to the theme 'Kitchen Life', fully realising the candidate's intentions with clarity and personal relevance (AO4).

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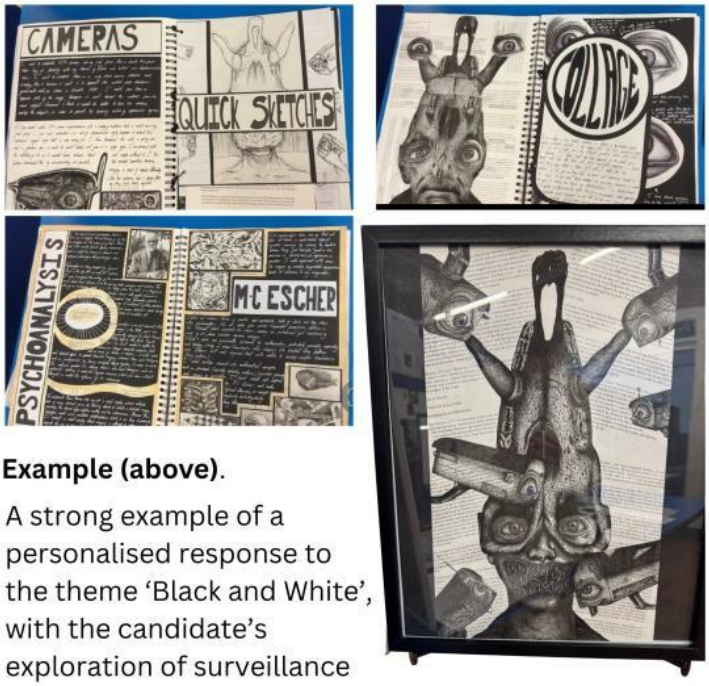
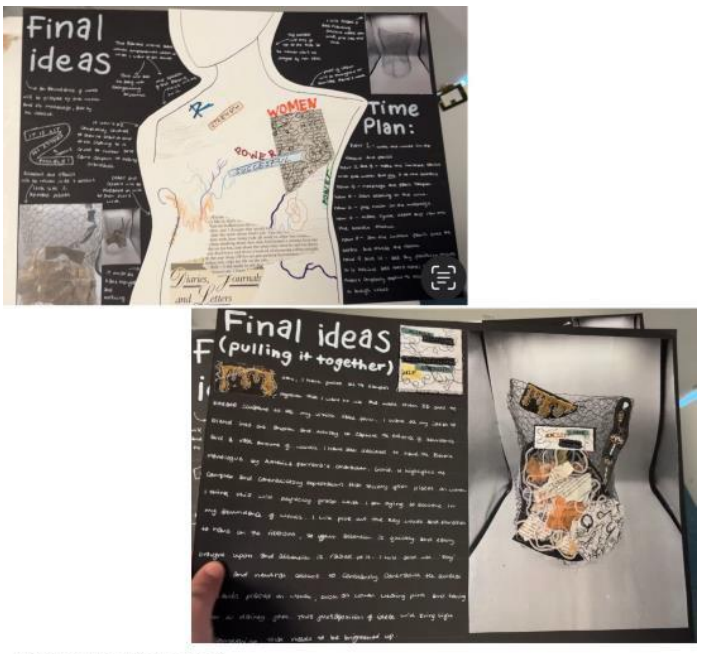


Example (above).

A strong example of a personalised response to the theme 'Black and White', with the candidate's exploration of surveillance showing clear idea development through purposeful drawing and compositional experimentation (AO1, AO2).



Example (above).

A well-developed personal response to the theme of abundance, showing sustained development and effective time management in refining the final idea, demonstrating strong technical discipline (AO2) and personal engagement (AO4).

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Comparisons with 2024

The ESA often led to more individual and personal outcomes than the portfolio, which some centres noted as a positive shift. Candidates seemed to relish the new project after the portfolio, with generally improved analysis of research and stronger experimentation. While the portfolio allowed for a broader scope, the ESA's condensed timeframe often resulted in greater depth in contextual source study and refinement of ideas. However, some observations indicated less work presented in the ESA this year compared to previous years, and in some cases, a lack of distinction between ESA and portfolio work, with candidates revisiting similar artists. Time constraints were frequently cited as a factor, with some candidates running out of time for full development or refined technical execution.

Key Concepts Arising from Responses

- Personalisation and Individuality
  Many candidates demonstrated a strong sense of personal engagement, particularly in response to themes such as Me. This led to more authentic and meaningful outcomes, with candidates often pursuing individual lines of inquiry that reflected their own identities, experiences, and interests. This was particularly effective in meeting AO1 and AO4.
- Structured Approach to AO Coverage
  Many centres adopted a clear and structured approach, often allocating specific sketchbook sections or pages to each assessment objective. This methodical planning supported candidates in addressing the full range of AOs with balanced coverage across the creative journey.
- Use of Primary Research
  Successful submissions often placed a strong emphasis on primary sources, including first-hand photographs and observational drawing. This supported authentic visual recording and strengthened the candidates' ability to analyse, reflect, and respond to their subject matter in a personal way, directly supporting AO3.
- Contextual Research and Application
  While contextual research was consistently present, the quality of engagement varied. Stronger candidates critically analysed artists' work and effectively applied relevant techniques and ideas within their own creative development. In contrast, some responses relied on replication or struggled to adapt complex artistic styles in a meaningful way, limiting the depth of investigation required for AO1.
- Time Management and Process
  Time constraints were a recurring challenge, often impacting the level of experimentation (AO2) and the refinement of outcomes (AO4). In some cases, this resulted in underdeveloped ideas or unfinished work, highlighting the need for more focused time planning throughout the ESA process.
- Integration of Digital Photography (AO3):
  Digital photography was widely used to support the recording and development of ideas. It served as an effective tool for primary research and visual documentation, particularly in meeting the requirements of AO3.

Key Points for further development:

- Depth of Experimentation and Refinement (AO2)
  AO2 continues to present the most challenge for many candidates. To strengthen achievement in this area, submissions need to move beyond initial material trials towards sustained, purposeful experimentation. Combining media, manipulating processes, and applying critical judgment in refining ideas are essential to demonstrate the depth required for reaching the higher tiers in the mark scheme.

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- Sustained Drawing for Development (AO1/AO2)
  While drawing was often used for recording, its role in idea development was less consistent. Emphasis on drawing as a developmental tool, exploring composition, form, and visual problem-solving, rather than progressing too quickly toward an outcome without sufficient exploration.
- Integrated Contextual Research (AO1)
  Contextual studies embedded into the development process. Candidates are encouraged to critically engage with relevant artists, designers, or movements and demonstrate how this research directly informs their own creative intentions. Surface-level or retrospective artist studies limit the impact of AO1.
- Ongoing Review and Critical Reflection (AO3/AO4)
  Although many candidates clearly articulated their intentions, the process of reviewing and refining ideas was not always evident. Stronger outcomes demonstrate more consistent critical analysis – comparing, contrasting, and evaluating decisions throughout the creative journey, particularly in the lead-up to the outcome/s. This supports higher achievement in both AO3 and AO4/
- Effective Time Management and AO Balance
  Well-paced structure can help prevent work becoming rushed or underdeveloped in later stages, particularly during refinement and outcome production.
- Creative Risk-Taking and Ambition in Outcomes (AO4)
  While many candidates demonstrated a willingness to take creative risks, some final outcomes lacked the technical control or ambition expected at this level. Mock-ups, trials, and risk-managed planning can foster innovative and personally significant responses without compromising technical quality.

Comments on individual questions/sections

AO1 many candidates began their projects with structured approaches such as mind maps, mood boards, and artist research. In stronger submissions, this initial work led to a well-developed and imaginative exploration of ideas. There was clear evidence of thoughtful engagement with chosen themes, and many candidates demonstrated an ability to make meaningful links between their research and their creative outcomes. The analysis of contextual sources showed noticeable improvement compared to Component 1, particularly in how candidates used research to inform and shape their intentions.

AO2 was a particular strength for many. Candidates showed confident use of materials and processes, often selecting media aligned with their personal strengths. In these cases, experimentation was purposeful and demonstrated a genuine exploration of ideas and techniques, which enriched the development of final outcomes.

AO3 there was evidence of progress compared to the portfolio. Candidates were generally able to articulate their rationale for choosing specific themes and sustained this through clear, reflective written commentary. This was effectively supported by personal photographs and observational drawings, which reinforced the development of ideas.

AO4 was often delivered with strength, especially where planning was thorough. Many outcomes were both personal and authentic, clearly reflecting the candidate's identity and interests. In more successful outcomes, there was also a confident use of visual language and a willingness to take creative risks, which led to more distinctive and resolved final pieces.

Despite a number of strengths, there remain key areas for development to ensure more consistent performance across the assessment objectives. The following observations reflect common patterns found across the Externally Set Assignment submissions:

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AO1 In a number of submissions, the depth and relevance of contextual research were limited. Artist studies were occasionally tokenistic or included retrospectively, with minimal impact on the development of personal ideas. A tendency to rely on familiar artists from Component 1 often led to repetitive responses and reduced opportunities for originality or risk-taking. Candidates would benefit from more critical engagement with artists' methods, media, and conceptual intentions, ensuring that contextual understanding actively informs creative development, in line with higher-level descriptors.

AO2 was frequently the least securely addressed objective. In weaker responses, candidates presented limited evidence of sustained experimentation or purposeful refinement. This was often characterised by small-scale samples, tracing, or superficial media trials with little evidence of exploration or combining techniques. Development through media and process lacked the iterative, reflective approach expected in the upper mark bands. Candidates can benefit from in-depth exploration of materials, processes, and techniques, and show a willingness to refine and adapt work based on discoveries made during the creative journey.

AO3 While intentions were generally articulated, the level of critical reflection and refinement was inconsistent. In many cases, annotation was descriptive rather than analytical, with limited evidence of comparison, evaluation, or self-assessment. As a result, some submissions lacked the depth of insight and purposeful documentation required for higher marks. Stronger submissions demonstrated more sophisticated observation through photography, drawing, and commentary, that directly informed the development and refinement of ideas.

AO4 Final outcomes in weaker submissions often lacked individuality and resolution. These pieces sometimes closely mirrored the work of researched artists, suggesting underdeveloped personal intent in earlier stages. A lack of planning, particularly in relation to composition, media choice, and visual impact, hindered the successful realisation of ideas. Stronger responses demonstrated coherence between preparatory work and final outcomes, showing clarity of purpose and personal relevance, consistent with the descriptors for higher attainment in AO4.

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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.
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Email: artanddesign@eduqas.co.uk
Qualification webpage: GCSE Art and Design | Eduqas

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