# A-LEVEL
# ART AND DESIGN

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Report on the Examination

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**General**

The variety and quality of work seen in schools and colleges was a genuine celebration of student achievement. The highest levels of engagement and enjoyment of art and design were seen in creative outcomes and in student endeavour, inspired and nurtured by the expertise and dedication of art teachers.

Changes to Teacher Standardisation meetings, including additional examples of work awarded high marks and more time available for marking, were welcomed by teachers. There was generous feedback for the AQA specification, support material, CPD courses and for the range of starting points provided in ESA question papers. Moderators reported that marking in the majority of schools and colleges was broadly in line with AQA standards.

At AS, the majority of portfolios included at least one extended personal project supported by additional material from the earlier part of the course. At A-level, successful students worked independently and in depth, demonstrating their knowledge, understanding and skills. Successful students engaged with ideas and had both clear intentions and sense of purpose when working towards realising their intentions.

The A-level Personal Investigation is an in-depth investigation into an idea, issue, concept or theme. Students should demonstrate their abilities to develop a sustained line of reasoning from an initial starting point to realisation in finished work. The Personal Investigation is not a portfolio and should not include unrelated additional work such as introductory tasks and assignments. Where students include work produced earlier in the course, it must be directly relevant to the Personal Investigation and assessed to the AQA A-level standards.

There were many interesting and rewarding examples of the required written material in the Personal Investigation in which students demonstrated their understanding of the four Assessment Objectives (AOs). Successful examples provided a rationale for the practical work and clarified the focus of the investigation. Analytical and critical understanding was evident when students explained their choices and decisions when developing and refining ideas, and when reflecting on their own work and that produced by others. A small minority of students produced written material in which there was no connection with the practical work. Requirements for the written material can be found on page 11 of the specification.

Practical work was often supported by meaningful and concise annotation which provided additional evidence of the AOs and gave valuable insight into students' ideas and intentions. A number of submissions included unnecessarily lengthy annotation when more evidence of practical work would have been appropriate.

The four AOs are not a methodology and should not be interpreted as a linear progression. They are different strands of the processes involved in investigating, developing and refining ideas, and realising intentions. In some schools and colleges, students followed the AOs in numerical order which imposed an artificial constraint on the natural progression of their work. The AOs are inter-dependent and overlap.

**AO1**

Successful students were able to demonstrate their abilities to produce sustained and focused investigations in which their intentions were clear.  The ability to develop ideas in a coherent manner was a significant feature of the most successful work and impacted on all four assessment objectives. The best examples were thoughtful, personal and organised investigations conducted with a genuine spirit of enquiry.

The majority of teachers provided students with a stimulating choice of starting points.  These included broad open-ended ideas, themes based on the natural and built environment, natural processes such as decay or growth, and issues which effect society and young people today. Some teachers used or adapted starting points from previous years' Externally Set Assignment question papers.  Where students produced their own starting points, they did not always provide sufficient scope for the investigation and development of ideas.

Students began their investigations in various ways.  Some students resourced their work with fieldwork, recording initial observations in sketches, drawings and photography.  Others found objects, specimens or other materials for their starting point, then investigated contextual sources relevant to their investigation.  Many students identified a starting point and began their investigations by exploring work by relevant artists.

Successful students were genuinely inspired by their investigations into relevant works by artists, designers or photographers.  References to contextual sources helped students to consider ideas and approaches and informed their understanding of formal elements.  Looking at work by others helped students to consider different ways of responding to their chosen starting point and enabled them to develop their own personal language when developing their ideas.  Students who understood the purpose and value of investigating contextual sources selected and referred to relevant examples for a variety of reasons at appropriate points as their work progressed.

Occasionally, there was only a tenuous connection between the examples chosen and students' investigations.  Contextual material had little relevance to, or impact on, the students' own work.  A minority of teachers provided all their students with a set of contextual sources with little regard to the starting points chosen by students and to the independent nature of the investigation.  A number of less successful students downloaded copious images from websites such as Pinterest, showing little evidence of understanding, purpose or selection.

Some students learned from producing visual analytical studies which contributed to their understanding and helped them to develop their own personal language.  However, it is not a specification requirement to produce copies of work by other artists.  For many students, producing copies and their own interpretations *in the style of,* proved to be time-consuming and, to the detriment of the work, often resulted in outcomes that were pastiches.  Some students were so over-burdened with copying works by others that they had little time left to produce sufficient evidence of developing and refining their ideas.  Where students were unable to apply the knowledge they had gained, copies were significantly more accomplished and controlled than students' own original work.

Successful sketchbooks, workbooks and mounted sheets of studies provided clear evidence of initial investigations and the development of ideas.  Some students prepared sketchbook pages, laying down grounds on which to work. Title pages decorated with illustrated lettering and pages embellished with colour washes were not uncommon. In a number of examples, these were poorly executed and an untidy distraction.

Evidence of analytical and critical understanding was provided in students' understanding and responses to contextual and other sources, in the choices and decisions made as their work progressed and in making meaningful connections between images. Successful students provided evidence of learning from work produced by others.

## AO2

In the majority of schools and colleges, students were able to demonstrate their abilities to select appropriate resources and to explore materials, techniques and processes that were appropriate to their intentions. The development and application of skills was important. It was clear in the most successful work that students understood how to use their knowledge and experience to refine or improve their ideas by managing materials, refining techniques, improving compositions or layouts, clarifying details and resolving problems. Refining ideas is often the least understood element of this AO.

Evidence of refining ideas was seen in the focused and purposeful exploration and handling of materials, and in working drawings, colour studies, thumbnail sketches and diagrams, fashion drawings, design roughs and scamps, maquettes and models. A sequence of images or a series of studies provided evidence of how the various elements of an idea or image were manipulated, altered and refined.

Drawing, painting and printmaking, photography, digital and electronic media, embroidery and machine stitching, motion graphics, projection and reprographics, film, video and mixed-media were explored purposefully and successfully. There were more examples of successful monoprints, relief prints, drypoint etchings and collagraphs this year. Relief printing and using inferior materials, which were generally undertaken by less successful students, often had no other purpose than to provide evidence of an additional medium.

In textiles design, students produced samplers in which they explored a variety of materials, processes and techniques including dyeing, print and stitch, and combinations of traditional textile media, plastics, foils and industrial materials. Colour combinations and tonal values were explored using watercolour, acrylic paint, gouache and computer software. The shape, form and surface design of garments were refined through the exploration of materials, and in fashion drawings using fineliner, line and wash, and gouache, occasionally incorporating skilfully handled collage to represent folds and creases. In the best examples, finishing skills were important.

Good examples included one student who produced large charcoal and ink drawings and explored various ways of using resins, wire, withies, wood, slate and metal, to refine their ideas for large three-dimensional work based on spiders. A sculptural garment design based on sea-life incorporated fusible film, liquid plastic and freehand embroidery on a crinoline base. An investigation into the human spine included exploration of two- and three-dimensional media. Wire, willow, duct tape, plastic, card and found materials were used effectively and a series of maquettes led to large sculptures.

Where successful students used electronic media, evidence was provided in images which clearly documented key stages in refining the chosen idea, recording the changes, adjustments and improvements made by manipulating an image or design. In graphic communication, less successful students provided insufficient evidence of their abilities to refine or improve their chosen ideas. The importance of margins was not always understood in graphic work.

There was less evidence of gratuitous experimentation this year. Broadly, there was more evidence that exploration was selective, focusing on what students needed to discover in order to successfully hone their skills, refine their ideas and realise their intentions.

Less successful students demonstrated various levels of understanding and skill when managing and handling materials and techniques. There was often little or no evidence of refining ideas. However, in some schools and colleges, even the least successful students were able to demonstrate some understanding of how to refine their ideas.

**AO3**

Confident and assured recording skills enabled successful students to investigate and respond to source material, in depth. Some very accomplished drawing was seen. Students used a wide variety of materials, techniques and methods to record ideas, observations and insights, and provided evidence of reflection on their work and progress.

It is important that students record their ideas and observations in ways that are appropriate to their intentions. For example; carefully produced sketches and diagrams, hand-drawn or using computer software, providing evidence of recording the planning of photoshoots and studio lighting, and documenting ideas for installations, page layouts, packaging, surface designs, ceramics and product design.

In photography, the most successful students demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of manual settings by recording aperture, ISO and exposure. Contact-sheets provided a record of multiple photoshoots and documented selection. Evidence of how and why images were manipulated was provided in successful work. In some examples, contact sheets were printed too small or not printed clearly. Where students did not include contact sheets, they were unable to successfully demonstrate the process of selecting images.

Recording in drawing and students' own photography most often provided the starting points for investigations and source material for the development of ideas. Loose, expressive drawings produced on location provided the inspiration for sustained and refined studies produced in the art room or studio. Analytical studies from natural, manufactured and found materials, provided evidence of students' abilities to record observations in a sustained and focused manner. Working drawings facilitated planning and the production of paintings and sculpture.

Successful practical work provided evidence of how students reflected critically on their work and progress in the way that an idea or image led to another. Critical reflection was evident in the choices and decisions made when selecting an image or part-image, an alternative eye-level or viewpoint, working on a different scale, or using a different medium or technique. Most students provided additional evidence in written materials.

In less successful examples of graphic communication, students recorded a series of related ideas that provided evidence of development across the series, but with no evidence of how the chosen idea was either developed or refined towards the finished outcome.

**AO4**

Students were encouraged to choose their preferred subjects, sources and ideas.  Responses were based on familiar or less familiar surroundings, on experiences, or from close observation of things seen.  Some students responded to contemporary issues and topics of concern. Responses to gender issues, the dangers of social media, self-image, ageing, politics and conflict, often revealed sensitivity, contextual understanding and students' abilities to communicate visually.

Successful students were able to develop their own visual language which enabled them to make a personal and meaningful response.  Intentions were realised at various points during the progress of their work, such as in a working drawing or completion of a sheet of design ideas, as well as in the finished outcome. Less successful work was usually fragmented and disjointed. There was little connection between visual and other elements, and less evidence of understanding and skills.

Students realised their intentions in accomplished portrait paintings and sculpture, in representational and abstract landscapes, in mixed-media and relief work, as well as light projection and large formal abstractions.  Engaging examples of sculpture and printmaking were seen.

In successful examples of installation, students demonstrated understanding of contextual sources and careful consideration was given to providing evidence of all four AOs.  Assemblages of found objects were occasionally underpinned by in-depth research which demonstrated awareness, skill and reflection when developing ideas and realising intentions in thoughtful and considered outcomes.  Less successful, and occasionally awarded high marks by teachers, were assemblages and constructions using found materials in which there was insufficient evidence of understanding and skills when investigating, developing, refining and realising ideas, and when managing appropriate materials, processes and techniques.

Skilful illustrations using traditional and digital media and inspired designs for posters, book covers, print, packaging and promotional material were seen.  High standards of presentation and understanding of formal elements were evident in successful responses.  Accomplished examples of branding included identification graphics and logo design, promotional material, motion graphics and designs for apps and websites.

Traditional, unusual and recycled materials were used in textiles to produce garments, fashion accessories, wall hangings and a variety of installations.  Wallpaper designs based on natural objects and intricate geometrical designs were seen alongside embroidered and printed fabrics for furnishings and interiors.  Machine and hand stitch was used to create skilful, free-flowing textiles illustrations based on seascapes and rock formations.  There were many examples of imaginative and creative fashion designs.

Successful examples of jewellery, ceramics, product design and architectural models demonstrated students' understanding of context, function and aesthetics.  Rigorous investigations into ideas and materials resulted in well-conceived ideas and skilfully produced outcomes.  In the best examples, students were able to demonstrate their awareness and understanding of the codes and conventions in design, informed by investigations into relevant contextual sources.

In photography, traditional, digital and electronic media were used to realise intentions in a single image or in a series of related images.  Less successful were outcomes in which students produced sets of unrelated images.  Some students produced short films.  A number of students realised their intentions in reliefs, installations and three-dimensional outcomes.  In some

examples, the understanding and skills evident in students' photography were more successful than the three-dimensional finished work.  In several schools and colleges, teachers were generous when awarding marks to issues-based work in which students presented evidence of a personal response but demonstrated less confident photography skills.

It is important that students understand the need to be selective in work they submit for assessment.  It is also important that students present their work in a manner which reflects the nature of the title, particularly in photography and graphic communication.  High standards of presentation were seen in the majority of submissions.

There was improvement in the organisation and presentation of electronic files.  In the best submissions, students presented their work in folders that were organised in a logical sequence and labelled clearly.  In photography, well organised evidence of photoshoots, contacts and edits, enabled moderators to identify and understand students' intentions and the development of their ideas.

**Administration, marking and moderation**

In most schools and colleges, marks were received by the deadline of 31 May.  Teachers and moderators welcomed the introduction of e-subs.  Candidate Record Forms (CRFs) and Centre Declaration Sheets (CDSs) were not always completed before the moderation visit.  Some CRFs were not signed by the teacher(s), some did not match the work displayed and there were some transcriptional errors between the CRFs and e-subs. Teachers' comments on the CRFs were often very helpful.

Preparation for moderation visits was generally very good. Samples were displayed as an exhibition or presented in folders. Displays were most often considered, carefully organised and effective, where space permitted.  Large, heavy portfolios, work piled on the floor, and the lack of a suitable work surface, hampered moderation.

Labelling was usually clear, but there were exceptions.  Work displayed on walls or panels was not always identified clearly.  Where different components produced by a student were displayed together, it was not always a straightforward task to identify which work belonged to which component. It was most helpful when different sets of work were separated clearly.

Although it is not a requirement, the majority of teachers organised the samples in rank order, which aided the moderation process.

Most moderators were provided with a quiet, private space to work in. Teachers are reminded that moderation is a confidential process and the moderator must not be asked to mark work in public thoroughfares.

Moderators commented on the positive approach of teachers to the moderation process and to the warm reception they received in the majority of schools and colleges. However, there were occasions when they felt under pressure to reveal marks, which they cannot do.

Understanding of the assessment objectives resulted in accurate marking. Problems generally occurred when teachers awarded their best student high marks when a lower mark was more appropriate. Many teachers commented on the value of standardisation meetings where

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successful examples of work at different levels of achievement can be seen. Erratic marking was often linked to non-attendance at these meetings.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.