DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Paper 9481/01
Portfolio

Key messages

- Learners are encouraged to develop visual language skills as a tool for communication.
- Learners are encouraged to avoid an over reliance on text in what is essentially a visual qualification.
- Higher scoring scripts were seen to combine personal creative expression with a mature and sophisticated approach to critical analysis.

General comments

A varied set of responses were seen during this examination window, including photography, video, illustration, 3D Modelling and magazine design. In some cases, candidates provided an index at the beginning of their supporting studies and in some centres, these appeared to be identical among candidates. Whilst it is helpful to guide candidates, there is a risk that marks could be constrained where candidates remain limited to a set content. Among higher scoring scripts, candidates typically formed the direction of their own enquiry. Among video responses, candidates often provided evidence of improved editing skills in comparison to previous series. They also often provided screenshots of the editing process and timeline which was useful in illustrating the development of the candidate's work. Among lower scoring responses, this evidence was frequently limited which tended to frustrate marks in AO2 and AO3, even when a strong proposal was evident. Where some candidates developed initial ideas, their work could have benefited from more evidence of a consideration of the constraints of the project. Higher marks could also have been achieved with an improved focus on critical understanding and a refinement of final ideas.

Some candidates chose very personal projects and reflected on friends or family as starting points. Scripts which achieved higher marks were able to use this initial work to develop projects whilst also reflecting on the work of other artists and designers. Lower scoring scripts would have been improved by focusing on recording, exploring, developing, and producing. This would avoid the risk of marks being significantly limited in some of the assessment objectives. For example, where the examiners noted very limited evidence of reviewing and refining work, it could be difficult to find reward in AO2.

Many lower scoring scripts focussed too much on the topic itself, rather than the use of visual media and creative design to express their ideas. Learners are encouraged to research how a particular topic can be explored and communicated creatively, rather than conducting a study of the topic itself. Learners will wish to avoid compounding this oversight when gathering feedback which is focused on the theme rather than design work developed by the candidate. Those scripts achieving higher marks used either an explicit or implicit approach, which sought feedback on the use of colour, shape, user interface, costume, communication, presentation method, camerawork, or editing, for example. Among higher scoring scripts, the underlying question was frequently 'how can I improve the design'.

Learners are encouraged to avoid an over reliance on text in what is essentially a visual qualification. Among lower scoring scripts the work would have been improved by avoiding the use of quotations, extended descriptive passages, biographies, or histories of photographs, art works or design works. Learners should also understand that media refers to the tools, materials or techniques used to express ideas – rather than media studies or media production. Media should be understood in the way that a paint brush would be understood in Art & Design. Learners are not expected to demonstrate complex technical skills or expertise in software. Learners are encouraged to develop independent creative expression, critical and reflective practice, and visual language skills as a tool for communication. How digital media is fashioned through its design will determine how effectively it communicates.

Continuous PDF or PowerPoint are preferred formats. Files and websites stored on remote access servers (e.g., Google Drive), including school servers, and Keynote files are to be avoided. All material should be

embedded within the submission. Where candidates submitted moving image work, some of this material was longer in duration than the guidance provided in the syllabus. This approach may result in marks being limited. Centres are required to submit concise video content. This is mentioned in previous reports and centres are reminded to monitor the duration of moving image work. Additionally, the submission of duplicate video and image files is strongly discouraged as this is unnecessary and may create potential confusion. Candidates are therefore encouraged to perform a thorough check of all work before the final submission.

Comments on the themes

Boundaries

This theme inspired a range of responses including the boundaries of objects, still-life arrangements, interiors and exteriors, prejudice and discrimination, physical boundaries, gender equality, AI and contemporary technology, geography, conflict, garment design, and architecture. Candidates often provided an analysis of the ways in which the theme could be interpreted. This was a useful area of exploration and was rewarded in AO1 and AO2. Some responses considered the idea of unseen boundaries. These candidates examined the aesthetic boundary between what is real and what is fantasy. The developmental work was inspired by artists such as Kelichi Matsuda.

Many scripts responding to this theme used photography as their area of study. Other scripts contained mixed-media work where candidates made effective use of the properties of the materials and techniques they were using. Where candidates were seen to take calculated risks with the media and were confident in using both analogue and digital approaches, they were rewarded in AO1, AO2 and in AO4.Where moving image work was submitted, there was often evidence of planning location shoots, storyboarding, and scriptwriting. However, higher marks would have been achieved where there was also evidence of critical reflection and evidence of revisions or amendments. Some candidates were seen to use moving image material downloaded from the internet whilst exploring ideas and experimenting with techniques. However, candidates should be mindful of the requirement for authenticity in their work and for a personal digital response.

In the higher scoring responses, candidates presented a cohesive journey from experimentation to proposal. Higher scoring scripts were often very well presented, demonstrating a confident understanding of design and layout. Those achieving higher marks typically gathered feedback and acted upon it as they developed their final proposal. Among lower scoring responses, candidates often researched ideas that had limited influence on their proposal. Lower scoring scripts would have been improved by systematically receiving, reviewing, and applying feedback. However, candidates are encouraged to avoid relying on feedback which does not offer helpful insights or opportunities for improvement.

The Digital Classroom

There were not enough responses to this theme to discern a pattern.

Digital Poetry

Some candidates selected a piece of poetry and used photography to illustrate aspects of it. Candidates worked with moving images with varying degrees of success. The examiners noted scripting, storyboarding, and effective development of editing as a strength among the higher scoring scripts. In addition, these scripts demonstrated evidence of an ability to reflect, revise, and develop work based on feedback. Candidates achieving lower marks were able to identify artists who inspired them from among a range of creative media. However, such scripts would have benefited from an experimental and personal approach rather than an outline of a theoretical model for the development of ideas. Candidates are encouraged to explore a range of visual practice associated with their interpretation of this theme. This can help to provide a more secure platform for exploration and the development of ideas.

Emotions

Many candidates used video or photography in response to this theme. Higher scoring scripts clearly illustrated their creative journey, including imagery and techniques that evidently influenced their proposals. They often powerfully projected ideas with an effective use of visual language. Among the highest scoring scripts the work was very well made and clearly linked to the research undertaken by the candidate. Many candidates referred to the work of Dorothea Lang and found inspiration in her thought-provoking imagery. Candidates sought to work in her style and make insightful comparisons between her photographs and their

own work. The examiners noted some strong video work accompanied by evidence of very good records of the creative process and an understanding of film language and techniques.

Some candidates referred to the emotions experienced during the pandemic and separation from family. Some of the resulting imagery and video work was powerfully rooted in personal experience. The higher scoring scripts often provided a vivid account of such memories.

Lower scoring scripts would have been improved by adopting a more coherent approach to planning research, acquiring visual material and exploration of related techniques. Lower scoring scripts would also have benefited from including references to artists who were relevant to the creative direction of the project. Candidates are encouraged to avoid an uneven approach to their responses to the theme. For example, where detailed bodies of research were provided, some scripts contained more limited exploratory and developmental work.

Travel

Higher scoring scripts frequently submitted carefully planned supporting studies which addressed each of the assessment criteria. Such scripts were seen to have researched relevant artists, photographers, film makers and used the practices of others to influence their work. Through testing and feedback, candidates sought to demonstrate how the opinion of others can help in reviewing and refining work as it develops.

Candidates worked from a variety of sources for their research work. These included holidays, educational visits, different modes of transport, or a focus on their own location. Many candidates submitted scripts concentrating on architecture and travel photography. A range of proposals included developing a short film about a travel destination, a series of photographs placed on website, or an exhibition of final work. Some candidates presented their proposal in the form of a selection of photos of a location they had visited. This work would have benefited from a more discerning approach to relevant research and a more sustained investigation. Many candidates combined typography and photography in their proposal. Whilst some scripts demonstrated design and layout skills, other scripts would have benefited from an exposure to practitioners who successfully deploy text and image combinations. Lower scoring scripts would have been improved by a focus on the relationships, weight, and order of visual elements in text and image combinations. Lower scoring scripts would also have benefited from more detail and insight gained from relevant research and recording.

Stronger scripts tended to include more convincing evidence of an informed approach to the selection of work to develop into a proposal. Moving image work tended to achieve higher marks where they demonstrated both creative progress, and an understanding of film language and techniques. Many higher scoring scripts typically demonstrated a creative application of editing techniques, reflective comments and audience feedback.

Wellbeing

Many scripts focused on promoting wellbeing through sport and activity. Higher achieving candidates submitted evidence of insightful research of the health benefits of sport to create proposals for public service announcements or health information posters. Candidates sometimes submitted evidence of data research and the opinions of peers or family. There was much interest in healthy eating. Some candidates supported this interpretation of the theme with research ranging from icons sourced from the internet to studio photography of food for menu designs. Some scripts provided screen shots of the review and refinement of photographic images indicating a step by step development of ideas. Higher scoring scripts often provided evidence of critical awareness in their annotation of screenshots. Although the proposals often made clear connections between digital and design elements, some scripts would have attracted more marks with a greater refinement of ideas. Candidates who deconstructed the work of their reference photographers were seen to creatively apply these insights to their own work. This was rewarded in AO1 and AO2.

This theme attracted ideas such as walking as a meditative therapy, exercise and recreation, traditional and contemporary approaches to mental health, dealing with stress, visual communication of emotion, and emotional health in young people. Candidates used a variety of platforms for their proposals such as promotional videos, app designs, or video recorded interviews. Higher achieving candidates typically outlined their aim from the beginning and were clear about what they wanted to achieve. Such scripts often explored how they could use a range of creative influences in their own work. Higher scoring scripts were seen to contain an effective analysis of their design choices and the progress of their work. Lower scoring scripts would have benefited from exploring how visual language can communicate ideas.

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

Key messages

- Candidates often presented their work in a clearly structured format.
- Learners are encouraged to avoid an over reliance on text in what is essentially a visual qualification.
- Primary and secondary research were key strengths among higher scoring scripts.

General comments

The examiners noted that an interesting range of work was presented throughout this component which included 3D models, branding material, photo essays, immersive artwork, and animated sequences. Candidates submitted a wide range of research relevant to their intentions and explored a range of media and technology in response to the assignments. Many candidates developed their final work through a focused investigation of their chosen concept. Higher scoring scripts typically demonstrated clear development of ideas and investigations informed by a sound understanding of the constraints of the assignment. The use of feedback was often meaningful and relevant. Candidates provided a sequential development of their ideas and annotation work to demonstrate a critical understanding of their progress.

Some lower achieving submissions submitted work that did not provide evidence across all of the assessment criteria. Where this was the case, candidates were limited in the marks they were able to achieve. Among lower scoring scripts, research was often limited to biographical details of various artists, designers or photographers. Candidates are encouraged to develop their practice in research and recording. Candidates are also encouraged to include a more critical analysis of the work they are researching and how this will impact on the progress of their own work and their final outcome. Where candidates worked in the moving image area of study, scripts would have been improved by giving more consideration to film language and/or camera technique. Where candidates use websites or apps to assist them, they will need to be mindful of the requirement for authenticity and for a personal response which realises the candidate's own intentions.

Many lower scoring scripts appeared to demonstrate a concern for the topic above the study of creative design using visual media. Learners should research how a particular topic can be explored and communicated creatively, rather than conducting a study of the topic itself. This oversight was often compounded by gathering feedback that was focused on the theme rather than the candidate's design work. Those scripts achieving higher marks used either an explicit or implicit approach to seek feedback on the use of colour, shape, user interface, costume, communication, presentation method, camerawork, or editing, for example. Among higher scoring scripts, the underlying question was frequently 'how can I improve the design'.

A significant number of candidates from different centres referred to the final work as the *proposal*. A proposal is a requirement of Component 1. Some candidates had included a written proposal which is not required for this component. To avoid confusion, candidates must be made aware that Component 2 requires a final outcome. Candidates are encouraged to avoid an over reliance on text in what is essentially a visual qualification. Among lower scoring scripts the work would have been improved by avoiding the use of quotations, extended descriptive passages, biographies, or histories of photographs, art works or design works. Learners should also understand that media refers to the tools, materials or techniques used to express ideas – rather than media studies or media production. Media should be understood in the way that it would be understood in Art & Design e.g. paints, brushes etc. Candidates are not expected to demonstrate complex technical skills or expertise in software. They should be encouraged to develop independent creative expression, critical and reflective practice, and visual language skills as a tool for communication. How digital media is fashioned through its design will determine how effectively it communicates.

Continuous PDF or PowerPoint are preferred formats. Files and websites stored on remote access servers (e.g., Google Drive), including school servers, and Keynote files are to be avoided. QR codes are also to be avoided. All material should be embedded within the submission. Some submitted moving image work was longer in duration than the 5 minutes specified in the question paper. Candidates are required to submit concise video content and work longer than 5 minutes may result in marks being limited. This is mentioned in previous reports and centres are reminded to monitor the duration of moving image work. Additionally, the submission of duplicate video and image files is strongly discouraged as this is unnecessary and may create potential confusion. Candidates are therefore encouraged to perform a thorough check of all work before the final submission.

Approaches to the assignments

1. The artist's studio.

The examiners noted a variety of responses to this assignment including 3D models, photo studies, animation and video. Most candidates chose to respond by researching their art classroom, artist studios they visited, or studios of famous artists via the internet. Popular choices included Francis Bacon and Pablo Picasso. A number of candidates also carefully investigated artifacts found in an artist's studio and provided a photographic record. Some higher achieving candidates were seen to carefully develop design concepts as they worked on advertising for an art exhibition, or on the interior planning for an artist's studio. There were also a number of submissions exploring digital images for projection in an immersive display. Some candidates submitted a virtual art studio using architectural software. These submissions were often thoughtful and imaginative with clear annotation describing each stage of the creative process. Some candidates had clearly taken inspiration from the studios they had researched.

Some of the scripts working on designs for a digital poster, would have benefited from a more considered refinement of ideas before producing a final work. Among lower scoring scripts examiners noted that the development of ideas would have been improved by applying a critical awareness of the relevance of research, and of the constraints of the assignment. Among other lower scoring scripts, it was clear that although candidates had a developed idea, the work would have been improved where this was translated effectively throughout the assignment. Candidates are encouraged to retain a clear sense of intention throughout their research, exploration, development and realisation.

Some scripts used peer collaborators to act in some strong videos of an artist's studio. Other scripts used aspects of several of the given concepts to produce a well-considered response to an individual concept. Higher scoring scripts typically contained targeted research which was used to both generate ideas and to benchmark progress. Some scripts focused on local artists. Such scripts created the idea of the artist's studio with documented journeys to the studio, fly throughs, and voice overs. This work was characterised by reliable structures established by planning, rehearsals, and in supporting contextual studies.

2. The lifecycle of things.

Among higher scoring responses, candidates used their research on recycling and sustainability effectively to develop and inform their ideas. Responses to this assignment ranged from digital design work to photography or moving image. Many responses to the immersive wall-to-wall digital artwork concept, were seen to have appropriately considered scale. Higher scoring scripts were seen to have informed their design work using well-considered research to inform communication with a target audience. Higher achieving candidates sometimes thoughtfully created colour palettes relating to the theme. Other scripts successfully combined text with iconography to develop infographics.

Higher scoring scripts working with moving image, were seen to have thought more carefully about their intended audience and used a wide range of strategies in post-production to engage the viewer. These included titles, sound, and repeated images to reflect a narrative. Most moving image work was within the duration guidance. However, such work would have been improved by a more succinct approach and a more closely edited final version. The examiners noted some interesting work created from found objects, which was effectively documented using photography. Higher scoring scripts frequently contained strong research into the concepts described in the assignment. Some candidates invented a new charity or used an existing charity as a platform for their design work. Stronger scripts often explored locations in detail to discover creative opportunities and unexpected visual possibilities. Research among stronger scripts was often relevant and typically informed the candidate's explorations and development of ideas.

However, among some lower scoring scripts, research was often the sole most substantial element of the assignment. This work would have been improved where the research translated into exploration of materials

and ideas, and the development of the final outcome. For example, this could have been evidenced by the inclusion of scripts, storyboards, location shoots or shooting schedules. Too frequently in lower scoring scripts, research moved straight into a finished film. Other lower scoring scripts were seen to use stock footage in preference to original moving image work. Such scripts would also have benefited from evidence of planning and development for a final work. Other scripts could have been improved by developing photographs used for research and recording, into elements of a creative work. Lower scoring scripts typically could have benefited from consideration given to the visual elements found in the candidate's research.

3. Beach town re-brand.

Candidates submitted digital postcards, short films advertising an existing beach town or an invented beach town, or avatars inspired by beach birds and beach objects. Many candidates used photographs in support of the branding work for this assignment. Other candidates explored typography and graphic design. Stronger scripts included a solid body of research which concentrated on artists, designers, photographers or film makers who have worked with a similar topic. This was typically complemented by a range of exploratory work which was annotated with reflective comments. This often provided a sound platform from which to progress towards the development of a final outcome. Higher scoring scripts included clearly relevant reference to the work of others. Such scripts also demonstrated a critical understanding of the relation between text and image. This was shown by experiments with layout and compositional structure, letterforms, and design styles. The stronger scripts tended to produce final outcomes which are clearly influenced by research, exploration and the development of ideas. In stronger scripts, candidates evidenced their feedback and described how this allowed them to make changes and improve their work. The strongest scripts typically developed a clear and informative storyboard and annotations explaining the creative process. Such scripts also provided evidence of technical progress.

Many candidates placed a significant reliance on collecting some historical holiday postcards to inform their design ideas. Some candidates designed website pages. However, this work would have been improved by considering the feedback which was available elsewhere in the scripts. It should be noted that whilst gathering feedback is important, it is just as important to make use of it to improve work. Weaker scripts would have benefited from a more convincing progress from research to final outcome. Candidates would be better advised to ensure that their research has a demonstrable influence on the final outcome.

DIGITAL MEDIA & DESIGN

> **Paper 9481/03**
> **Personal Investigation**

Key messages

- Higher scoring scripts were rewarded for their mature approach to the investigation and excellent depth of analysis.
- Where applicable, centres are required to submit concise video content
- The submission of duplicate video and image files is strongly discouraged

General comments

The examiners noted that an interesting range of work was presented throughout this component. This included photography, video including documentary, websites/blogs, magazines, and 2D and 3D animations. Candidates often demonstrated a capable and engaged approach to an in-depth investigation of their own choosing.

Many lower scoring scripts where more focused on the topic rather than the study of creative design using visual media. Candidates are encouraged to research how a particular topic can be explored and communicated creatively, rather than conducting a study of the topic itself. Candidates should avoid compounding this oversight by gathering feedback which is focused on the theme rather than on design work.

Candidates are encouraged to understand that media refers to the tools, materials or techniques used to express ideas – rather than media studies or media production. Media should be understood in the way that a paint brush would be understood in Art and Design. Candidates are not expected to demonstrate complex technical skills or expertise in software but are encouraged to develop an independent critical and reflective practice, where ideas are expressed through a sophisticated visual language.

Continuous PDF or PowerPoint are preferred formats. Files and websites stored on remote access servers (e.g., Google Drive), including school servers, and Keynote files are to be avoided as are QR codes. All material should be embedded within the submission. Some moving image work submitted was found to be unnecessarily long in duration and this may result in marks being limited. Candidates are required to submit concise video content. This is mentioned in previous reports and centres are reminded to monitor the duration of moving image work. Additionally, the submission of duplicate video and image files is strongly discouraged as this is unnecessary and may create potential confusion. Candidates are therefore encouraged to perform a thorough check of all work before the final submission.

Approaches to the Personal Investigation

Final outcome

Personal investigations provided a wide variety of digital media and themes. Candidates pursued a range of investigations including consumerism, an experience of diabetes, women in sport, loneliness and insecurity, wastelands, fantasy stories, connection with the natural environment, drug addiction, dungeons and dragons, dystopian environments, family relationships, fairies and folklore, poetic anxiety, political propaganda, mental health campaign, the passage of time, travel, video gaming, and websites for sport clubs and tourist destinations. There were some thought-provoking submissions on the effect of relationships and identity, for example. In other submissions reference materials were gathered from collaborative projects and design motifs produced during the consultation were developed into effective digital campaigns.

Overall, submissions for this component demonstrated a distinct 'step up' from work seen in the AS level components. Higher scoring scripts clearly demonstrated a high level of skill and development of ideas.

Candidates used this component to develop the skills they had acquired and apply them to a topic or theme of their choice. Higher scoring scripts demonstrated a mature approach to the investigation, clear evidence of the journeys from conception to realisation, evidence of critical reflection, and excellent depth of analysis.

Where a website or blog was submitted as a final outcome, candidates would often show a video navigating the website or blog. This was often a useful form of evidence, as external links cannot be used. Candidates are reminded that when they are producing a personal digital outcome, they should focus on design elements rather than technical skills alone.

Many scripts presented video for the final outcome. This work included documentaries, personal narratives, animations, short stories, or music promotions. Videos varied significantly in duration. The examiners noted how the shorter videos often presented a clearly evolved idea and developed a sustained viewer engagement. More successful scripts evaluated and then developed the final version of the moving image work. However, the use of voice overs and subtitles should be carefully considered by candidates. Such devises should be used to complement the clarity of communication and not detract from the visual content. Candidates are encouraged to carefully consider the fonts, layout and colour of any subtitles used. Some candidates enthusiastically pursued their moving image investigations without paying sufficient attention to recording insights and developing ideas. These scripts would have been improved by conducting research that could inform the creative direction of the work. Candidates are reminded to embed moving image work into a PowerPoint presentation to provide reliable access.

Character development work was seen in a number of submissions. This was sometimes begun in analogue and then developed in a digital format and incorporated into animations or used in graphic design outcomes.

Some candidates wrote music and lyrics for their moving image work. This demonstrates an awareness of the skills, techniques and understandings associated with the area of study. It was also seen to contribute to a personal digital response. Candidates are reminded that scripts containing extended lists of equipment and software will not attract additional reward.

The reach and quality of initial research frequently influenced the potential for the development of the final outcome. Some highly effective performance work employed successful direction of scenes and participants, and an appropriate use of digital manipulation matched to the emotional texture of the work. Such scripts frequently acknowledged references to fine art performance and fine art painting. Structure and schedule were frequently well managed and typically supported by a project plan.

Some innovative research work was seen where films were deconstructed to identify graphic elements and production techniques. Sometimes directors were interviewed to gain further technical and practical insights. This work was typically complemented by the testing of style and technique to determine feasibility and identify constraints. Following reflective feedback, meticulous planning was evidenced in storyboards and in further test sequences. Many submissions were seen which had been thoughtfully and creatively designed, which enhances the clarity of the evidence. By paying more attention to the overall presentation, many other scripts could have attracted more reward by ensuring that the investigation is clear, purposeful and succinct.

Written element

Some candidates incorporated the written element into the supporting study whilst others submitted a separate document. Most written commentaries told the story of their creative journey. Higher scoring scripts typically adopted an analytical and evaluative posture. Where candidates were rewarded for their written element, this was typically due to detailed critical analysis of reference material, the inclusion of some key reference images, or transcribed interviews, for example. Such scripts also demonstrated a clear familiarity with relevant technical aspects of the investigation. Feedback was often sought through social media and evidenced through screen shots. The inclusion of feedback was successful when it was annotated and seen to demonstrably inform design decisions.

The level of analysis usually matched the quality of the visual material. There were occasions where the examiners noted that the analysis was uneven. In these cases, candidates had made an effort to critically reflect on one area of development but had appeared to overlook the creative potential of another. Where candidates appeared to be less sure about a topic for investigation, the written element tended towards description, and included personal feelings about the difficulty to progress. However, some candidates made good use of this situation and were able to demonstrate a critical understanding of this form of constraint. The most successful submissions, (even where a written essay had been additionally uploaded), were where critical commentary and visual material were combined in the supporting studies. Candidates will wish to

note that well-presented visual work can demonstrate effective critical analysis, and then can be expanded with evaluative commentary.