



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

ART AND DESIGN A LEVEL

SUMMER 2017

Grade boundary information for this subject is available on the WJEC public website at:
<https://www.wjecservices.co.uk/MarkToUMS/default.aspx?!=en>

Annual Statistical Report

The annual Statistical Report (issued in the second half of the Autumn Term) gives overall outcomes of all examinations administered by WJEC.

Component	Page
Introduction	1
The Implications of Decreasing AS Entries in England	2
Approaches to Course Structure	2
Time Planning for the Personal Investigation and Externally Set Assignment	3
Evidence of Drawing and the Drawing of Form Taken	4
Use of Learner Statements	4
Extended Writing Element	5
Centre Marking and Higher Expectations	6
Personal Investigation	6
Externally Set Assignment	8
Most Popular Questions`	10

EDUQAS

GCE A LEVEL ART AND DESIGN

Summer 2017

Introduction

Both WJEC/Eduqas A Levels in Art & Design have seen rapid growth in 2017, with 52 new centres across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Guernsey. The Eduqas A Level is a linear qualification in which all of the assessments must be taken at end of the course. The WJEC A Level offered in Wales continues to be linked to the AS, with 40% of the marks contributing to the full A Level. The move to the new A Level has been widely and enthusiastically accepted by both English and Welsh centres. For example, many teachers in England reported that the move away from external assessments in year 12 had freed up more time for classes to focus on A Level teaching, enabling candidates to develop stronger foundation skills in the first year of their studies. This generally afforded more time being devoted to developing and testing techniques and processes; and more time to undertake visits, trips and hands-on workshops, with skills developed earlier in the course being effectively utilised in producing outcomes later on.

The fact that candidates had more time to freely experiment and take risks with their work clearly strengthened creative decisions and was definitely considered advantageous. However, some centres had set too rigid a foundation period that lasted far too long, giving candidates little chance to develop their work independently.

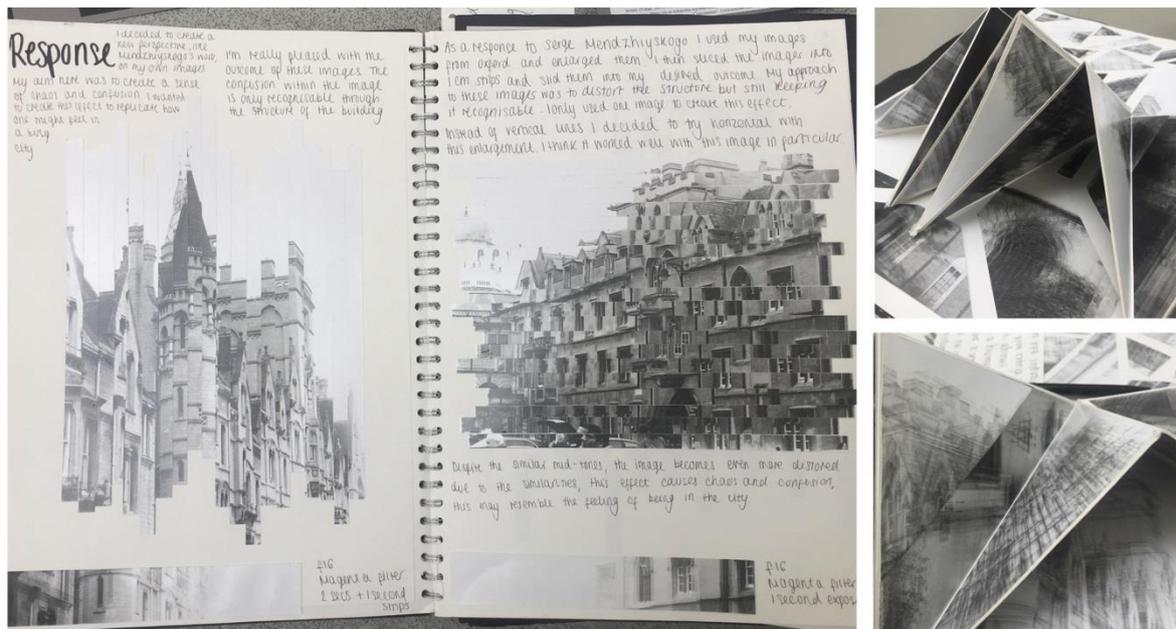


Fig 1: Exploration of architectural structures.

The implications of decreasing AS entries in England

Some centres in England continue to deliver the AS Level in year 12 as an effective transition to the A Level in year 13, whilst others offer the course as a standalone qualification for certain candidates who (for numerous reasons) will not progress to A Level. The main attraction of the AS is often cited as being that it helps teachers measure how well their students are progressing and how well suited they are to continue their subject into year 13. An externally marked AS grade may also aid teachers to more accurately set predicted grades and could carry more weight with universities when considering applications. It is also regarded as a strong motivational factor for students in applying themselves consistently over the two years. Furthermore, should candidates not wish to continue with their studies to the second year, they have the option of cashing-in their AS grade and accumulating valuable UCAS points.

The increase in centres offering only the A Level linear qualification has, however, resulted in AS numbers falling significantly across England. The closure of art and design AS courses may also reflect the fact that, because of severe funding pressures, sixth forms and colleges are finding it increasingly difficult to run courses where there are relatively small numbers of students. It would also seem that the decision to opt for a two year A Level course was often based on financial factors, such as the reduced total cost of entry fees.

The implications of dropping the AS in England may well leave a vacuum regarding the formal assessment of work within centres. Importantly, it raises issues concerning the monitoring and measuring of students' progression during the first year of studies. By not offering the AS qualification, candidates must be committed to a two-year A Level course, leaving them without the option of cashing in their qualification at the end of the first year.

The choice of a standalone AS, AS together with A Level or a single A Level linear qualification would seem to have provided more options for centres in England and Northern Ireland. Feedback from our moderators and teachers suggest that the choices made have generally resulted in more variety of approaches, stronger development of ideas and increased refinement of skills, while also enabling personal and individual selection of themes to naturally evolve.

Approaches to Course Structure

As might be expected with any new specification, there was some apprehension about how best to organise the Personal Investigation. Despite this initial concern, many Eduqas centres celebrated the idea that candidates had more time to freely experiment and take risks with their work before making firm creative decisions. Eduqas centres tended to adopt a skills based approach, followed by a personal investigation negotiated between teacher and student. Likewise for WJEC centres, as the Personal Creative Enquiry gave candidates sufficient time to explore, it was considered unnecessary to repeat a similar skills development phase, allowing them the freedom to embark immediately on their topics. In both settings candidates often determined their own themes; however, in many larger centres candidates were given a broad focus from which they developed personal lines of enquiry. Stronger and more confident candidates tended to select and devise their own subject matter, and weaker ones were guided towards appropriate areas of study. Such flexibility of approach reflects the non-prescriptive character of A level provision, which enables centres to adopt the most appropriate format for their candidates.

It was pleasing to see that submissions were varied, and presented in interesting formats. Portfolios tended to be made up of sketchbooks with additional images and design developments mounted onto larger sheets. Traditional approaches to sketchbooks were still not strongly in evidence, and tended to be more like workbooks in nature. Stronger submissions documented the developmental process well, showing a deep understanding and ability to refine ideas, leading towards highly skilful and creative outcomes.

Time Planning for the Personal Investigation and Externally Set Assignment

The extended time available for candidates to develop their core skills has necessitated particularly astute and effective planning strategies on the part of teachers. Most centres delivered an induction project, which laid a solid foundation for developing techniques, research and investigation. This provided candidates with the means to start developing personal themes whilst providing a firm grounding in the standards and expectations required in preparing for their Personal Investigation.

Approaches took on many appropriate forms and moderators noted the following methods:

Personal Investigation

- A brief 'refresher' project during the first term/semester, followed by the Personal Investigation.
- Refresher projects that sometimes repeated the content of the Personal Creative Enquiry introductory project/s.
- The written component taught separately from, but with reference to, the practical and personal elements.
- A general foundation project (not linked to a theme) followed by a personal theme.
- Embedding of Personal Investigation themes within the initial technical and explorative tasks.
- Exploring between two and four projects across the year and incorporating different skills into each of these projects before leading to a final major project based on a set theme.
- Collaboration between different areas of study, such as a Fine Art and Graphic Communication group, working together for some observational drawing skills classes. Extra time meant more collaborative ways of working were possible and the trialling of media could be pushed further.

Externally Set Assignment

- Organising study visits to museums/galleries to coincide with the preparation period for the Externally Set Assignment.
- Allowing a little extra time to produce a 'rehearsal' or trial final outcome in preparation for the sustained focus period.
- The sustained focus period completed during 2/3 consecutive days; alternatively this time was taken over a period of two weeks and both worked well. In a small minority of centres, the sustained focus period was conducted only in lesson time, which is usually disadvantageous to candidates and is not recommended.

Evidence of drawing and the drawing forms taken

Most centres had attempted to address the new A level specification requirement for purposeful drawing to be evidenced across all titles. Despite more incidence of drawing, the different purposes of drawing had yet to be fully explored. Stronger centres used drawing as a means of exploring ideas and to support the creative process through focused observational drawing and primary sourced imagery. Life drawing was evident in many centres, and was ambitious, skilful and on a variety of scales; however, it was not always directly relevant to the Personal Investigation, and often existed as a separate element.

Strong examples of Graphic Communication were seen where candidates utilised drawing as a major aspect of the design process. There was also an increase in the number of submissions containing digital drawing, which was often of a high standard and well rendered. Successful Photography submissions included evidence of drawing to communicate ideas. In these examples, candidates were encouraged to draw visual sources and explore techniques, thereby demonstrating an understanding of the formal elements and the application of media. Storyboarding and preparatory sketches were also adopted to plan and chart creative idea development. Unfortunately, some candidates relied too heavily on the use of secondary sources for their drawing, which was often downloaded from the internet and reflected a lack of meaningful personal involvement.

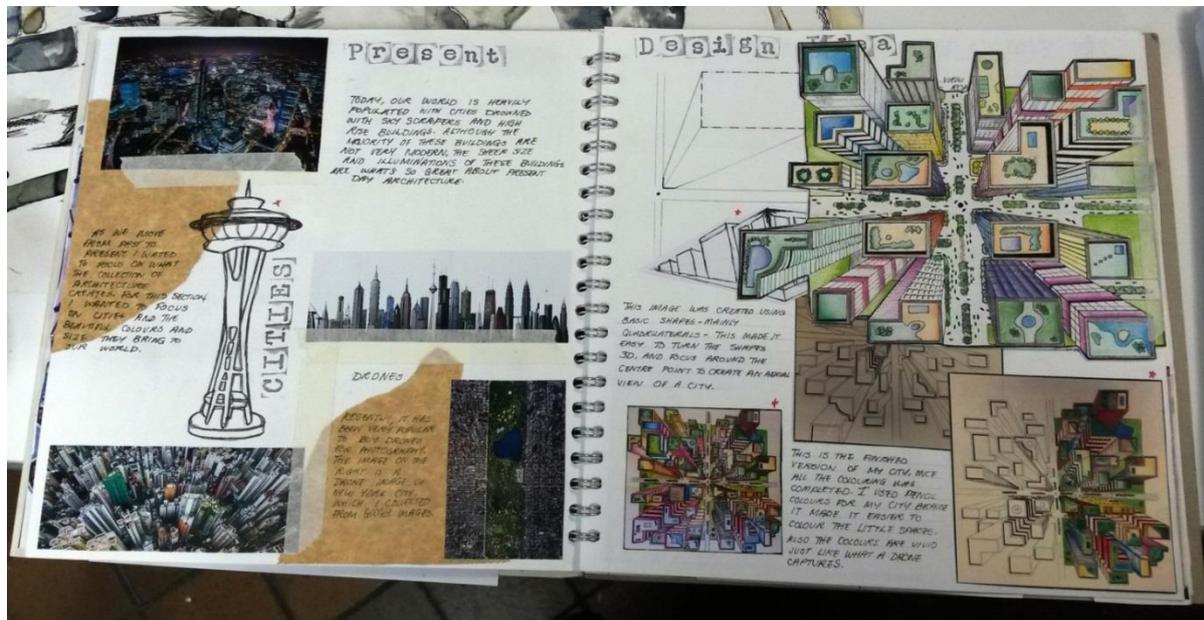


Fig 2: Drawing as a means of exploring ideas.

Use of Learner Statements

Learner Statements have contributed significantly to the improved structure and focus of submissions in many centres. The framework of Main idea, Plan, Context and Reflect, has provided a format that most candidates can relate to and make effective use of in initiating ideas and planning forward development of their enquiries and investigations. Teachers and moderators have also gained from this improvement. Teachers have benefited inasmuch as candidates have made specific their intentions and thus teachers have been able to direct individuals towards more challenging possibilities. Moderators have been able to more quickly and clearly assimilate candidate's objectives and place assessments of their work in an informed context.

Increasing numbers of candidates are using the Learner Statement as an ongoing planning log and the example below illustrates the way in which they are completed incrementally as they begin their course of study, part of the way through, and at the conclusion of it; showing progression of ideas and application.

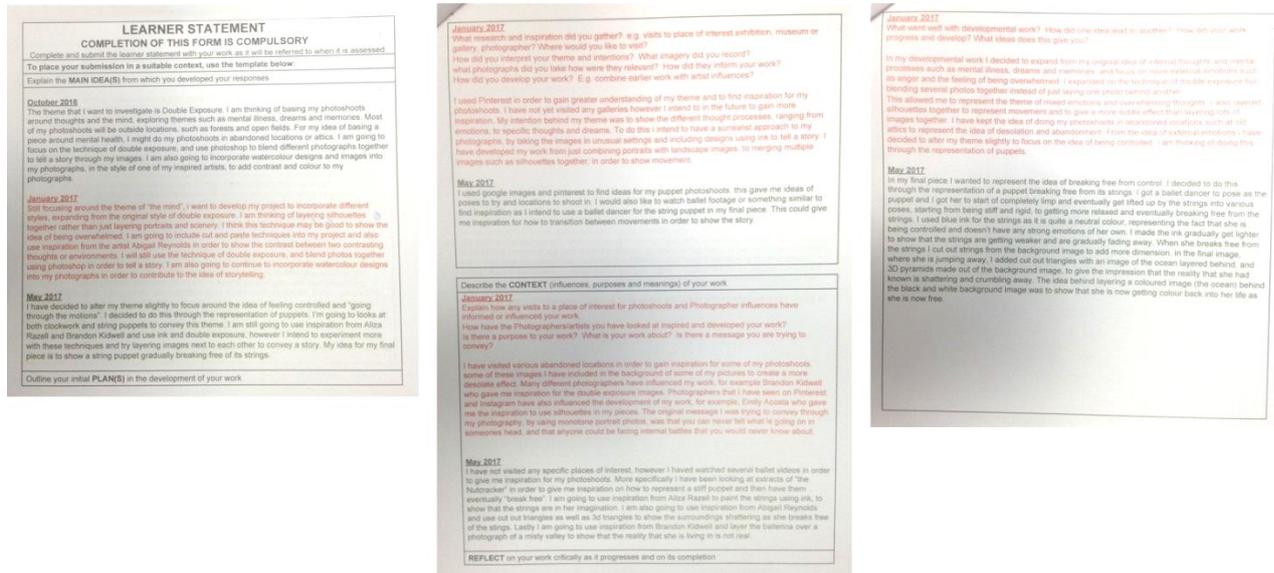


Fig 3: Learner Statement as an ongoing planning log.

Extended Writing Element

The requirement to produce extended writing as part of the Personal Investigation was fully addressed by the majority of centres. In most cases, the written element was presented in an essay format, with the exception of Critical and Contextual Studies candidates, who adopted a far more adventurous approach to presentation, probably as a means of addressing AO2 and AO4. Across all titles a mix of standards was apparent, with some being well written and relevant to the students' practical work. Others tended to take the form of history of art essays, sometimes contextually relevant; but bearing little relation to and with a limited impact upon practical responses. Some centres encouraged candidates to compare and contrast selected contextual sources, and others required them to pose and answer questions related to their own work.

Where candidates decided to integrate the written element within sketchbooks, this was sometimes disjointed. The written element often gave students a strong starting point to focus their studies, whilst weaker candidates were able to draw on information from artists and craftworkers to relate to their lines of enquiry. This extended writing element was far more comprehensive when candidates referred to work which they had seen and experienced, giving them the opportunity to develop advanced writing skills, and preparing them for the demands of Higher Education.

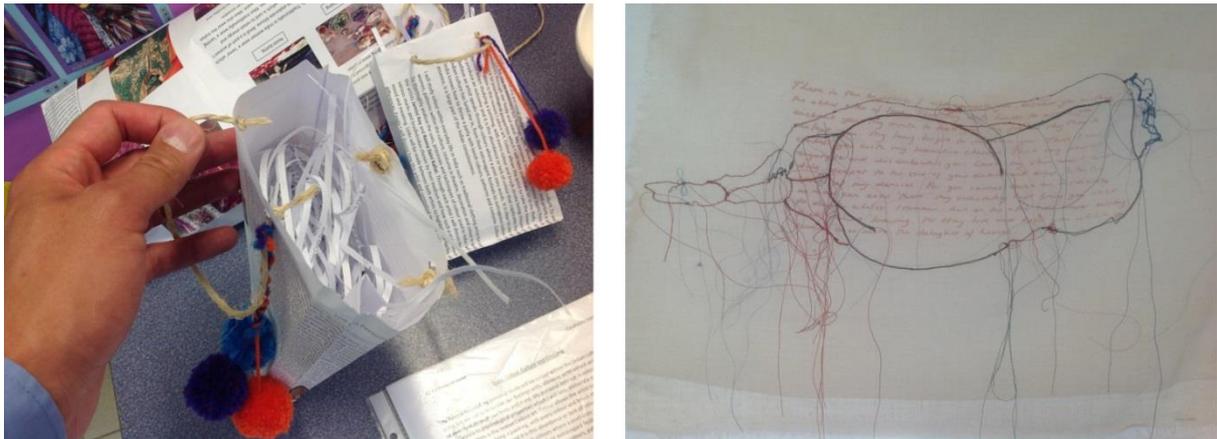


Fig 4: Creative responses to Extended Writing.

Centre Marking and Higher Expectations

In 2016 the overall standard of achievement at AS level rose by 10% over the legacy ART1 or ART2 in previous years. This may have been mainly due to the extra time given to the Personal Creative Enquiry as a consequence of not having to do an Externally Set Assignment. Bearing in mind that most AS candidates continued their studies into A Level, it seems logical to anticipate that standards would also rise at A Level. This would also be the case for candidates doing the two year A Level, because dropping the AS with no formal examination at the end of the first year would have given them the opportunity to develop stronger foundation skills in the first year of their studies. This has generally led to greater breadth with the development of core skills being competently refined in the second year into more in-depth Personal Investigations and final Externally Set Assignments.

One of the few negative consequences of the rise in standards is that many centres failed to take account of the significant differences in time allowance and had awarded unrealistically high marks. This has resulted in the need to make an increasing number of adjustments to centre proposed marks in order to align them with new nationally agreed standards and also has the effect of inflating grade boundaries. In these circumstances, the notional grade boundary for A grade is likely to be higher than was originally anticipated. However, the proportion of higher grades awarded this year will be similar to the proportion awarded in summer 2015 Legacy A Level.

Personal Investigation

Strengths

- A broad range of skilful media testing and manipulation was evident, with many candidates showing a willingness to take risks with their work, leading to the production of ambitious and mature outcomes.
- Increased sophistication in subjects chosen for investigation, with many focused on pursuing challenging and emotive material. References were drawn from sources other than the internet, and included newspaper articles, TV and radio broadcasts, novels, films and social media.

- Ideas supported through the intelligent exploration of primary sources and observational drawing, often leading to highly personal responses that reflected candidates' experiences and environments.
- Purposeful use of the Learner Statements; in the best examples these were used as an effective planning and reflective tool, with candidates revisiting and modifying the content as their portfolio developed.
- Extended written element integrated into the main body of work, supporting the prime focus, feeding into and connected to the visual responses.
- Evidence of gallery visits and personally directed visits to gain primary references and experiences. This was particularly successful when candidates could re-visit venues, especially as their portfolios developed, allowing them to be more focused and specific when gathering information.
- Strong relationships between all aspects of the portfolio, showing a thorough understanding of the creative process.

Shortcomings

- Extended written element, although extensive, tended to be a more literal description of progress and less about evaluating the contextual development of a personal theme.
- Predictable subject matter selected and approaches adopted that failed to engage both candidates and viewers.
- A disproportionate amount of time spent on developing skills which jeopardised personal development and expression, and hindered idea development.
- Insufficient thought given to initiating and planning an investigation that might fire enthusiasm.
- Lack of purposeful drawing, especially in Photography and Graphic Communication, and across all titles with a dependency on drawing from photographs.
- Poor use of Learner Statements, which tended to be completed at the end of the course, and provided little insight or understanding into the candidates' investigations.

Suggestion for improving performance

- Undertake investigations that are of personal interest and concern to the candidate, or are of value to them by accessing relevant sources, such as college diploma shows, galleries and interesting locations.
- Ensure that the written element relates to the candidates' work and is of benefit to their practical responses. Modelling the process of how to critically analyse a piece of work, and using that process as a transferable template for candidates' choice of topic, could provide stronger evidence of their ability to evaluate sources, and enable them to be more focused and concise.
- Make more purposeful use of the Learner Statements; candidates should consider these as an intrinsic part of their portfolio development, coexisting with their extended writing element to provide evidence of their ability to plan, refine, reflect and analyse each essential element of their portfolio.
- Better time management: by avoiding repetition of the experimentation with techniques and processes already covered in the Personal Creative Enquiry; or by securing a balance between the taught course and candidates' freedom to develop personal ideas and responses.
- In specific titles candidates could be encouraged to explore a greater variety and breadth of contextual references, by studying sources which are outside their selected disciplines, e.g. graphics candidates studying fine art sources.

- Give greater consideration to the proposed audience of their work by encouraging candidates to question their own intentions, their key messages and the purpose of their practice.
- Address a range of drawing methods, so that candidates fully understand how to document observations, such as timed sketching, as well as sustained studies, using different drawing tools, and working on a variety of scales.

Externally Set Assignment

Strengths

- Well executed outcomes that show skill and ambition produced partly as a result of the increased time length for the Externally Set Assignment.
- Candidates seemed to take advantage of constraints being removed regarding choice of assignments, rather than these being dictated by centres.



Fig 5: A remarkably contrasting TD submission. Well-designed and crafted Kimonos for PI on right and experimental, expressive mixed media panels for ESA on left.

- Highly personal interpretations of the Externally Set Assignment stimuli.
- Interesting and innovative methods to present work, especially in Photography submissions. For example, a candidate demonstrated considerable video editing skills utilising Final Cut Pro to produce commercially polished outcomes.
- Good contextual understanding through effective and appropriate sketchbook studies with a few artists covered in-depth to complement workshop activities.
- Written annotations and evaluations which were insightful and meaningful, as well as aiding progress.
- Drawing used as an explorative tool: to record from observation, create trial compositions and/or storyboards; or varied materials effectively used to further extend candidates' experiences.

- Reflective recording used throughout the submissions, with ideas developed and reflected upon in sketchbooks. This showed clarity of purpose that encouraged thematic approaches to emerge.
- Candidates making particularly interesting use of textile processes that amplified the formal qualities of colour, texture and pattern.
- Contextual understanding was particularly strong when it was related to material that candidates had a personal interest in.

Shortcomings

- Taking interesting photographs but then disregarding them or using them in an obvious and less creative manner. Simply copying images produced by others instead of using them as starting points for extended lines of enquiry.
- A lack of drawing and too much use of photographs as the basis for drawing.
- Relying too extensively on secondary sources and not giving more thoughtful consideration to the use of primary sources.
- Learner Statements with the bare minimum of commentary and offering no insight, reflection or explanation of work.
- Annotations that tended to be too descriptive and lacking evidence of analytical or evaluative judgements.
- Submissions were not sustained and did not make sufficient use of contextual sources.
- Some candidates still view Learner Statements as a paper exercise that simply describes what is in their portfolios rather than explaining intentions, how the candidate plans to realise them and the context within which they will be produced. Statements completed only at the conclusion, rather than during, the course of study.
- Not looking at a wide enough range of contextual sources and studying these in insufficient detail.
- Not enough planning of the set time period was undertaken and consequently outcomes were weaker in quality.

Suggestions for improving performance

- Use thorough planning and consider partly completing a similar version of the intended outcome before beginning the 15 hours. The strongest candidates followed this approach and it led to some outstanding outcomes.
- Candidates should have their own voice by now and they also need to take responsibility for preparing for the 15 hour Sustained Focus Period.
- Projects need not be perceived as purely technical exercises in learning how to use a particular medium or technique but should be developed in more intellectually challenging ways by using the acquired practical skills to express challenging ideas with confidence, solve a particular design problem or raise concern/awareness over a particular issue.
- Candidates need to be more explicit in discussing motives, concepts and how ideas will be communicated and resolved. They could also benefit from linking their work back to their contextual research.
- Aim to consider a sufficiently wide range of resources. Might candidates carry out some primary source gathering such as visits, interviews, questionnaires, going to talks? This would stimulate ideas more at the start of their project and give them further options when it comes to realising outcomes.
- Avoid duplication of images evident in sketchbooks and then simply copied and presented on mounted boards.
- Evidence the journey from research to creative making to demonstrate refinement of ideas.

Most popular questions

In Eduqas centres, both visual and written assignments attracted responses, with 'Challenging the Ordinary', 'Contours', 'Seen better days,' 'The Edge' and 'Stratification', being popular choices.

'Food Culture' was also particularly popular with Graphic Communication submissions. Candidates enjoyed having a new stimulus and there were many excellent pieces of work in evidence.

Responding to *Challenging the Ordinary*, a candidate initially studied Dadaism and the impact of World War One on this movement, drawing on archive material at the Victoria and Albert museum. The research prompted a more focused investigation into the role of women artists in the Dada movement and a challenging discourse on the boundaries between Fine Art and Applied Art, particularly with regard to woven textiles. Part of the submission included a woven outcome based on a geometric abstract design.



Fig 6: Challenging the Ordinary – ‘an imaginative discourse on the boundaries between Fine Art and Applied Art’

There was purposeful initial experimentation and analysis of digital video versus traditional film in a response to 'Investigate an expression of faith and belief' by a candidate who then used materials, tools and techniques sensitively and skilfully throughout the unit. Multiple exposures, layering techniques and capturing the transient effects of unfixed images, were utilised competently in this highly experimental submission.

The portfolio of a textile candidate showed a real passion to explore the title 'The Edge' through the form of a psychiatric illness; investigating both the biological issues involved and also analysing 'outsider' artists' work in depth. Her final outcome was a highly imaginative, personal and meaningful response based on a traditional nurse's uniform, showing a wonderful mixture of techniques including free machinery, dying and cutting through a calico all-in-one sleeveless dress.

In WJEC centres, notable submissions included a Fine Art response to 'Looking Up' that investigated the demise of the tomato industry in Guernsey, with large-scale charcoal drawings and accomplished three-dimensional relief painting and sculpture outcomes. 'Supporting Structures' also led a Photography candidate to explore architectural structures in an innovative, abstract and mature manner resulting in an imaginative three-dimensional outcome.

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