



National Qualifications 2009

Internal Assessment Report: Art and Design

Assessment Panel: Art and Design

The purpose of this report is to provide feedback to centres on verification in National Qualifications in this subject.

Standard Grade

Element/Coursework verified

Art & Design: Design Activity (completed Units)

Feedback to centres

General comments

Eight verifiers visited 21 centres in May 2009 to sample Design Activity from Standard Grade Coursework, which is a two-fold increase from last year's quota.

Of the centres visited, 14 featured full samplings of 12 candidates, while the other seven showed samplings from 11 down to only one candidate, depending on presentation circumstances.

Internal assessment at 19 of the centres was concordant within the 6-point cut off. In 12 of these centres, however, verification discrepancy points mostly downgraded candidates. Five centres were fully concordant. In two centres, verification discrepancy points upgraded candidates. The remaining two centres however, were discordant to the point of full reassessment being required.

Advice on good practice and areas for further development

Design brief

The majority of centres visited used whole-class briefs rather than individual candidate briefs, although a small number featured both. Again, as with last session and also previous years, the most popular area from samplings was graphic design, followed closely by product, then textiles, then jewellery. Virtually no architecture, built environment or interior briefs were seen. Graphics Units featured posters, book jackets, CD covers or logos; 3D design areas included lamps, pots, frames, panels, chairs, and clocks. Textiles were equally divided between costume and fashion themes, consisting of garments or accessories for wear. Diverse items of body decoration were viewed in the area of jewellery.

Design briefs, whether class or individual, varied in quality and content. Weaker examples were open-ended and non-specific, where candidates had floundered in certain areas due to the absence of restrictions or defined constraints that would have offered more guidance and focus. Conversely, where candidates were working to set parameters and clear constraints, they showed greater understanding of the problem-solving processes, and practical work was consequently much stronger.

Again this year, the weakest briefs were found to be in the 2D graphics area, the most popular choice. Without a stimulus theme, client, purpose or identified need, candidates other than the most able often struggled to maintain focus and cohesion. Established

constraints for these aspects and issues, while still allowing for personal exploration and creativity, would have better guided candidates through the activity.

Investigation

Although annotations are not a mandatory requirement during research and investigation into a theme or context, it was felt that their inclusion helped to clarify candidate thinking and justify and personalise much of the collected imagery — especially where this was photographically or electronically produced without the inclusion of drawings or sketches. Without such commentary, sheets at times showed no hand of the candidate and the resultant ‘mood board’ effect had a rather impersonal appearance. Strong examples had a vibrant, individualised character in which relevant drawn images were selective and meaningful, giving a more sketchbook view where the candidate had engaged enthusiastically, from the onset, with a well-drafted brief.

Again, most weaknesses were seen in the graphics area, where investigative research was disjointed, unrelated or scant. Although work could seem copious or thorough, on closer viewing these visuals tended to be wallpapered, bearing little connection to any later development. In many cases, this weakness often stemmed from a slack or ill-defined brief. Clearer direction and focus would have improved these examples.

Development

Regardless of design area, whether 2D or 3D, there was found to be great variation between centres in the quality of work seen at the development stage. Many strong examples clearly followed on from key aspects of investigation and showed really individual, creative consideration of alternative possibilities through trials, roughs, specimens and samples. Design issues such as scale, form, layout, use of materials, and graphic or craft techniques, had been well considered with thoughtful and skillful visuals and manipulation of materials, many to exquisitely executed standards.

Weaker candidates, however, showed scant or no consideration of layout or the links between lettering and imagery in the area of graphics, little or no consideration of form or scale when designing a 3D product, and did not address the human figure or scale when developing a garment or accessory for wear. Textile developments often failed to include any fabric samples or specimens at this stage. At times, one idea would simply have been plucked from a series, thus suddenly producing a solution with little or no refinement or development towards it.

The strongest work, however, featured lively and thorough consideration of design problems and issues, often to a sophisticated level. Any repetitious padding with the overuse of similar imagery in 2D graphics, where a single visual was merely tweaked into a final solution, would have been avoided had the candidate engaged in a more robust development of colour scheme, font or layout through working with sketches, thumbnails or roughs. The strongest developments showed clear refinement of all of the above elements through a structured, explorative, problem solving process.

Solution

Some highly creative, beautifully executed and presented solutions were seen in many centres. Appropriate techniques and materials had been used with great creativity, sensitivity and skill, to produce outcomes that were genuinely borne of sustained exploration and enquiry through all stages. On the other hand, where a solution resulted from simply choosing one idea from several, all developed (or not) to the same degree, this final outcome was weaker as no manipulation, alteration, morphing or development had taken it beyond other possibilities shown. Far more input into fleshing-out and developing a selected option would have led to stronger solutions in such cases.

Evaluation

Many centres have adopted the format of evaluation sheets now issued by SQA for NQ Units, or teacher-drafted questionnaires which are akin to these. These were thought to facilitate the strongest evaluative responses, as candidates are directed towards making reflective critiques of their folio work at all stages of the design process. Weaker examples tended to be scant or else descriptive diary accounts of events, without any appraisal of the process or solution.

Across all levels, evaluations tended to reflect the quality of folio work seen. It was, however, sometimes only in this last-stage evaluation exercise that the design brief itself was clarified, as some centres had issued no actual brief at the outset of the Unit. While the NQ-style of evaluation format can be used very effectively here, the design brief should be the springboard rather than a footnote to practical activity. The NQ-style format of evaluation was thought to be especially helpful in guiding the weaker candidate.

National Units

Titles/levels of National Units verified

DV37 Expressive Activity: levels 12, 11 and 10 (Higher, Intermediate 2 and Intermediate 1)

DV38 Design Activity: levels 12, 11 and 10 (Higher, Intermediate 2 & Intermediate 1)

Feedback to centres

General comments

Fifteen verifiers visited 26 centres in January/February 2009 to view work at Higher, Intermediate 2 and Intermediate 1, with the samplings at each level reflecting the ratio being presented by the centres. The proportion of Higher and Intermediate 2 candidates' work seen was fairly equally balanced, while Intermediate 1 featured less. Again this year, many S4 candidates are now presented at NQ level instead of Standard Grade where centres have made that transition. Centres simultaneously delivering Design and Expressive Units narrowly outweighed those teaching Units end-on, where Design tended to be undertaken first.

In 17 centres both Design and Expressive activity was viewed, while the remainder featured only evidence of one Unit, mostly Design.

The majority of visits involved seeing live Units and, in Expressive Activity in particular, final Outcomes had not been started. Throughout the centres sampled, staff tended to have full ownership and responsibility for all aspects of Coursework, and only rarely did they share classes by delivering different components. Many centres compiled verification samples to feature candidate work considered borderline at that stage, rather than clear examples of each level, other than in obvious cases. This was either due to lack of available evidence to date, or in order to use the verification exercise as an aid to the clarification of levels.

Advice on good practice and areas for further development

Virtually all centres visited were conducting joint course assessment and reviews to cross-mark regularly, share good practice, check candidate progress, and standardise internal estimates. Indeed, centres where the work sampled appeared weaker, regardless of level, tended to be those where on-going team marking did not operate.

Component/Coursework in National Courses

Component/Coursework verified

DV38 Design Activity

DV37 Expressive Activity

Feedback to centres

General comments: Design Activity

The Brief

The most popular briefs this year, from the samples of Design Activity verified, were textiles, where fashion items featured more than costume, followed closely by 2D graphics, then jewellery, and then product. Architectural and interior themes barely featured.

Briefs were mainly negotiated with the candidate or drafted by the teacher, rather than purely candidate-devised. Textiles comprised a rich mixture of garments, headwear and accessories for fashion, as well as theatrical masks and headdresses. Graphics featured CD covers, logos and posters. Jewellery allowed for a varied and creative assortment of body decoration, with product design featuring both functional and decorative household items.

Very few centres had offered only one design area, so candidates had much scope for choice in this. The strongest briefs allowed for individual interpretation, tapping into candidates' personal interests and enthusiasms. However, these set clear restrictions and constraints to guide through the problem-solving process. On the other hand, vague, non-specific briefs saw candidates struggle, with all stages of practical work being less focused where design issues had not been identified or addressed.

Investigation

During investigation and research, whether visuals were drawn or electronic, the strongest examples were well edited to feature a cohesive body of work, annotated where appropriate, to justify and clarify thinking. Where the hand of the candidate was less obvious due to photographic content, these annotations were especially helpful. A mood board approach, however, where random or spurious material diluted the breadth and depth of real investigative enquiry, lead to weaker examples. More meaningful and selective imagery, or personalised, relevant annotations, would strengthen this stage of research.

Development

Textile design was the most popular area viewed this year, and very creative work was seen in garments, hats, bags, masks and headdresses. Strong developments featured real problem-solving where beautiful craftwork addressed the human form in terms of scale, structure and wearability. Consideration of fabrics was also integral and well developed.

Jewellery also featured exquisitely-worked trials and specimens at this stage and again, the strongest developments included the human body or head to be considered.

Graphics showed some robust and rigorous development, with clear understanding of the essential link between font and imagery. The best of these had creatively explored layout and colour schemes showing thorough experimentation. Any computer-generated visuals were meaningful and well used in the communication and development of possibilities.

Product design featured less, but work seen showed very imaginative experimentation with 3D techniques and media, and clear consideration of design issues like scale, form, function, weight, safety, comfort and durability. Special mention was made of how candidates in all areas of design had, in the strongest examples, addressed and considered these key issues.

Across design activity, regardless of area, a noted weakness was where candidates had not progressed or refined an idea or option to an adequate degree. In some cases, a solution seemed to have been plucked from a range of possibilities without being further developed than any other. In other examples, two ideas had been equally defined and developed so the solution could have been selected from either of them. The expansion or morphing of a selected option for more focus and development would have been beneficial.

Solution

The presence or absence of a solution does not affect how centres assess candidate levels at this stage. During verification visits, some solutions were completed whilst others were in progress or not yet begun. Where solutions were viewed, mention was made of the high quality of craftsmanship and finish on many examples. Importantly, those that were derived from a strong, clearly-drafted brief, where constraints and restrictions were identified, were among the strongest seen.

Expressive Activity

Themes

At the centres visited, by far the most popular expressive theme was still life. This was followed by portraiture, and then figure composition, the natural environment, then landscape or townscape. Interestingly, there was no mention of fantasy and imagination that featured in last year's visits.

Overall, expressive work was at a less completed stage than design activity, even where Units were delivered simultaneously (as was the case with most centres). Elsewhere, design activity was virtually completed with expressive work barely begun. Only two centres featured expressive Units entirely with no design work in evidence.

Investigation

With still life again being the most popular choice of theme at the centres visited, some extremely strong, skillful and sensitive analytical drawing was seen, derived from primary source subject matter that engaged and enthused candidates.

Beautiful work was also viewed in the areas of portraiture, figure composition and landscape. The observed reference drawing in this work focused on subject matter that was clearly of personal significance. Where photographic imagery was present, it had been carefully selected as meaningful and justified. A wide range of appropriate drawing materials showed candidates' analytical and investigative abilities executed in a wide range of skilful media-handling techniques.

Alternatively, where candidates had not been directed to a theme or subject of particular interest to them, or towards an area appropriate to their skills level, this stage was much weaker, where they struggled with unforgiving sources of reference to produce rather piecemeal investigations. In some cases more appropriate themes and props, along with stronger guidance, would have improved this area.

Development

In many centres visited, highly skilled use of media was seen at this stage, in the consideration of possible compositions as well as lively experimentation with colour, content or alternative light sources. The strongest developments were based on key aspects of preceding investigative work with clear connections established.

A wide range of media featured paint, ink, pastels, chalk, print and collage, showing relevance and experimentation. This stage was much the weaker where repetitive use or a narrow range of ideas or approaches was seen, or when overly-large examples of work self-penalised the candidate by compromising the space for opportunity to show alternative development and consideration. Also, where a narrow range of media was over-prescribed, thus prohibiting any freedom to engage more expressively, work appeared lacklustre and without direction. A more diverse range of trials, colour studies, compositional studies or cropped sketches would have enriched this stage.

Outcome

At most centres visited this stage of expressive activity had not been completed or even started. The presence or absence of an outcome piece, however, did not affect the centres' interim assessments for level placing of candidates.

In only two centres were final outcomes viewed, with the strongest of these featuring theme-based work, meaningful to the candidate, resulting from clear progression through all stages. These displayed skilled use of appropriate media, executed with obvious enjoyment and commitment, to a high standard of finish. Less successful outcomes appeared to lack guidance on theme, or had a subject matter that neither addressed candidates' interests nor took account of ability levels. More individual support according to interests, aptitude and ability would have helped here. Also, due time given to this stage, with twice the weighting of the previous two stages, is important.

Advice on good practice and areas for further development

In centres where expressive work was viewed, investigation and development was often at a collated and mounted stage. Based on available evidence, in some cases re-assessment between Higher and Intermediate 2 level was discussed, or suggestions were made on how and where to enrich or gap-fill in order to help standardise the level placing of candidates.

Verification visits this year found that the majority of centres were assessing candidates at the appropriate level for the stage they had reached, in line with National Standards. Indeed, in many cases, candidates were not placed definitively at specific levels at the time of verification, as many were following a common course until sufficient evidence could accurately determine presentation level. Where candidates had been identified as working to a particular level, the verification visit confirmed internal assessment in most cases.

Where the verification exercise found that internal assessment did not match National Standards, advice and guidance was given to centres on how candidates could complete Units to the necessary standard, or alternatively a review of assessment would be made to change levels. The most concordant centres were those whose staff cross-marked and assessed as a team within the department to share good practice in regularly standardising assessment. Many verifiers made special mention of how centres were receptive to and appreciative of these visits to look at live Units at this stage in the academic session, where input and feedback was most welcome.