

GCSE Examiners' Report

Art and Design
GCSE
Summer 2025

© WJEC CBAC Ltd. 2025



Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	<p>Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade.</p> <p>For unitted specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level.</p> <p>For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.</p>	For unitted specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner WJEC

Contents

	Page
Executive summary	5
Unit 1 Portfolio	6
Unit 2 Externally Set Assignment	10
Supporting you – useful contacts and links	12

Executive Summary

For Unit 1, Portfolio, candidates generally demonstrated strong initial research and contextual understanding (AO1), but the development of ideas through to final outcomes (AO4) remains an area for improvement. Centres are encouraged to prioritise clearer visual and written documentation of the creative journey, including thumbnail sketches, compositional planning, and experimentation.

Key strengths observed in centres

- Encouraged personal enquiry through flexible themes.
- Structured guidance aligned with assessment objectives.
- Integrated gallery visits and first-hand research.
- Promoted thoughtful annotation and critical reflection.
- Embraced digital media while maintaining breadth in materials.

Areas for improvement include:

- Use of more relevant contextual references which supports personal creative development.
- A broader range of creative media and materials, expanding exploration and experimentation.
- Editing and selecting portfolios to demonstrate quality over volume to meet the assessment objectives.

Digital portfolios are increasingly common, particularly in Graphics and Photography.

Looking ahead, the new specification builds on this successful model, with an emphasis on personalisation, contextual depth, and technical refinement. Centres are advised to continue fostering autonomy, ensure clear progression from research to outcome, and maintain high standards of documentation and presentation. 2025 standards are broadly similar to 2024, with most centres achieving a strong balance between structure and creative freedom.

The standard of ESA submissions in 2025 remained broadly consistent with the 2023–24 cohort, with moderators continuing to commend the diversity, creativity, and innovation evident in candidate responses. The focused nature of the ESA, combined with time constraints, often led to some of the most accomplished and engaging work in candidates' portfolios. Maturity in skill development also contributed to improved outcomes.

However, time management remains a key challenge. Some candidates struggled to plan effectively from the release of the paper in January to the final 10-hour controlled assessment, resulting in sparse submissions and limited coverage of assessment objectives. A lack of sustained idea development and experimentation was particularly evident in weaker Unit 2 submissions.

Key strengths observed in centres

- Clear progression from research to outcome.
- Balanced engagement with all four assessment objectives.
- Effective use of contextual references and first-hand sources.

Areas for improvement include:

- Structured planning to ensure adequate time for development and refinement.
- Early, well-considered question selection to avoid disjointed outcomes.
- Broader use of creative media, especially in Photography.
- Contextual research that meaningfully informs practical work.

Despite these challenges, the ESA continues to provide a valuable platform for personal expression and high achievement when well-supported and thoughtfully executed.

ART AND DESIGN

GCSE

Summer 2025

UNIT 1: PORTFOLIO

Overview of the Unit

This 2025 report marks the near completion of the legacy Art & Design GCSE courses, and it is important to note that the developments undertaken during recent years have made a very significant contribution to the new specification (taught as of September 2025). The adoption of a portfolio approach to coursework allied to a foundation period of skill development has met with considerable approval nationally; consequently, the new specification grounded within the principles of the Curriculum for Wales is a further refinement of what was already a very successful model.

Principal Reports have often reinforced the need for candidates to clearly demonstrate the development of their ideas from initial research to outcome[s]. Future candidates would benefit from showing a clear, coherent and explicit design/idea journey within their submissions. It is evident within both Unit 1 and Unit 2 that candidates for the most part are adept at gathering initial investigations and making considered and relevant contextual links; however, the development of ideas from these sources to outcome is often underrepresented. Thumbnail drawings, compositional sketches, colour experimentations, digital editing etc. need to be employed to highlight how the outcome[s] have been arrived at, and centres may wish to prioritise this issue as a focus for departmental development. The Creative statement forms have been helpful in enabling moderators to gain better insight into the candidates' thinking, planning and evaluations, including changes in direction, and are most useful when not written retrospectively. A minority of centres have neglected to ensure that these forms are presented for moderation. Whilst the new specification will no longer require the completion of the Creative statement forms for Units one and two, I would wish to reinforce that they are still a requirement as regards this specification for the forthcoming academic year, and it is mandatory that the work of candidates is authenticated on these forms. It is essential that all paperwork accompanying the submissions are completed.

Other measures required for the maintaining and improvement of standards include:

- The considered perusal of the Indicative content documentation.
- Clearly demonstrating the development of ideas from initial research to outcome.
- Considered and perceptive use of digital photography and drawing as a method of gathering primary, first-hand experiences.
- Successfully integrating educational visits and similar contextual experiences into the practical activities of candidates.
- Enabling candidates to determine their own personal starting points (when appropriate) as opposed to teacher-driven, over-prescriptive approaches which undermine personal expression.

The specification has witnessed the adoption of well-structured foundation courses that provide learners with the necessary skills and confidence to progress into the main element of their portfolios. This model has now become established within most centres nationally and is a tried and proven method of ensuring a balance is arrived at regarding teaching essential skills and facilitating personal creative expression. Over-prescriptive courses that do not allow learners to develop personal lines of enquiry and expression result in stale submissions bereft of originality. Inevitably candidates are prevented from truly flourishing when subjected to such a system. Conversely, centres which do not provide their learners with guidance and direction inevitably arrive at a situation where the final submissions are deficient in terms of Assessment Objective coverage and lacking clear structure and technical quality regarding outcomes. Thankfully, the necessary balance has been successfully achieved within most centres and standards are broadly similar to the 2023-24 cohort.

Digital portfolios are becoming more prevalent within centres nationally, particularly in relation to Graphics and Photography. Candidates are encouraged to continue to consider innovative methods of presenting work as long as the four Assessment Objectives remain explicit within the submissions. Centres need to also ensure that a sufficient breadth of mediums and materials have been employed by candidates whilst pursuing their portfolios to ensure adequate marks at Assessment Objective 2, consequently this aspect needs to be given due consideration when presenting work solely through digital portfolios.

Centres adopt a variety of approaches as regards portfolio themes; negotiating individual themes with candidates is popular as it facilitates a pleasing degree of personal engagement whilst accommodating specific interests and preferences, this is particularly valuable in terms of rewarding candidates within Assessment Objective 4. Another successful method is to have an umbrella theme, tried and tested by the department, rich in contextual and first-hand references; candidates are then encouraged to pursue personal lines of enquiry within this common brief. Linking structured foundation course experiences with a theme that offers an increasing level of opportunity for personal response as the course develops is another model which has its advantages. The key is to ensure that themes offer copious opportunities to gather first hand primary sources and contextual references in addition to facilitating independent and highly personal responses. It is pleasing to note that candidates are increasingly exploring a more diverse range of contextual references such as local Welsh artists and craftworkers; social media platforms are also highlighting practitioners who may have a more purposeful and relevant link to the work and aspirations of individual candidates.

To conclude, the strongest features of portfolio work were evidenced in centres which had:

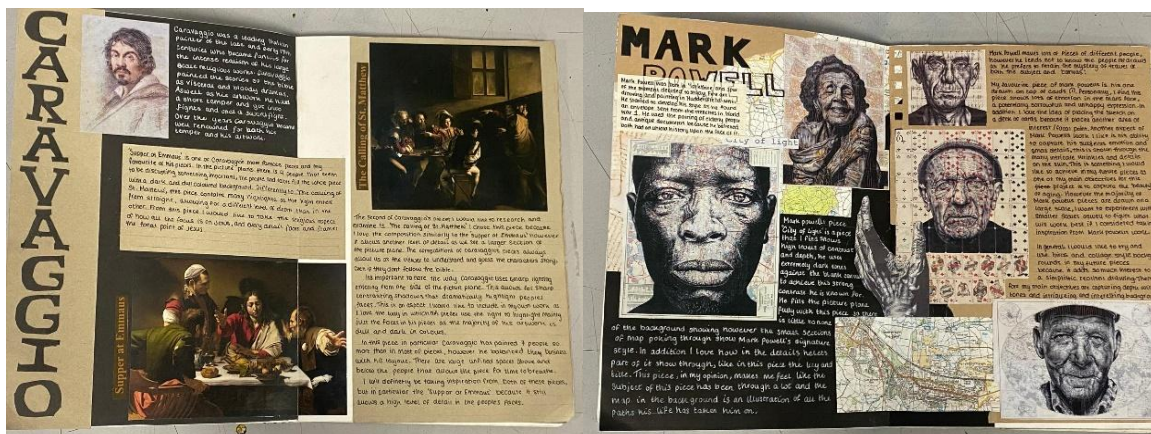
- Allowed candidates to develop a portfolio based on themes that encouraged candidates to pursue personal lines of enquiry.
- Provided candidates with a clear structure to organise their work and respond to assessment objectives.
- Organised visits to galleries, museums as part of their course, visited specific places of aesthetic interest and/ or worked with visiting artists.
- Encouraged candidates to offer a well explained visual and written route through direct annotation and analysis of work as it progressed.
- Well planned and delivered Unit 1 courses that facilitate the development of personal interests within a supportive and well guided framework.
- The use of primary sources as a basis to creative work.
- Contextual work which informs the development of candidates' practical work in meaningful and relevant ways.
- Portfolios which have been carefully edited and presented for assessment.
- The judicious and sensitive use of digital media within the developmental work of candidates.
- A clear path of progression and idea development from initial sources to outcome/outcomes.
- Lively and highly personal portfolios which embrace the four Assessment Objectives in equal measure.

The weakest features of portfolio work were evidenced in centres which had:

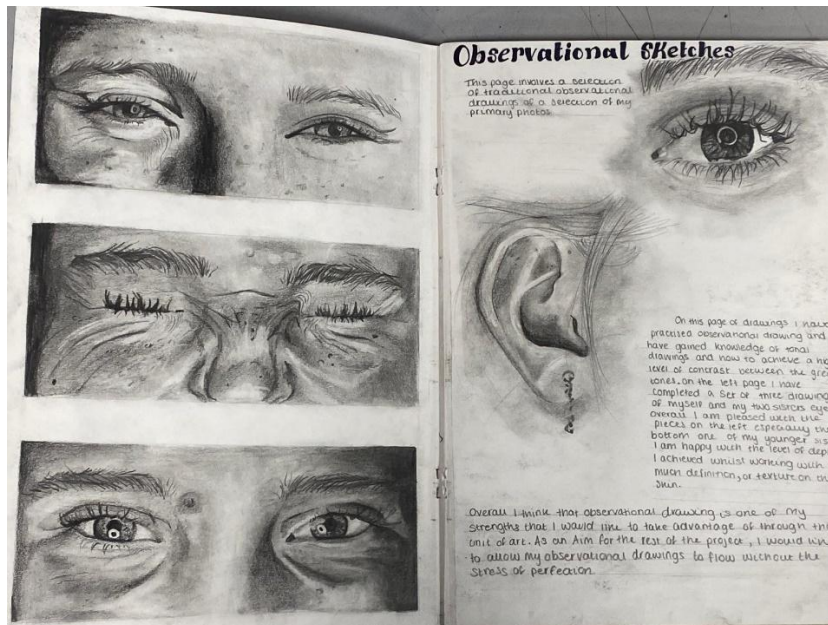
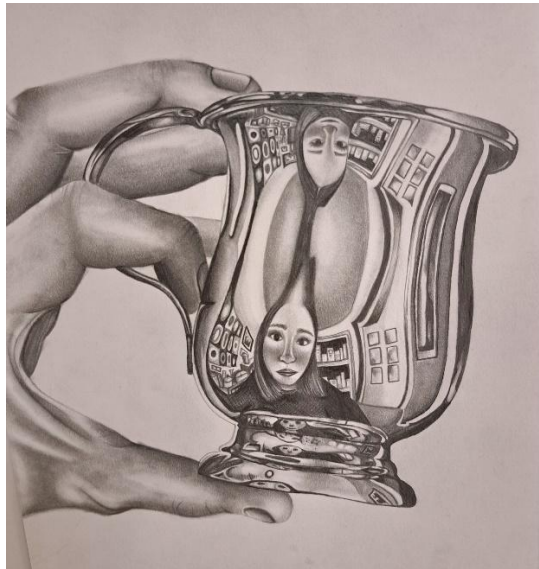
- Over-prescriptive programmes of study that curtail and limit the development of candidates.
- Poorly planned and delivered Unit 1 experiences bereft of structure and guidance leading to low attainment.
- Contextual references of spurious relevance that contribute little to the creative work of the candidate.
- A sparse portfolio demonstrating limited evidence of engagement with Assessment Objectives.
- A restricted range of creative media and materials.
- An over-reliance upon the use of secondary materials.
- Poorly selected and edited portfolios, high in volume but low in quality.
- Portfolios that do not demonstrate a clear progression of ideas from initial investigations to outcome.



A02 'Ideas are refined and explored through rigorous selection and purposeful, creative experimentation'



A03 'Perceptive and rigorous critical analysis of sources...'



A03 'Sophisticated recording of ideas, observations...'

ART AND DESIGN

GCSE

Summer 2025

UNIT 2: EXTERNALLY SET ASSIGNMENT

Overview of the Unit

The standard of ESA submissions are broadly similar with that of the 2023-24 cohort. Moderators continue to comment upon the diverse, innovative and highly creative responses seen by candidates in relation to the ESA element. The more concise, focused challenge allied to the reality of time restriction quite often elicits the most interesting and accomplished aspect of a candidate's portfolio. Unsurprisingly, the increasing maturity of the candidate's skill set is also a contributory factor regarding the general improvements made from earlier efforts.

Shortcomings within Unit 2 often relate to the inability of some candidates to manage their time appropriately from receipt of the exam paper in early January to commencing the final 10 hour-controlled period in spring; consequently, submissions are at times sparse, lacking in rigour and adequate coverage of Assessment objectives. Moderators comment annually upon seeing research and investigation work allied to contextual references but little evidence of sustained idea development and media experimentation leading to the outcome. Whilst this is also a shortcoming within Unit 1, it is particularly evident within the Unit 2 submissions of some candidates and centres nationally. To negate this problem of insufficient coverage of the assessment objectives, consideration of structured planning to allow enough time across the AOs could be an area of improvement. Ensuring that learners adhere to a strict timetable of dates for the completion of different elements of the preparatory work is a well-established and successful method of ensuring that valuable marks are not lost by candidates.

An inability to make a firm decision regarding question choice has also resulted in undermining some candidates' ability to make progress; some submissions have contained evidence of muddled thinking and a lack of direction, consequently much of the initial research material and/or contextual references has little relevance to the remainder of the work resulting in a disjointed effort. This lack of coherence within the submission has a particularly negative impact upon marks awarded at AO4 where the 'purpose and intention of the work' needs to be conveyed. This is a perennial problem, and candidates are strongly advised not to procrastinate following the opening of the paper, and to strive to make a firm and carefully considered selection of question as early as practicable in order that valuable time is not lost. Nevertheless, despite these challenges it is gratifying to report that Moderators continue to see commendable levels of achievement in relation to the Unit 2 element.

Strengths:

- Well-researched responses to the ESA paper followed by a clear path of progression to the outcome where the candidate's intentions are explicit.
- All four Assessment Objectives thoroughly embraced in equal measure, facilitated by furnishing candidates with clear deadlines for the completion of work during the preparatory phase.
- Carefully analysed and considered contextual references that inform and enrich the development of the candidate's ESA in a meaningful manner.
- First-hand primary sources used as initial starting points for candidate responses.

Shortcomings:

- Poorly documented final outcomes that have been arrived at with little reference to preceding work.
- Sparse ESA submissions which reflect little sustained rigour on behalf of candidates and consequently insufficient engagement with Assessment Objectives.
- ESA submissions which contain pleasing evidence of research and investigation but sparse reference to idea development and experimentation of media.
- Candidates opting for questions prior to considering the availability of first-hand sources.
- Contextual work, which is biographical and descriptive in nature, contributing little to the development of the candidates' work.
- ESA submissions within Photography that are limited in the use of creative media; it is important to reinforce that the photography endorsement is within the context of 'Art & Design' GCSE and should therefore reflect the breadth of creative materials expected within all other endorsements.
- A limited breadth of processes and materials.



A04 'Highly imaginative, personal and meaningful response which realises intentions in a sophisticated, coherent and assured manner'



A04 'Highly imaginative, personal and meaningful response which realises intentions in a sophisticated, coherent and assured manner'

Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.

Tel: 029 2240 4304

Email: artanddesign@wjec.co.uk

Qualification webpage: [GCSE Art and Design](#)

See other useful contacts here: [Useful Contacts | WJEC](#)

CPD Training / Professional Learning

Access our popular, free online CPD/PL courses to receive exam feedback and put questions to our subject team, and attend one of our face-to-face events, focused on enhancing teaching and learning, providing practical classroom ideas and developing understanding of marking and assessment.

Please find details for all our courses here: <https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/>

WJEC Qualifications

As Wales' largest awarding body, WJEC supports its education community by providing trusted bilingual qualifications, specialist support, and reliable assessment to schools and colleges across the country. This allows our learners to reach their full potential.

With more than 70 years' experience, we are also amongst the leading providers in both England and Northern Ireland.



WJEC
245 Western Avenue
Cardiff CF5 2YX
Tel No 029 2026 5000
Fax 029 2057 5994
E-mail: exams@wjec.co.uk
website: www.wjec.co.uk