

# GCE Examiners' Report

Art and Design  
GCE  
Summer 2025

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## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.	<a href="https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/">https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/</a>
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.	<a href="#">Portal by WJEC</a> 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 unitised 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 unitised specifications click here: <a href="#">Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)</a>

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<sup>1</sup> 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.	<a href="#">Portal by WJEC</a>
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.	<a href="https://resources.wjec.co.uk/">https://resources.wjec.co.uk/</a>
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.	<a href="#">Portal by WJEC</a> 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.	<a href="#">Become an Examiner   WJEC</a>

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## Executive Summary

For Unit 1, Personal Creative Enquiry, moderators agreed that 2025 standards broadly aligned with 2024, with AO2 remaining the strongest and AO4 the weakest. Centres promoting structured skills-based workshops and cultural engagement, consistently nurtured innovative, personal outcomes. Candidates benefited from early technical development, applying skills creatively and independently throughout their investigations.

Where experimentation and intellectual enquiry were embedded, submissions demonstrated critical research, originality, and conceptual depth. Conversely, prescriptive teaching resulted in repetitive, formulaic work with limited risk-taking. Strong contextual research linked to personal themes underpinned the most distinctive ideas, although an over-reliance on set artists sometimes constrained individuality.

Digital integration expanded in 2025, particularly in Photography and Graphic Communication. Candidates combined traditional and digital media in dynamic ways, with photography entries standing out for technical maturity. Reflective annotation and drawing from direct observation supported refinement and depth, contributing to coherent and imaginative final outcomes. Centres with sustained technical skill-building produced the most confident and sophisticated responses.

For Unit 2, Personal Investigation, moderators found centre assessment broadly aligned with standards, especially for AO1 and AO3. However, AO2 and AO4 assessments were often overly generous, with insufficient attention to clarity, refinement, and overall submission quality. Strong AO1 responses demonstrated analytical engagement with contextual sources, especially where candidates had direct access to exhibitions or interviews. These enriched the creative process and led to mature, purposeful investigations.

AO2 strength varied: higher-performing candidates showcased innovative media use, combining traditional and digital techniques with refined experimentation. Weaker submissions suffered from limited development and planning. AO3 was generally strong, particularly in visually exciting sketchbooks featuring observational drawing and quality primary references. Nonetheless, some candidates relied heavily on secondary imagery, limiting depth.

AO4 submissions thrived when themes were deeply personal and meaningfully resolved, reflecting conceptual clarity and technical skill. Less successful outcomes lacked cohesion and suffered from poor presentation or planning. Digital processes were used effectively across disciplines, with growing confidence in tools like Photoshop and ProCreate. A few candidates integrated AI appropriately for layout and design development.

Overall, submissions displayed personal relevance and creativity, with themes ranging from feminism to environmental issues. Centres are encouraged to promote direct engagement with sources, develop analytical writing, and emphasise refinement and review across the creative journey.

Moderator feedback indicated that standards for Unit 3 Externally Set Assignment, was broadly similar to the 2024 series, with candidates displaying increased maturity and creativity. AO1 and AO2 were addressed most effectively, reflecting rich contextual investigation and innovative media experimentation. AO3 was sometimes hindered by time pressures and overreliance on secondary sources, while AO4 emerged as the weakest area, marked by unresolved final outcomes and inconsistent creative processes.

Candidates embraced the freedom of selecting new lines of enquiry, producing highly personal interpretations. Popular starting points included visual prompts like Natural textures and Workplace, and written stimuli such as Distortion and Zoomorphic themes. Though the ESA shorter time frame sharpened focus for some, others struggled to refine and resolve their ideas, leading to superficial investigations.

Strong submissions showcased diverse contextual research, skilful technical application, and well-articulated creative journeys. Greater emphasis on refining outcomes and coherent presentation is recommended to improve assessment accuracy and student attainment.

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#### UNIT 1: PERSONAL CREATIVE ENQUIRY

##### Overview of the Unit

Moderators agreed that standards in 2025 were broadly similar to those observed in 2024, with Assessment Objective 2 continuing to emerge as the strongest area and Assessment Objective 4 remaining the weakest. Centres that embedded structured skills-based workshops, encouraged critical reflection, and promoted engagement with galleries and other cultural experiences, were consistently identified as supporting the most innovative and personal outcomes. These approaches enabled candidates to develop technical confidence early in the course and apply their skills with increasing independence and creativity as their work progressed.

Moderators noted that where centres fostered a culture of experimentation and intellectual enquiry, candidates produced more distinctive and thoughtful investigations that were underpinned by purposeful research and critical analysis. In contrast, centres adopting more prescriptive approaches tended to see formulaic outcomes, with limited evidence of risk-taking or original thinking. Overall, the most successful submissions demonstrated a clear journey from initial exploration through to resolved and imaginative final outcomes, with all assessment objectives given appropriate weight and integrated effectively.

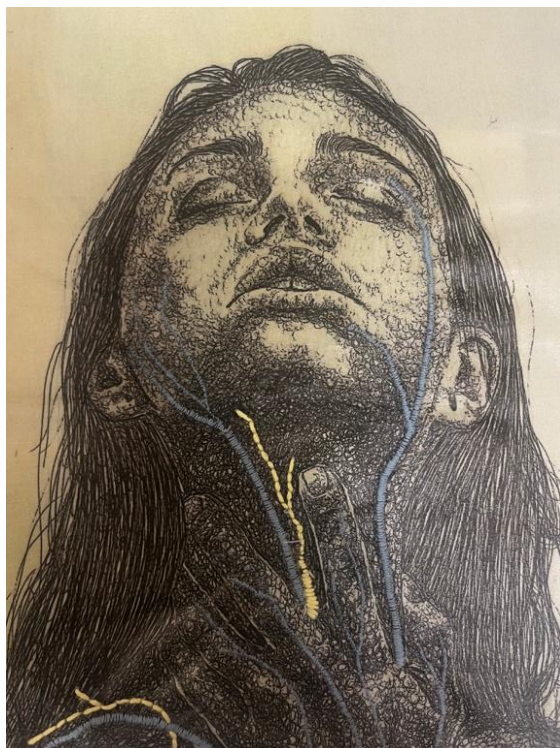
Evidence from moderation indicated that candidates approached the PCE with confidence and creativity, often beginning with skills-based workshops to strengthen technical competence. Many centres supported strong contextual research and thoughtful links to personal themes, though in some cases an over-reliance on set artists limited individuality. Experimentation with materials and processes was praised for its breadth and ambition, helping candidates develop creative ideas; however, in weaker submissions this became repetitive and lacked meaningful refinement.



*This candidate demonstrated a creative and confident exploration of drawing and painting techniques in response to the theme 'Beneath the Surface', thoughtfully exploring their own emotions and feelings.*

## Comments on individual questions/sections

Candidates explored an impressively wide range of themes, with many demonstrating highly personal and individualised responses. Topics such as mental health, feminism, identity, and environmental issues reflected strong connections to contemporary concerns and the candidates' own lived experiences. Natural forms, architecture, and portraiture also featured prominently, often supported by photography as a primary research tool.



***This ACD candidate produced a mature and thoughtful response to the theme of personal identity, experimenting with biro and embroidery on fabric.***

Across the titles, there was strong evidence of creative experimentation and varied technical processes. Candidates engaged confidently with both traditional and contemporary media, including painting, printmaking, textiles, digital image editing, and 3D construction. Top-performing candidates demonstrated technical control and a willingness to take creative risks, producing outcomes that were imaginative and visually sophisticated. However, some centres could strengthen provision for technical skill-building, particularly in textiles and drawing, where exploration occasionally lacked depth. Centres employing structured skills-based workshops in the early stages of the course were more successful in supporting sustained technical development.

Photography submissions stood out for their maturity and creative integration of digital and physical techniques. There was greater confidence in using digital technologies in 2025, with more candidates experimenting with digital drawing and blending traditional and digital processes. However, some candidates produced literal interpretations of starting points, which limited the originality of final responses.

Candidates demonstrated strong contextual research and made clear, meaningful links to their personal themes. High-quality written work and thoughtful artist investigations often supported purposeful and sustained idea development. The strongest candidates showed evidence of critical analysis and used their research to inspire inventive starting points. However, in some cases, there was an over-reliance on a narrow range of set artists provided by centres, which limited the scope for personal enquiry and hindered students' ability to develop more individual, distinctive responses. Encouraging a broader selection of influences could have strengthened the originality of outcomes.

Contextual research emerged as a notable strength across many submissions, with students engaging critically and selectively with artists, designers, and movements to inform their practical work. Stronger candidates demonstrated the ability to analyse context and extract relevant aspects to inspire their creative exploration. However, the less successful candidates' written responses and annotation were often descriptive rather than analytical, summarising artist work without reflecting on how it informed their own practice. This lack of depth in connecting research to practical outcomes limited the potential for development and refinement.

Most centres approached research effectively, with many students evidencing investigations that underpinned a personal and purposeful development of ideas. In stronger submissions, candidates explored themes in depth, making confident and individual decisions about their creative direction. By contrast, weaker submissions often revealed a more prescriptive and narrow approach that resulted in formulaic outcomes and limited opportunities for students to demonstrate independence or originality.

Many candidates demonstrated a strong engagement with a wide variety of materials and processes across disciplines, including traditional and contemporary techniques. Stronger submissions revealed extensive, relevant, and sustained experimentation that enabled students to explore possibilities and refine their technical and creative skills. In some cases, candidates presented work that lacked depth, with limited experimentation leading to repetitive approaches and superficial outcomes. In these cases, candidates often defaulted to safe, familiar processes rather than pushing boundaries to take creative risks.

Centres that embedded structured skills-based workshops within personal investigations gave candidates the opportunity to refine their techniques and make informed creative choices. This approach enabled students to develop confidence and technical fluency, which were clearly evident in their sketchbooks and outcomes. In centres where such opportunities were less evident, students' exploration often appeared superficial, and practical investigations lacked relevance or connection to individual themes.

Digital processes featured prominently, particularly in Graphic Communication and Photography, with many candidates demonstrating proficiency in using digital sketchbooks, image editing software, and compositional planning tools. The strongest submissions combined traditional and digital approaches in innovative ways, resulting in more dynamic and layered creative outcomes. However, some weaker submissions relied too heavily on digital techniques alone, often at the expense of material exploration and technical variety.

Reflective practice was a significant strength in the strongest submissions, where candidates used purposeful annotation to evaluate progress and refine their ideas critically. This reflective approach often drove sustained development and supported decision-making across the creative process. In contrast, less effective submissions tended to rely on descriptive commentary, recording processes without exploring their impact or identifying areas for improvement. This limited the potential for refinement and further development.

Drawing skills were evident across titles, and centres that incorporated observational drawing workshops early in the course saw candidates develop greater confidence and fluency, resulting in more dynamic outcomes. In contrast, where drawing from direct observation was less evident, particularly in Graphics and Photography, recording tended to rely heavily on photography or tracing, limiting depth and innovation.

Final outcomes were often imaginative and well-resolved, showcasing a wide range of media and presentation formats, including installations and interactive work. The strongest submissions demonstrated a clear journey from research to outcome, with sketchbooks, experiments, and final pieces complementing each other. In weaker work, final responses sometimes lacked cohesion and did not fully synthesise earlier exploration.



***This candidate responded to the theme 'Broken' by developing imaginative ways to exhibit their work, focusing on broken communication and how this could be conveyed to an audience.***

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## UNIT 2: PERSONAL INVESTIGATION

### Overview of the Unit

The majority of moderators were of the opinion that standards across all titles for the Personal Investigation broadly aligned to 2024. Many candidates showed increased intellectual confidence and practical competency as they progressed through their personal investigations, with AO1 being the strongest element within the submissions. However, weaknesses were identified within certain aspects of the assessment objectives, especially for AO4.

According to moderators, centre assessment was generally in line with set standards, with AO1 being the most accurate. For AO2, centre assessment did not always consider the level of clarity regarding idea development, or the thoroughness of investigations to explore creative possibilities, and so tended to be generous, especially for those towards the middle to lower end of the ability range. Centre assessment for AO3 was largely in line with set standards, and AO4 was slightly generous. This was mainly due to centres awarding personal engagement without giving due consideration to the coherence and competency of the submissions. Although in most instances intentions had been realised, centres needed to pay greater attention to the overall quality of the submission when allocating marks.

Across all titles, moderators saw submissions that explored a range of themes and topics, reflecting the diverse nature of the subject. Candidates engaged in a wide range of issues exploring arguments and ideas which were of significance to them, from Feminism in the 21st century, to animal welfare, and to family ties and relationships. Their responses reflected a strong connection to contemporary concerns and to their own personal experiences.

Moderators highlighted the skilful use of digital processes across all titles, particularly in Graphic Communication and Photography. Candidates showed proficiency when creating digital sketchbooks, image editing and compositional planning, particularly with software such as Photoshop and ProCreate, which saw a marked improvement in their use compared to previous years. More innovative approaches were seen when candidates combined both traditional and digital approaches, and merged disciplines to create original responses. The use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was present in a few submissions and was used appropriately as an investigative tool for developing ideas and exploring layouts and design alternatives.

### Comments on individual questions/sections

In addressing AO1, candidates sourced and explored a wide range of relevant contextual references, often displaying excellent analytical and evaluative skills. The most successful responses were often a result of direct contact with a source, either through an exhibition, online interview, or studio visit. Such experiences enriched candidates' understanding and strengthened their personal engagement with their themes. Many investigated their sources with enthusiasm, showing a genuine sense of discovery and excitement. Those submissions achieving a band 5 in the mark scheme were those who analysed these sources in great depth and demonstrated a mature understanding of their purposes and contexts.

Their investigations were rigorous, with confident and well considered connections having been established between sources and practical responses. This rigour was also accentuated in the extended writing element, often presented in the form of an illustrative digital document. When done well this document enriched the practical response by providing a greater insight into candidates' intentions and ideas.

For AO2 many candidates revisited skills learnt during their PCE and applied these effectively to new contexts as they developed their portfolios. Successful responses had evidence of pertinent investigations into techniques and media, with many demonstrating highly skilful control and manipulation of media, culminating in innovative and sophisticated responses. Some exceptional fine art skills were seen, such as painting, printmaking and sculpture, as well as equally competent textiles processes, for example experimental embroidery and mixed media collages. Submissions which satisfied the top band of the mark scheme showed logical development of ideas, which were reflected upon with care and consideration, enabling candidates to make informed and sensitive refinements to their work as it developed. The best submissions were prepared to push boundaries by combining unusual techniques and processes such as stitching and ceramics.

When it came to AO3, sketchbooks were often the most successful element within the submissions. Both traditional and digital versions were visually exciting, showing strong idea development, which was thoroughly explored and documented, providing a valuable insight into candidates' intentions and experiences, showing clear progression of ideas supported by rigorous and effective critical reflection on work and progress. Digital sketchbooks tended to be used predominately in Graphic Communication and Photography titles. Those submissions achieving the top band in the mark scheme showed the extensive and sophisticated recording of observations through purposeful drawing and detailed annotation. Intelligent use was made of good quality primary references, including personal photographic images to support idea development and realise intentions. Where appropriate, highly confident observational drawing was evidenced which communicated ideas and perceptions, often derived from first hand experiences, such as a visit to a bird sanctuary and a farmers' market.

One of the strongest features of successful submissions for AO4 was candidates' personal investment in their work, with individual identities and interests clearly expressed through their chosen themes. Candidates presented highly imaginative responses, and some very powerful presentations were seen, such as an investigation into the role of women in religion and being visually impaired. Submissions achieving band 5 in the mark scheme presented eloquent and original submissions which had been derived from a strong personal attachment to their chosen theme. The final presentation of these submissions brought the work to a very successful conclusion by enhancing their meaning, and their effect on the viewer. In the very best submissions intentions had been realised in a very perceptive and coherent way and were exciting to view and read.



***A selection from a Fine Art PI illustrating the effective use of primary references to develop ideas supported with well-considered reflection on progress.***

In less successful submissions, evidence for AO1 was underdeveloped, as sources had not been analysed in any significant depth. These selected sources were not always wholly relevant to candidates' intentions, and as a result had limited impact on outcomes. An overemphasis on descriptive and biographical information did not address the requirements to critically analyse sources, so candidates could not achieve the higher bands within the mark scheme. The extended written requirement, usually presented as an essay, was often redundant as it had limited relevance to the practical response or was a pure record of a process. Where possible, direct engagement with sources is beneficial to foster engagement and encourage critical enquiry. Encouraging candidates to develop more analytical and evaluative skills focusing on purposes, meaning and contexts would make the higher bands of the mark scheme more accessible.

Lower achieving submissions at AO2 showed limited idea development and a lack of experimentation; many seemed to have adopted alternative responses to coming up with different idea variations, which appeared formulaic and contrived, as these alternatives were not comprehensively reviewed, and had limited impact on final outcomes. Many submissions would have benefitted from making greater use of prototypes, samples and mock-ups, before commencing outcomes, which might have resulted in better quality pieces. Some candidates needed to consider the formal elements, especially scale and composition, prior to commencing on the final outcome, as final pieces often lacked the refinement and skill needed to address the top band of the assessment scheme. In some cases, the relationship between creative development and final outcomes needed to be strengthened, as some of the energy and creativity seen in the preparatory work was often diluted when it came to the outcome. Centre assessment did not always take this into account and therefore tended to be generous.

Shortcomings when addressing AO3 requirements largely stemmed from an overdependence on poor quality secondary imagery used as reference for idea development, resulting in poorly resolved submissions. In some instances, candidates were reluctant to explore different styles of recording, preferring to resort to a style or genre which they were familiar with. There was often a lack of quality primary references, and a general reluctance to draw using traditional methods. Many submissions seemed reluctant to investigate further than those images available on the internet. This absence of primary references was not always considered in centre assessment, and no marking adjustments were made for poor quality responses derived from predictable secondary sources. Across the various disciplines, encouraging candidates to draw from direct observation would have a real benefit on the range and standard of the work presented, and give student candidates better quality starting points from which to begin their studies and explorations. Encouraging candidates across ability levels to carry out observational drawing studies would impact directly upon the confidence levels of their working practice and the quality of outcome responses.

Limitations at AO4 were a direct consequence of poor planning, with presentations disjointed and lacking clarity of intentions. Final outcomes lacked refinement, as there was limited evidence of work being reviewed and modified. In some instances, ideas and concepts took priority over skills and quality of making. Some presentations lost focus and direction as they progressed through the unit, often omitting important phases of idea development, resulting in unresolved final outcomes. In these instances, centre marking did not take this omission into account and as a result was generous. Improvements could be made if candidates gave due consideration to how their work is curated and presented. Being more selective and critical prior to submitting their work could enhance the flow of the unit and make it more appealing and accessible to the viewer.



***A PI textile mixed media response based on the theme of war time family memories.***

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#### UNIT 3: EXTERNALLY SET ASSIGNMENT

##### Overview of the Unit

The majority of moderators were of the opinion that standards for the Externally Set Assignment (ESA) were broadly similar with those achieved in 2024. Candidates generally showed greater maturity and creativity in the ESA, building on skills and experiences acquired during the previous units. Moderators identified AO1 and AO2 as being most effectively addressed, with AO3 occasionally limited by time constraints and a reliance on secondary sources. As in the PI, AO4 was identified as being the weakest element of submissions, due to unresolved outcomes and disjointed processes.

Moderators noted that many candidates thrived on the opportunity to select a new enquiry for the ESA and often demonstrated highly personal interpretations of their chosen starting point. No single question stood out as being the most popular; however, many responded to the visual stimuli assignments “Natural textures”, “Bleak?” and “Workplace”, and equally popular were the written stimuli of responding to a proverb, exploring the possibilities of Zoomorphic, the effects of distortion and investigating unusual surfaces.

Across all titles, moderators agreed that the shorter time frame of the ESA required more focussed and astute idea development which helped concentrate progress. Many submissions found the tighter time frame a challenge, and as result investigations were superficial and lacked depth, especially in the penultimate refining stage of idea development, leading to unresolved outcomes.

##### Comments on individual questions/sections

For AO1, candidates sourced and explored a diverse range of contextual references, often through direct experiences of visiting exhibitions and galleries, and through interviews. These direct contacts were often the most effective and had the greatest impact on submissions, with these candidates often achieving band 5 of the mark scheme. In a minority of cases, too many contextual references had been selected, and were therefore studied superficially, and had limited impact on idea development and final outcome.

Many submissions showed evidence of extensive skilful experimentation with different techniques, processes, and media, which were well documented and regularly reviewed, resulting in fully resolved and highly competent outcomes. In some cases, selected media and techniques were not adequately explored to fulfil their creative potential. Explorations did not develop beyond initial concepts and were not reviewed and refined with sufficient rigour to impact on practical outcomes. Centre marking did not always take these limitations into account and therefore tended to be generous across the ability range.

When addressing AO3, the stronger submission showed evidence of high-quality visual studies and the adoption of a breadth of drawing approaches, which provided vigour and excitement to the work. Observational and investigative studies greatly enriched the initial research and had a positive impact on final outcomes. To satisfy the higher bands within the marking scheme, some submissions needed to be less reliant on secondary images, as these investigations were often superficial, and drawings often stemmed from personally derived photographs, resulting in static images.

For Personal Presentation, candidates showed well documented development of ideas, including investigative sketches and annotation. The creative process was clear and effectively communicated. Such clarity was not always the case, and some submissions lacked the evidence of a logical and sequential creative process, which had a detrimental effect on their assessment. To improve attainment and ensure accuracy in centre marking, greater consideration needs to be given to the overall presentation of submissions and the viewer's experience.



***An experimental mixed media photographic ESA based on creating a response to the proverb “All that glitters is not gold”.***

## **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](mailto:artanddesign@wjec.co.uk)

Qualification webpage: [AS/A Level Art and Design](#)

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

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