

OCR Report to Centres

June 2013

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the examination.

OCR will not enter into any discussion or correspondence in connection with this report.

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Expressive Arts (J367)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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A691 Working in response to the study of artworks by practitioners and A692 Working in response to a stimulus

General

Centres are reminded that for each candidate there should be an individual portfolio, which has clear evidence to support the awarding of marks. If there is a performance piece to be considered as part of the awarding of marks for Assessment Objective 3 then an individual DVD for the candidate should be included in the candidate's portfolio.

In the main, the paperwork for both units was completed satisfactorily, although in a small number of cases slight errors and omissions were made with candidate numbers missing or incorrect labelling of DVDs. It is important that the quality of the DVD recording allows the moderator to confirm the marks awarded by a centre to a candidate for their performance. On occasion this was an impossible task because of poor audio recording or lighting, frustrating attempts to identify potentially good work. In the better produced DVDs candidates were clearly identified both on the external cover of the DVD and in filming, audio recording was clear and at a good volume and the piece was long enough to establish the quality of the candidate's performance. Whilst centres generally interpreted the difference between A691 and A692 well, some centres need to focus on the development from a teacher led module to more independent work and the shift in emphasis from the focus on three practitioners to working on a theme. Some centres made this transition but lost the focus on the professional works by focussing on the theme too intensely in A692.

A rarity this year was the use of multiple copies of downloaded material from the internet. In the main when this type of material was used it was heavily annotated and led specifically to creative development in the work of candidates. This is a most welcome development. However centres should be wary of moving to a too concise portfolio where it is difficult for the moderator to evidence where marks have been allocated. Centres are reminded that over the course of the two units there is a requirement to explore a range of art forms.

More centres than usual were over-generous in their application of the marking criteria this year and this was true across all assessment objectives. A frequent issue appeared to be the lack of internal moderation before submitting marks and in-school variance was identified in a number of centres. It is crucial that the centre carries out a robust internal moderation of teams who are delivering the course before they submit marks. Centres are advised to consider carefully the marking criteria when awarding marks. Centres are also reminded that the use of writing frames is not permissible in this specification under the rules for controlled assessment.

A691

This unit was generally very well delivered with ample evidence in student portfolios to support the marks awarded by centres. A wide ranging group of artists and their works was used, covering all the art forms. A good mix of contemporary artists and more traditional works were used to inspire and motivate candidates to really demonstrate their understanding of how art is created and the interaction with the art forms. Some examples are: The Green Table – Kurt Tooss; All the World's a Stage and Romeo and Juliet – William Shakespeare; Face of War and Persistence of Memory – Salvador Dali; Harry Potter – J K Rowling; The Fire Bird – Igor Stravinski; The Nutcracker – Matthew Bourne. Centres should take care to ensure they cover a range of art forms with their chosen practitioners.

In the strongest portfolios, candidates were able to show understanding of a wide range of practitioners and works of art, facilitating the ability to demonstrate the skills and techniques they had identified and the ability to put them into practice, in some cases showing extremely high skill levels and creativity. In all cases in the stronger portfolios the understanding of the areas of study was integral to the work and not just an after-thought that needed to be done to comply with the specification.

In weaker portfolios, candidates had little evidence of having contributed to the creativity of the piece and played small and relatively insignificant parts in the group pieces. Evidence was flimsy at best with low skill levels and a lack of understanding of the areas of study.

Centres generally made it clear who was responsible for which elements of planning and development but it is crucial that all work is attributed to the correct candidate in the selected samples. Where evidence was particularly clear there was a wide range of methods of recording, including photographs, DVDs, written evidence, drafts and redrafts, and clear development of the work. Where evidence was weak it was difficult to identify individual candidate's contributions in group work, portfolios were disorganised and difficult to moderate because candidates had not been encouraged to section their work, showing planning then development, outcomes and evaluation.

There has been a notable improvement in the quality of evaluations and evidence to support marks in Assessment Objective 4.

A692

This unit was generally well delivered but in a small number of centres there was a lack of development from the A691 unit. That is, three practitioners were used in the same way as in A691 rather than as part of the exploration of a theme. Centres are reminded that although the theme should be central to the work, candidates must show how the work of three practitioners has influenced the piece.

Themes such as: time, conflict, protest, war, relationships were all used to give candidates the opportunity to express themselves and their ideas. A wide range of practitioners enabled candidates to explore a very wide ranging set of skills and techniques. Examples of the practitioners used: Christopher Bruce, Antony Gormley, Michael Jackson, Akram Khan, Banksy, Pablo Picasso, Henri Ogike, Willy Russell, Mark Laita, Walt Witman.

Central to the work in the stronger portfolios was a clear intention and purpose of communication and understanding of audience. These candidates made it clear how they were using the skills and techniques recognised in professional works to explore their theme and communicate their own ideas. As a consequence, performances came over as well thought out and prepared with a mature perspective.

Weaker portfolios focussed on the theme often at the expense of identifying and, more importantly, using and developing skills and techniques from professional work. As a consequence work came over as immature and badly prepared.

There was a range of successful outcomes, but the monologue dominated with candidates writing and performing their own work. Art or writing with music to create atmosphere was also popular.

Again monologues were popular, as was dance, as the preferred method of communicating ideas.

As in A691 there has been an improvement in the quality of evaluative work.

A693 Working in response to a commission in a community context

General comments

Administration of the examination

All centres were well prepared for the examiner's visit. Although the candidate details on the front of the WMS were completed correctly in most cases, there were also instances where vital information was missing, e.g. audience or art forms.

Many centres underestimate the value of completing the additional evidence boxes, thereby (in some cases) either denying the candidates the opportunity of achieving a higher mark or failing to prevent a reduction in the mark on the part of the examiner. For instance, where a centre suggested a higher band for a candidate than was immediately obvious to the examiner, this could have been justified by an additional comment. Other centres merely provided comments referring to evidence seen on the day by the examiner, therefore simply confirming what the examiner could see rather than providing any additional evidence.

DVDs need to be sent to the examiner within a week of the visit. The OCR requirement is for the centre to provide one DVD per candidate.

Centres need to be aware that portfolios and DVDs may well be viewed by examiners as well as teachers with no link to the centre; therefore all effort must be made to make the DVDs as accessible as possible:

DVD labels must include the centre name and unit number as a minimum. DVDs should be divided into chapters. The index should have a still photograph of the candidate with name and candidate number followed by a verbal introduction by the candidate with full details of the work to be seen. Some centres paste a photograph of the candidate (similar to the chapter still) on the front of the portfolio. This enables OCR to link DVD with portfolio. A separate order of events is also very useful.

In general, centres provided an appropriate space for the examination to take place and candidates presented their work with the appropriate blend of enthusiasm and serious intent befitting an examination. A few centres need to be reminded that the area needs to be treated as an examination space where 'outsiders' are made aware of the examination conditions. In a few cases an examination was interrupted by noise, distractions, school bells and even a fire alarm.

Occasionally centres miscalculate the time required for the whole exam to take place. It is sometimes forgotten that the examiner needs time to record details of group members before a performance and to write notes about each candidate immediately afterwards, while the performance is still fresh in the mind. The running order also needs to allow for all candidates to present their work well within the school day, without creating a sense of panic in the later candidates that their work will not be seen.

Portfolios were usually to hand but occasionally an examiner had to ask for them to be available in time for the performance by that candidate. A reading light was sometimes provided, which was very helpful.

Technical support was usually helpful to candidates and well prepared but there were some issues which may have affected candidates, such as the wrong music being provided or a hold up whilst technicians found the correct track on a CD or laptop. However, this is becoming rare as centres become more accustomed to including technology within a performance.

Use of art forms is not always balanced – where a centre might be aiming for higher grades it is essential to include three art forms in an equitable way.

It is not always clear which candidate produced which part of the outcome – and there is often a lack of additional evidence on working mark sheet which could give that information.

Questions were raised about what counts as a contributing art form, for example is creating some sound effects that are vaguely musical, music? Musical skills must be used, and simple sound effects would not count as music, whereas a significant soundscape created by a candidate from music and sounds would be admissible.

The Commissions on the examination paper were generally welcomed this session as being accessible and imaginative.

Advance documentation

Centres were mostly punctual with their completion of the paperwork confirming dates of visits. On the whole, the paperwork was completed correctly, providing signatures and contact information where required, with the exception of one centre. Maps were sometimes included, which were usually very useful although directions showing how to find a centre when on foot and information about the entrance to a centre, which has many locked gates, would have been helpful in one case!

One centre with a large number of candidates over several days was extremely cooperative and emailed the candidate running order in advance, which enabled the examiner to create a useful document for recording comments and marks.

Audience to watch the performances

The best performances were ones where an audience of the candidates' peers was present and there was a sense of occasion. Although the formality of an examination situation can be helpful to candidates, there was one examination where the candidates were clearly very nervous performing only for the examiner, the teacher and a technician. One centre managed to provide the candidates' selected target audience, which worked well.

Spread across disciplines

- The most common art forms used were drama, with candidates presenting their ideas in role through script or narrative, and creative writing, with candidates writing scripts, poetry and monologues. Drama also featured heavily as the 'cementing' process – and there was some impressive physical theatre seen.
- Dance of a good standard tended to occur when contemporary dance drama and musical theatre were the genres used. Dance was also used successfully when candidates presented synchronised moves and mimes to music as part of a drama.
- Music composition was rare except where GarageBand, Audacity or other software were used to enable the creation of music to establish atmosphere or a sense of place. There was some arranging of popular music and well known classical pieces and this was effective when used to support a specific genre of performance.
- Art was best used when it was integrated into a performance, as a backdrop or prop. There were also successful presentations using art to support poetry. Less effective realisations used artwork projected on a screen behind a drama performance where there was little connection with the drama other than it was based on a similar theme.
- More evidence of modern technology in use this year – music technology and film integrated into performances

- More examples of live music and singing were observed during this series and the standard in general was much higher than in other years. More own compositions were also evident and few backing track singing of existing songs was seen.

Communities

“Institutions” was a popular choice, with schools and school assemblies being common. Primary school and pre-school communities provided sound opportunities for target audiences.

‘Spaces’ and ‘Events’, e.g. Arts festivals/shopping malls, were also popular. Sports Competitions/exhibitions also featured.

For ‘Issues’ there were some very successful pieces where candidates directed their performances at particular ‘interest groups’ such as a domestic violence support group, a young offenders’ rehabilitation group, OCD, the Holocaust. Some candidates chose issues that had affected them personally during their lives.

Other examples included:

- Bee conservation society
- Children’s hospital
- Quiet spaces!
- Political Figures
- Street Theatre
- On line websites.
- Special Schools/ Partially sighted- Sensory Board.

Portfolios

Some candidates are still spending time on researching and developing all ten commissions. There are no marks for this and it wastes valuable time during preparation.

Areas of study

Most centres are focusing candidates’ preparation and development through attention to the areas of study. Candidates have been ‘well drilled’ in A691 and A692 and explore the works of practitioners through the areas of study as a matter of course. There are still a small number of centres who stubbornly ignore the existence of the areas of study or tack them on as an after-thought. Better candidates explore the areas of study in detail as they consider their initial ideas.

Some portfolios made reference to the areas of study using a teacher’s writing frame designed to prompt candidates to include all areas. This contravenes OCR’s guidelines for controlled assessment and tended to work against the candidates in that they usually failed to fully develop their explanations, providing in some cases simply one word ‘answers’.

The best portfolios considered the areas of study in the context of the planning and development of their realisations.

Atmosphere was covered by almost all candidates and typically in some detail.

Most candidates clearly identified a target audience and explained the appropriateness of their piece.

Many candidates made reference to the intended structure and shape of their realisations while

in other cases this area appeared to have evolved and was therefore highlighted retrospectively.

Narrative was often reduced to a summary of plot.

Genre was usually well understood by candidates.

The areas covered least well by the majority of candidates were symbol, motif and the social, political, historical, and cultural context, although the strongest candidates had no difficulty in understanding and incorporating these concepts.

Practitioner influence

For A693, candidates are permitted and many indeed prefer to select their own art works or practitioners as influences. Sometimes these evolved from research into the commission itself. Individual candidates researching their own choice of practitioner in some cases supported some very imaginative presentations. For example, Judy Garland's Dorothy was very successfully and imaginatively adapted to 'Big Yellow Taxi'. There was a humorous response to Swan Lake following a study of the classical piece alongside New York break-dancing.

The best performing candidates provided clear evidence that they had used their research on practitioners to inform their projects. There was some evidence that candidates had studied practitioners in lessons leading up to one or both of the coursework units (A691/6922) and had explored their ideas for A693 in the light of what they had learnt. Stanislavski, Brecht, John Godber, Joan Littlewood and Mark Wheeler typically served as fertile stimuli for drama work. Brecht's alienation theory was adopted by candidates who used signs for character and changed costumes on the set. Drama 'in the style of' provided effective performance realisations.

In several centres, candidates used practitioners whom they had studied earlier in the course such as Michael Jackson, Lucien Freud, James Fenton. Some centres had clearly 'taught' a range of practitioners and candidates were able to make choices appropriate to their ideas.

There was also evidence of individual candidate's interest informing choice. Examples include Manga styles and particular styles of music.

"Winter", commission point 6, influenced outcome directly by candidates producing their own artistic response including a large scale papier maché sculpture of a head/bust and natural collages. It clearly referenced Guiseppe Acrimboldo's work.

Commission point 3 "Behave", the extract from the poem "Rules and Regulations" by Lewis Carroll, directly influenced a dramatic/visual arts/creative writing realisation where rules and regulations at school were being conveyed to a KS3 audience in assembly.

"Oh what a lovely war!" a practitioner used in A691/692 directly influenced a response to the "Bermuda Triangle" (commission point 5) by informing the context and setting of a dramatic piece set against the backdrop of the RAF in WW2 on a sortie in a dramatic realisation with visual arts (large scale models of Spitfires used as costume/prop).

"Dandelion Fountain" (commission point 4) featured strongly in many realisations where the outcomes were sculptures/paintings. (A sculpture of multiple hands placed together in a fountain effect)

"Caught Speeding" (commission point 10) was used heavily. Outcomes included photo shopped dramatic comic strip realisations whereby the candidate was projected into fantastic scenarios clearly referencing sammydavisdog and his techniques and devices. These were often comic in mood and following a narrative, both of which provide further evidence of candidates applying the practitioner's influences.

Occasionally candidates found inferior quality poems on the Internet and then attempted to analyse them. Unfortunately the material didn't always stand up to analysis.

Other practitioners included popular music artists such as Michael Jackson and The Beatles and contemporary artist Barbara Kruger; Monica Rial voice artist enhanced work on dramatic readings of stories for animation and shadow puppets and Tim Burton was researched to inform puppetry. Common fiction writers used were Lewis Carroll and Roald Dahl. Roger McGough's poetry made useful studies for candidates working on "Behave". Other practitioners used were Stephen Schwartz (song delivery), Alvin Ailey (contemporary dance) and Vivienne Westwood (art textiles/costume design).

Overall quality of portfolios

Portfolios varied in quality, both in terms of content and structure. The most successful ones provided clear evidence of the exploration and development of ideas as well as a plan of action. Some candidates outlined their intentions for using the twelve hours, e.g. research, plan, practise, perform, but the best ones considered the stages of development in some detail, demonstrating understanding of the process and the required skills and techniques. Some excellent portfolios included photographs with candidates' evaluative comments at each stage.

The best portfolios were not necessarily the most bulky. Significant physical weight sometimes acts as a receptacle for multiple photocopied sheets or teacher handouts whereas some apparently flimsy folders contain nothing but quality content.

Some sound portfolio work was produced where candidates had very concisely outlined their ideas and had provided brief references to the areas of study. However, where candidates had stuck rigidly to the 600 words of continuous prose produced in the twelve hours, and had failed to include their pre-exam research and planning, the portfolios tended to simply summarise their ideas and failed to show evidence of the candidate's understanding of the art forms and the accepting/disregarding of ideas. Diagrams and annotated research could improve explanations of ideas. Scrapbooks sometimes consisted of one or two photographs without explanation by the candidates. In some cases, where prompt sheets and writing frames were used, candidates tended to provide only one or two words in reference to the areas of study.

Portfolio problems (if any)

One omission that must be avoided is the creative writing included in the presentation, whether poetry, story or script. Surprisingly, this is often left out of the portfolio and applies to all units. When speech is indistinct or inaudible, either live or on DVD, it is vital for the examiner to be able to read the creative writing.

*It would be very helpful if portfolios could make a very clear distinction between ideas discussed but then not followed through and the final idea which is then developed to the conclusion. Perhaps, at the top of a page, there could be a declaration along the lines of: **We have finally decided that we will write a short play on the theme of.... and that we will include a final dance.....etc***

This might need to be added in retrospect.

Some include an evaluation which, although not formally accredited is useful to 'fill in the gaps' in the application of skills.

An examiner's ideal portfolio: a thin folder or book with all pages securely fastened and numbered but where the pages can be turned, like a book; where all pages can be viewed without needing to be unfolded or removed from envelopes / plastic inserts; in chronological order; with clear headings for each major section, especially where the planning for the final

project begins; with photos, downloads etc fully annotated / labelled; with colour used to highlight areas of study and other important aspects.

Outcomes

Group size and length of pieces

All centres use appropriate group sizes and all sizes could work equally successfully, whether individual, pairs or groups. All candidates seen had at least two minutes' exposure.

Some performances could drag a little if candidates improvised but on the whole pieces were of an appropriate length. Centres are tending to have candidates in smaller groups and there were more examples of single candidates and pairs.

Communication skills

Communicating character through acting and first person monologues was mostly very effective. Candidates performed confidently and clearly and made use of their strengths. It was rare to see candidates attempting unsuitable undertakings.

Types of outcome

There was a wide range of outcomes. Most common were pieces where candidates in groups wrote and performed a script. The third art form was usually art to support the play or dance/movement integrated into the performance. These were mostly successful and allowed candidates to demonstrate their skills in a structured way.

More imaginative outcomes included:

- dance/movement to poetry with artwork
- scripts performed with PowerPoint/art backdrop
- a children's book with music to create atmosphere
- art-textiles used for costume for a dancer
- poetry played as a soundtrack
- dramatic song interpretation & dance
- ballet, poetry & arranged music
- shadow puppets with writing and a dramatic reading
- animation presentation & dramatic reading
- a monologue presented half in Russian and half in English with an explanation of intent presented in character to the target audience
- a dramatic presentation to poem;
- Garage Band programme used for music with poetry and a PowerPoint presentation;
- bee, butterfly, ladybird, dragonfly made by candidates and included in a drama/script;
- music backing as poem read using the imagery of bees in hive;
- a myth/legend developed into a new story;
- synchronised moves used in an episodic drama.

The most effective and imaginative commission outcomes were:

- Winter: A Shadow puppet presentation
- Behave: An on screen animation presentation
- Behave: A group performance using dance where each candidate performed a different style of dance and the drama included a range of school situations.
- Tiger: Holocaust ghost interacting with examiner and teacher to the background of traditional Jewish song manipulated and performed by candidate as background, with excellent appropriate supporting art work
- Swan Lake: A Rap mixed with Classical Ballet and Street Dance. WOW!
- The Dandelion Fountain: Using plastic bottles/recycling reproduced a fountain.
- Flight of the Bumble Bee: Primary school assembly. Candidate dressed up as a bee, played the recorder and created a poem about preservation of bees. Involved audience participation/ repetition of poem.
- Behave: All art forms used, on the theme of obsessive–compulsive disorder (OCD), including a moving dance incorporating compulsive gestures within a top-scoring individual project. A film made in the style of the Blair Witch project based on starting point ‘And then it was gone’ which was absolutely terrifying and had the invited audience curling up in their seat!
- Two pieces of physical theatre, one based on ‘The Bermuda Triangle’ and one based on ‘Hobson’s Choice’ which completely integrated all the art forms into a highly accomplished performances. Both performances involved carefully synchronised movement and vocal sound-scapes.
- The Acrimbolodi sculptured bust with creative writing, drama and dance – a strong statement, working in a creative, sophisticated, out of the ordinary genres (contemporary dance especially convincing and refreshing). Powerful use of the floor and spatial positioning. A strong outcome.
- A computer generated visual arts piece using the key words associated with sports (appropriate for the community in question, Events) encapsulating creative writing and music.
- A piece for institutions, namely a Nursery School presentation. The candidate created plasticine models, a dramatic piece, and creative writing. The plasticine models were perfectly pitched for the target audience; extent of the detail in the sets created and the intention behind the piece itself, to educate young children about the environment made this piece successful and memorable.
- A photo-shopped comic strip dramatic narrative with creative writing captions based on Clint Eastwood and his works was effective owing to the extensive research the candidate undertook and applied creatively in the outcome.

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