AQA

A-LEVEL
ART & DESIGN

7206C & 7206X – Photography
Report on the Examination

7206
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Photography

Inventive approaches were seen in responses to the specification. Digital photography and editing software were used in most schools and colleges, although traditional darkroom skills were seen in an increasing number of submissions, sometimes at a very basic level.

Digital sketchbooks using presentation software, such as PowerPoint, were used to increasingly good effect and with great fluency. The most successful examples using digital sketchbooks often included finished hardcopy which demonstrated students' understanding of production techniques. Some work included installation and video presentations.

Many students chose to present their work as hardcopy in sketchbooks occasionally accompanied by PowerPoint presentations. Some students failed to clearly differentiate between their own work and work by others, or neglected to identify research sources. Poor organisation of digital files resulted in difficulties at moderation. References to contextual material sometimes included relevant examples from other disciplines, such as graphic communication and fine art. These often enhanced the work and contributed to the understanding of the student.

The revised specification has possibly led to subtle changes in the content and the direction of investigations by students, in all components. The majority of teachers are aware of the need to demonstrate greater understanding of selection, technique and planning. Some students included documentation of what they aimed to achieve in a particular shoot, planning the content, and then evaluating the results. This influenced the direction of their investigations and provided additional evidence for assessment.

Some schools and colleges have adopted a project format which includes a planning sheet for the student to work with. In most cases this provided a framework for individual thinking and creative decisions but occasionally it led to predictable formulaic responses. Some schools asked students to produce Pinterest boards of ideas which resulted in disparate responses with little sense of direction.

The most successful digital and traditional work included annotations which provided evidence of students' thinking. Annotations included why a particular image was chosen from a contact sheet, how work was informed by contextual references and the technical considerations of each shoot. Usually the intent of the investigation was clear from the outset. Many students chose to work with manual settings on their cameras and documented the settings used on their contact sheets. Where students produced studio work, shooting and lighting diagrams were often included. Similar properties were seen in traditional darkroom work.

Digital photography was very widely used, although not exclusively. Darkroom work usually benefitted students' understanding of photography.

Most successful students documented their thinking in meaningful and purposeful annotation. In less successful work, students presented collections of images with little understanding of techniques and a lack of discrimination or real engagement with the topic. Irrelevant image manipulation was a feature of these submissions. Sometimes, extremely interesting images were produced without background material, such as contextual influences or evidence of thinking and planning. In less successful work there was a tendency to mistake unjustified image manipulation for the development of ideas which led to over-marking. Successful students demonstrated their understanding of relevant photographic techniques and camera skills when making informed personal responses.

Personal Investigation (7206/C)

A wide range of topics were explored in this component, some in greater depth and with greater understanding than others. In the most successful submissions students demonstrated their understanding of recording techniques, presentation methods and contextual references. Some examples of very well constructed written work were presented in support of the practical work.

Successful students produced evidence of strong personal involvement with their chosen topics. Some investigations highlighted issues of concern to young people. On occasion, however, researching around the topic and collecting information tended to dominate the work to the detriment of the photographic recording.

A variety of techniques and media were seen in the work submitted. There seemed to be a great deal of encouragement from teachers to experiment with and explore the medium fully, usually to the benefit of students' understanding.

Less successful students demonstrated a lack of reviewing and refining of techniques and ideas and a somewhat linear approach to the selected topic. A lack of clear intentions, poor organisation and limited investigation was also evident.

The most successful work provided evidence of a clear sense of direction, sound understanding of contextual references, and good levels of understanding and fluency with recording and presentation techniques. Whilst some investigations remained focussed on their stated intention, some students developed their ideas into related aspects, generally to good effect.

The required written element of the Personal Investigation was, for the most part, handled very well, demonstrating the understanding of the student. Usually the written work was presented separately. On occasion, it was integrated with the practical work and sometimes it was difficult to distinguish between the required written work and annotation. The written work was often illuminating, and revealed genuine understanding. Some examples were simply a commentary on the progress of the investigation. The most successful work was well constructed with good quality illustrations and included a full bibliography. Some successful work also included relevant gallery visits and personal contact with relevant practitioners.

Externally Set Assignment (7206/X)

The question paper was considered broad enough to be accessible to all students of all abilities. A feature of all successful submissions, whether digital or analog, was the ability of students to fully investigate a chosen topic and demonstrate understanding of contextual material and the techniques used in them. Broad initial investigations were honed down to an area of personal interest and developed by the student. The most successful work was often annotated extensively. Investigations resulted in a well-produced image or images and, in some examples, the outcome was a moving image or installation. In all cases the development of the idea was clear, logical and individual. Less successful work included collections of images with little rationale or clear intentions. Students demonstrated limited understanding of imaging techniques and contextual references.

Influences

Most responses referred to examples of Hockney's work. Few students were influenced by other references included in the question. A number of pastiches were seen in which students showed little sense of understanding or development of the idea. More successful responses, displaying a higher degree of understanding considered cubist approaches, and used them effectively to develop their ideas and make a personal response. Some three-dimensional work was seen, which attempted to push the boundaries of presentation.

Portraiture

This was a popular and easily accessible starting point attempted by a number of students, in a number of ways, with varying degrees of success. Responses ranged from the traditional studio portrait to the more esoteric and experimental work. Various physical methods, including rubber bands, Sellotape and cling-film were used to explore distortion. Some students also attempted digital manipulation, with varying degrees of success and relevance to the investigation. The most successful work was influenced by relevant practitioners to develop a personal response, and carefully considered lighting, props, location and recording techniques. Less successful work was comprised of poorly informed pictures of people with little sense of engagement with the topic.

Manufactured structures

Architectural photography dominated responses to this starting point. Industrial landscapes, townscapes, dereliction, machinery, and bridges featured in many examples. A very interesting submission was seen in which a student made their own structures and used them as photographic subjects. The more successful work considered composition and viewpoint carefully and was informed by relevant practitioners. Some students chose this starting point to make personal comment about various aspects of modern life. Of all the starting points, this one gave the greatest opportunity to explore this aspect of photography, and a number of traditional monochrome images were presented. Less successful work included poorly informed photographs of local buildings with limited evidence of development.

Campaigning Photography

This starting point tended to be attempted by the student with something to say and as a result, was often attempted by the more able student. Strong links were made with work by relevant photographers and campaign photography generally. Some students, however, tended to get bogged down in research and information about the campaign that they wanted to illustrate, to the

detriment of the photography itself. Successful students thoroughly researched their chosen topic and produced thought provoking images relevant to the campaign. Many used text to enhance the meaning of their images.

The moving figure

A number of students took the idea literally and included predictable images of sportspeople or pedestrians, with little development of the topic beyond this. Some chose to explore the theme rather more esoterically and explored digital techniques to change their images.

Connected images

Some students chose a photo essay approach, with varying degrees of success. Less successful students presented a series of images of places or events with little focus on particular aspects of the events or places, leading to a bland collection of images with no apparent purpose. These students tended to refer to examples of photojournalism, but failed to fully understand the nuances of this aspect of photography. Some students chose to explore aspects of other genres, such as advertising. A few chose to record collections of similar objects, in terms of colour and purpose. The most successful examples were informed by relevant and sometimes obscure practitioners.

The mobile phone

This was probably the most easily accessible starting point for many students, as the mobile phone is such a part of modern living. The least successful responses, usually included a collection of images of people on their phones, without any rationale for producing the images. The more successful students considered the sociological implications of mobile communication. Thoughtful and considered responses were seen, in which students made relevant personal and informed comment about today's society. Text which referred to text messaging was sometimes seen in responses to this starting point,

Everyday objects

This starting point provided the opportunity to explore familiar objects, and in that sense many students considered this as a potentially rich theme. Responses included traditional 'still life' photography to objects observed in context. Some submissions explored issues such as waste and recycling. Close-up and detail photographs were attempted in a number of submissions and colours and textures were also considered. A range of contextual references were seen in responses to this starting point, and most informed the investigations effectively. Less successful submissions were rather linear in development and pastiches of researched images were produced.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.