GCSE Examiners' Report

Built Environment

GCSE

Summer 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	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. 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. 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.	For unitised 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

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Executive Summary

Unit 1- Introduction to the Built Environment

This series saw the fourth sitting of the Unit 1 examination of the GCSE Built Environment and as was the case with previous series, it proved to be an accessible paper.

The paper covered all Assessment Objectives namely AO1, AO2 and AO3 whilst sampling the specification content. Candidates were able to provide responses to questions on all assessment objectives. Most questions were answered well by the majority of candidates, there are, however, a number of points that can be made with a view to improving performance:

- Candidates should be encouraged to provide further detail in their responses to extended questions in order to access higher marks. Questions 5(b) and 10 in particular were not well answered by a significant number of candidates.
- Candidates should also be encouraged to read the questions fully and establish what is being asked of them. This in part, would benefit from consideration of the command verbs used and the total number of marks available.
- Centres are advised to use past papers as a key revision activity.

Unit 2 Pathways A and B

Unit 2 provides a choice of two pathways – each pathway is internally assessed with specification-based assessments. The assessments address all three assessment objectives; however, the greater emphasis is on AO2 – the application of skills, knowledge and understanding.

Design the Built Environment

Candidate work was internally assessed by centres and uploaded to the WJEC.

The specification-based assessment brief focuses on the design of a single storey extension for a community hall. This assessment can be modified or replaced with an assessment of a similar level of demand and focus. As was the case in the previous series, there were some instances where centres created their own assessments and provided too much information thereby reducing the potential candidate input.

A significant number of candidates did well in many areas of the work undertaken, there are, however, a number of points that can be made with a view to improving performance:

- Centres should encourage candidates to familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria and present the evidence produced in a logical way with clear links to the assessment criteria.
- Where centres provide an alternative assessment, then it should closely follow the specification-based assessment. This is to ensure that appropriate evidence is generated which meets the associated assessment criteria.
- Candidates should be advised how to write appropriate success criteria and how to subsequently use these in the development of their evaluations. Task (f) ‘evaluating the design task’ is an area which would benefit from a greater teaching focus in order to achieve higher marks.

Creating the Built Environment

Candidate work was internally assessed by centres and uploaded to the WJEC.
The specification-based assessment brief focused on the provision of an extension to a youth hostel. This assessment can be modified or replaced with an assessment of a similar level of demand and focus. There were some instances were centres created their own assessments and provided too much information thereby reducing the potential for candidates' own work.

A significant number of candidates did well in many areas of the work undertaken, there are, however, a number of points that can be made with a view to improving performance:

- It would aid centres and candidates if the evidence produced was presented in a logical way and clearly linked to the assessment criteria.
- If centres are to provide an alternative assessment, then it should closely follow the specification-based assessment. This is to ensure it generates the appropriate evidence to meet the associated assessment criteria.
- Alternative assessments should also use the example provided as a guide to the amount of information made available to candidates. Too much information can negatively impact on candidates' ability to access higher marks.
- Task (f) 'evaluation of the construction tasks' is an area which would benefit from a greater teaching focus. Candidates should be advised how to write appropriate success criteria and how to subsequently use these in the development of their evaluations.
- Centres are requested to provide clear photographic evidence which supports candidate work.

Unit 3 – Exploring the Built Environment

This unit is internally assessed by centres with sample candidate work being uploaded to the WJEC. Candidates are required to select two buildings, one being contemporary and the other being built before 1919. An excellent range of buildings were chosen with all centre 'pairs' being wholly appropriate.

The unit is assessed through a specification-based brief, which provides a framework of five requirements which are applied to the two buildings chosen. AO1, AO2 and AO3 are all assessed with a greater emphasis being placed on AO1 and AO3.

The evidence submitted by candidates was, in the main, good with some excellent work being produced. There are, however, a number of points which can be made with a view to improving performance:

- Centres are advised to select two appropriate buildings and forge links with their ownership/management.
- Centres are advised to help candidates get the most out of their liaison with the ownership/management of the buildings by encouraging them to obtain what they need in order to address the assessment tasks rather than collecting very generic information.
- Candidates would benefit from having questionnaires prepared in advance of any visits to the selected buildings.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

GCSE

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UNIT 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Overview of the Unit

The entries for Unit 1 increased from 144 candidates in 2024 to 188 candidates this series. Age 15 candidates those in year 10, account for 57% of entries. The remaining 81 candidates are aged 16. Of these around a third were resitting the unit.

This unit is assessed through an on-screen examination:
The examination is 1 hour 30 minutes, marked out of 70, and accounts for 35% of qualification.

The assessment comprises of a range of question types to assess the candidates' knowledge, skills and understanding in content related to ideas and concepts in the built environment and evidence related to the built environment.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1
Part **(a)** was intended as an accessible introductory question, giving candidates the opportunity to name two non-residential buildings which allowed a wide variety of possible answers. Many candidates were able to gain full marks.

Part **(b)** posed an equally straightforward question to name three electrical services installed in non-residential buildings. Few if any candidates earned full marks with most confusing electrical and mechanical services.

Q.2
Candidate knowledge of the important details to be included in a pre-demolition plan was lacking. Some were able to note factors such as removing hazardous materials such as asbestos and disconnection of utilities, but further understanding was uncommon.

Q.3
Part **(a)** was concerned with EWPs (engineered wood products) and their benefits. Some were able to name common examples such as plywood and MDF to gain 1 mark for **(i)**. Descriptions of the benefits of EWPs compared to sawn timber as required in response to **(ii)** were basic if attempted at all by the majority of candidates.

Part **(b)(i)** was correctly answered by most candidates who were able to correctly state two ingredients of mortar with the majority basically describing its function to gain 1 mark out of 2 for **(ii)**.

Q.4
This was the first question on the paper requiring a more extended response from candidates. An explanation of the function of a building's substructure was called for in part **(a)** and the superstructure in part **(b)**. Candidate understanding was limited with some basically identifying that the substructure is below ground and the superstructure above. More developed responses were few and far between.

Q.5
(a) was a straightforward, accessible question asking for the table to be completed by naming three building types to match the descriptions given. Many candidates gained two or three marks here.

(b) was an AO2 question that allowed candidates to apply skills, knowledge and understanding in the context of the infrastructure requirements of a sports stadium to be developed on a greenfield site. Many discussed the construction of the building itself with very little consideration of the infrastructure. Some candidates focused on the impact of construction on a greenfield site and compared to brownfield.

Q.6
Parts **(a)(i)**, **(ii)** and **(iii)** concerned Portal frames. Few candidates were able to correctly label the rafter and column components shown in the diagram. Many correctly named 'steel" as a suitable material for **(ii)**. It should be noted here that "metal", "timber" and "concrete" were common responses by candidates but were not accepted. Responses to **(iii)** demonstrated a poor understanding of the benefits of portal construction in the majority of cases.

Some candidates named a traditional construction method in part **(b)**, but few were able to outline a knowledge of the method to gain 2 marks.

Q.7
Disappointingly, very few candidates were able to attempt this question. Many confused heat pump technology with solar energy and limited marks were gained by the majority. Teaching of this important aspect of the curriculum (2.1.4 Renewable technologies and materials) does not seem to have been well addressed by centres.

The benefits of using greywater were also misunderstood or unknown by most candidates.

Q.8
(a) Most candidates were able to simplistically identify at least one activity carried out by a carpenter but the difference between carpentry and joinery activities remains confused in many instances. Several candidates referred to carpet fitter tasks rather than carpenters.

(b) a majority of candidates struggled to answer these questions and were unable to describe the responsibilities of a structural/civil engineer.

Q.9

(a) Most candidates concentrated their responses on the use of PPE as a control measure in the given context. Other possible measures such as risk assessments and training were rarely discussed.

Basic safety procedures such as isolating the power supply and the use of appropriate PPE allowed most candidates to gain 1 or 2 marks in part **(b)**.

Q.10

Candidates were required to read the question thoroughly and recommend measures to be taken to reduce the environmental impact during the construction phase of a new development of sustainable houses in a rural location. Marks were also awarded here for quality of written communication. Band 1 and 2 marks were the most common level of achievement for this question, with candidates generally displaying a poor understanding of the outlined scenario. Rather than discussing suitable measures appropriate to the construction phase, many incorrectly focused on the relative merits of greenfield and brownfield site construction, in particular stating that brownfield use is better for the environment. Detail and clarity of communication was often lacking in responses as well as a succinct description of the measures to be taken.

Centres are advised to:

- Encourage candidates to provide further detail and more concise justification in their responses to questions that are to be awarded 2 or more marks.
- Teach candidates to take more time to read and contemplate questions in detail, in order to fully understand what exactly is being asked of them.
- Give their students opportunities to practise answering questions prior to sitting the exam. Questions that call for an extended piece of writing, such as this year's question's 5(b) and 10, continue to be poorly answered by many candidates.
- Use the five past papers (2022, 2023, 2024, 2025 and the Sample Assessment Materials) as well as the digital resources; (https://resources.wjec.co.uk/Pages/ResourceByArgs.aspx?subid=96&lvlid=2) that are now available on the WJEC website to support candidate revision for this Unit 1 examination.

UNIT 2 PATHWAY A (NEA) – DESIGNING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Overview of the Unit

This was the third occasion on which this unit pathway has been assessed. Candidate work was internally assessed by centres prior to a sample being presented for external moderation by the WJEC.

The board-set task focused on the design of a single storey extension for a community hall. Centres are permitted to modify the board-set task or to devise a context of their own. A small number of centres did decide to create their own contexts and in these instances the design tasks presented for moderation were appropriate. However, in some cases candidates were provided with too much information which constrained their ability to make an individual interpretation of the design brief.

Tasks
Comments on tasks/questions relating to candidate performance/meeting assessment criteria

(a) Identifying and calculating information
This section involves an analysis of the outline scenario in order to specify suitable materials and the type of construction that could be used to realise the candidate's final design proposal. Calculations relevant to the design proposal also needed to be included. This aspect of the mark scheme was not always considered in sufficient depth and calculations were often spread throughout the design portfolio rather than being collected and presented for assessment in a logical order.

(b) Writing and setting success criteria
The mark scheme clearly sets out a requirement for success criteria to consider issues related to tolerance, timescale and quality and to be objective and measurable. The best examples presented by centres were concise and gave realistic parameters to the candidate's design work as well as providing a framework for the evaluation of the completed design proposal. Gantt charts can be used to set out a measurable timescale but should be related to completion of the design tasks and not concerned with proposals for the construction of the design scenario.

(c) Drawing plans and elevations
Overall attainment remains consistent in this area. The majority of candidate's time and effort being taken up by these activities. A variety of appropriate software was used to communicate the necessary plans, cross-sections and elevations. Computer-generated software was used in all cases with no centres presenting evidence in the form of hand-produced drawings.

(d) Drawing two-dimensional plans and three-dimensional virtual models and plans
Most candidates demonstrated proficiency in creating three-dimensional virtual models of their individual design proposals. In general, a good range of skills was shown in manipulating a range of software, such as 'Autodesk Revit' and 'Google Sketch Up'. Screenshots of the candidate's final design proposal were presented for moderation purposes.

(e) Using the language of drafting
Overall, candidates work followed the necessary British Standards and conventions as well as being presented in an appropriate scale.

(f) Evaluating the design task
This continues to be an area in which attainment could be improved in future with candidates often presenting very brief or simplistic evaluation reports. In many cases this seemed to be a direct consequence of the limited success criteria set out earlier in the project. The mark scheme clearly calls for the evaluation report to consider the requirements of the brief, success criteria, end users and suggestions for possible improvement.

Task marking
Comments on approaches to internal marking

Summary of key points

Centres are advised to:

- Further familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria and encourage candidates to structure their project work in the order of the assessment criteria.
- Think carefully about structuring the project work so that, where possible, it follows the linear pattern of the assessment criteria. This would aid both centres and students to ensure that they are meeting the assessment requirements. The work of some centres jumped back and forth between different parts of the mark scheme and in the cases where there was little teacher commentary the process of accurate assessment was made difficult.
- Use the board-set scenario or devise their own scenarios that closely follow the pattern of the board-set scenario. Some centre-devised scenarios presented the candidates with too much information relevant to the design which prevented them from being able to interpret and model the scenario to their own needs. There is a need for an 'outline' task scenario rather than an 'over-prescribed' scenario that can limit candidate attainment.
- Improve their student's knowledge of setting and writing success criteria. This in turn should also help to improve the quality and depth of the student's evaluations of the completed design proposal.

UNIT 2 PATHWAY B – CONSTRUCTING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Overview of the Unit

This was the third occasion on which this unit pathway has been assessed. Candidate work was internally assessed by centres prior to a sample being presented for external moderation by the WJEC.

The board-set task was about the construction of an extension for a youth hostel. Centres are permitted to modify the board-set task or to devise a context of their own. A number of centres did decide to create their own contexts and in all cases the construction tasks presented for moderation were appropriate and allowed their candidates to gain marks in each section of the marks scheme.

Tasks
Comments on tasks/questions relating to candidate performance/meeting assessment criteria

(a) Interpreting technical sources of information identifying resource requirements calculating materials required
In many instances, it was obvious that centres had provided candidates with too much information which constrained their ability to make an individual interpretation of technical sources of information relevant to the construction task. Resource requirements such as tools, equipment and PPE were generally identified and outlined in some detail by candidates. The mathematical calculation of material quantities was not always given sufficient emphasis. It should also be noted that the costing of materials is not a requirement of the unit marking criteria.

(b) Writing and setting success criteria
The mark scheme clearly sets out a requirement for success criteria to consider issues related to tolerance, timescale and quality and to be objective and measurable. The best examples presented by centres were concise and gave realistic parameters to the candidate's construction activities as well as providing a framework for the eventual evaluation of the completed work in the two chosen trade areas.

(c) Planning and organising work working practices that promote health and safety
The best examples moderated used appropriate planning methods such as Gantt or Flow charts to present a sequence and timeline for the manufacture of the construction tasks. Teacher comment on health and safety working practices was helpful here in highlighting matters to do with cleanliness, safety of work areas and the appropriate use of correct PPE.

(d) Preparing for construction tasks removing and disposing of materials
Preparation tasks (such as properties, stock forms and sizes) were cross-referenced in the resource requirements identified in section (a) by some centres. This is another area in which teacher comment can be helpful to highlight candidate attainment in the processing and safe disposal of the materials during the construction phase.

(e) Carrying out techniques
The techniques chosen by most centres were appropriate and challenging to candidates. This was true of centres that chose to follow the WJEC set context or centres that decided to develop their own. Photographic evidence of the two completed construction tasks is an essential requirement here.

A step by step 'diary' of work progress is not necessary but clear photos showing details of the 2 completed trade area activities are essential. Teacher comment and justification also supports the photographic evidence and aids accurate moderation.

(f) Evaluating the construction tasks
This is an area in which attainment could be improved in future with candidates often presenting very brief or simplistic evaluation reports. In many cases this seemed to be a direct consequence of the limited success criteria set out earlier in the project. The mark scheme clearly calls for the evaluation report to reflect on the requirements of the brief, success criteria, end users and suggestions for possible improvement.

Task marking
Comments on approaches to internal marking
Summary of key points

Centres are advised to:

- Further familiarise themselves with the assessment criteria and encourage candidates to structure their project work in line with the assessment criteria.
- Think carefully about structuring the project work so that, where possible, it follows the linear pattern of the assessment criteria. This would aid both centres and students to ensure that they are meeting the assessment requirements. The work of some centres jumped back and forth between different parts of the mark scheme and in the cases where there was little teacher commentary the process of accurate assessment was made difficult.
- Use the board-set scenario or devise their own scenarios that closely follow the pattern of the board-set scenario. Some centre-devised scenarios presented the candidates with too much information on material calculations and quantities which prevented them from being able to interpret and model the scenario to their own needs. There is a need for an ‘outline’ task scenario rather than an ‘over-prescribed’ scenario that can limit candidate attainment.

UNIT 3 – EXPLORING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Overview of the Unit

This was the third occasion on which this unit has been assessed. Candidate work was internally assessed by centres prior to a sample being presented for external moderation by the WJEC.

Candidates were required to select two relevant buildings in their local built environment on which to produce a case study. Without exception, the work presented for moderation met the requirements of the assessment criteria in respect to the characteristics of the buildings identified for study.

Tasks
Comments on tasks/questions relating to candidate performance/meeting assessment criteria

(a) Planning and design stages of buildings and structures construction processes
Most candidates displayed some knowledge of how their chosen built environment has been planned and constructed to meet given needs. The most successful were able to apply this knowledge to RIBA Stages 0 to 5 and gained marks accordingly.

(b) Well-being of communities
Candidates are asked to analyse the contribution made by the chosen contemporary building to their community. Attainment in this category was improved compared to last year with many candidates working methodically through the four factors required in the mark scheme (social, economic, environmental and cultural impact) and as a result were able to access marks in the higher bands of the assessment criteria.

(c) Post-occupancy evaluations
This section highlighted the importance of centres establishing a strong link with a contemporary building and its occupants. The information that is required for candidates to present their conclusions on a buildings impact can only be gained through a site visit or correspondence between building and centre.

(d) Building maintenance and repair, change of use
Again, candidates at those centres that succeeded in establishing a meaningful link with a nearby contemporary building seemed to perform well in this section of the mark scheme. The use of ICT skills and techniques throughout the case study was also adjudged and awarded marks in this section.

(e) Changing practices
A comparison of the design and construction of a contemporary and heritage building was carried out by candidates with a variety of generally effective methods being used to present findings. Some candidates chose to present the work in the form of a table, directly comparing the material and construction characteristics of the two buildings. In the most successful responses, photographs were often included to illustrate aspects of the buildings and their relevant features.

Task marking
Comments on approaches to internal marking
Summary of key points
Centres are advised to:

- Establish strong links with the two buildings chosen for the case study. The best work produced by centres show clear evidence that their students had made site visits and kept in contact throughout the period of composing the case study.
- Aid their students in preparing detailed questionnaires prior to the site visits in order to gain relevant feedback from the owners, occupants and constructors of the buildings.

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: 02922 404 259
Email: Construction@wjec.co.uk
Qualification webpage: GCSE Built Environment

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/

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