

**Film Studies**

Advanced GCE A2 H467

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS H067

**OCR Report to Centres**

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**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.

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## CONTENTS

### Advanced Subsidiary GCE Film Studies (H067)

#### OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
F631 Film Text and Context	1
F632 Foundation Portfolio in Film	5

# F631 Film Text and Context

## General Comments

This was the first sitting of this paper for this new specification and as such it was hard to know what texts and approaches candidates and centres would take to the questions available. It is very pleasing to report that there was considerable diversity of texts being utilised for discussion in answer to the questions available in Section A of the paper. This shows a very pleasing engagement with the letter and the spirit of the specification. Texts used for discussion included *V for Vendetta*, *Children of Men*, *Fish Tank*, *Shifty*, *The Angel's Share*, *Brokeback Mountain*, *No Country For Old Men*, *This Is England*, *Animal Kingdom*, *District 9*, *Black Swan*, *The Departed*, *Moon*, *Shutter Island*, *Hot Fuzz*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *Little Miss Sunshine*, *The Bourne Ultimatum*, *Sherlock Holmes: Game Of Shadows* and *Hanna*. This list shows the diversity of genres, and film-making styles which centres have embraced with this unit. This diversity – across the range of the whole cohort and centre level -has enabled candidates to answer the questions in Section A with some conviction, as will be discussed further below.

There was an almost even split in preference by candidates for Question 1 or 2. With regard to Section B, the most popular topics were the topics of *The Rise of the Blockbuster*, *Format Wars and Multiplexes and Developments in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cinema and Film.*. Some centres' candidates responded on *Early Cinema*, while only a small proportion of candidates attempted the questions on the topic of *The Impact of World War II on British Cinema*. The strengths and weaknesses of different approaches taken to the different questions and topics are discussed below.

## Section A

### Question 1

The question addressed two of the seven Frameworks For Analysis described in the specification, namely theme and style. On the whole, the question was proficiently handled by candidates – the majority of candidates who responded to this question were able to identify what they considered to be the key themes in the films they had studied and they were able to support this with reference to aspects of their selected texts. What was of a more variable quality across the cohort was the ability to apply technical knowledge and understanding of the elements of film language to these chosen aspects. Where candidates could discuss a range of technical terms and sustain such an approach across their response they were appropriately rewarded for this essential element of a film studies response.

Centres are advised that candidates will always need to utilise technical knowledge and understanding to be able to access the higher marks available in this section.

### Question 2

The question addressed one of the seven Frameworks For Analysis described in the specification, namely narrative. On the whole, the question was proficiently handled by candidates – the majority of candidates who responded to this question were able to grapple with the debate implied within the stimulus quotation. Three broad approaches were taken by candidates – the statement was agreed with and texts were discussed to demonstrate the veracity of the quotation, the statement was disagreed with and texts were used to show up the limitations of the claim in the quotation. The third approach was to agree and disagree with reference to different films studied. Any of these approaches were valid provided candidates were able to argue their case, supporting this with precise reference to aspects of the film

studied. There was much discussion of the theories of Propp and Todorov to support answers and these theories were used to some good effect. It is also recommended that the work of Chris Vogler and Joseph Campbell (*The Hero's Journey*) as well as looking at story types in general would also benefit centres and candidates with regard to analysing narrative in films studied.

As with question 1, there was a more variable quality across the cohort in the application of technical knowledge and understanding of the elements of film language to these chosen aspects. Where candidates could discuss a range of technical terms and sustain such an approach across their response they were appropriately rewarded for this essential element of a film studies response.

## **Section B**

### **Early Cinema (1895 – 1915)**

Question 3 was only attempted by a small number of candidates. Pleasing features of such responses were a focus on a specific American studio and looking at how institutions such as Warner Brothers or Universal Pictures developed within the time period stipulated in the topic. This question shows some of the depth that teaching and learning across any of the Section B topics should aspire to – and what will be required to be demonstrated in examinations. Centres which do not teach this topic are advised to look at this question and the Scheme of Work available on the OCR website as an insight into the expected depth of teaching and learning for these Section B topics.

Question 4 was somewhat more popular, and candidates were on the whole able to demonstrate a good, accurate command of relevant historical knowledge. This was pleasing to see and enabled candidates to marshal coherent responses to the question. However, even with the best responses there lacked some sense of debate that a full answer to the question required. Centres and candidates are advised to consider alternative hypotheses / ideas as to why some of the events in cinema history have happened – for example with the Lumière Brothers, to what extent did business acumen, inventiveness and creativity play a role in enabling them to become some of the best known names of early cinema?

### **The Impact of World War II on British Cinema (1939-45)**

Out of the four topics in Section B, this was the least popular. The candidates who did respond on the questions on this topic on the whole demonstrated accurate historical knowledge and were able to discuss appropriate films to the questions set – mostly this centred on texts named in the specification as examples of films that could be considered. Candidates in one centre did veer too much into textual analysis in this topic. While it is important that candidates have some means to exemplify the points made in their responses by discussing certain films, wholesale textual analysis does not enable candidates to achieve marks easily, as the application of the mark scheme does not allow for such responses. The difference between the two sections of the unit are delineated in the specification and, where necessary, centres should re-familiarise themselves with the relevant details in this regard.

### **The Rise of the Blockbuster, Format Wars and Multiplexes (1972 -84)**

This was one of the more popular topics in this section, and the question on multiplex cinemas proved very popular. Generally, many candidates were able to demonstrate a good understanding of the fundamental changes occurring in cinema in Britain and America in the relevant time period. There was much useful discussion of 'fleapit cinemas' and good

understanding demonstrated of how the development of the multiplexes facilitated an upgrade in the quality of the cinema experience. Stronger responses were distinguished by the ability to use macro level facts – such as the fact that 1984 represented the low point in British cinema admissions. Some candidates' responses lacked historical specificity, writing about the attractions for audiences in multiplexes in the present tense. Given that the time period covered by the topic is clearly marked in the specification and on the examination paper, it is important that centres and candidates ensure their work is appropriate to the time period covered by the topic.

With Question 8, the majority of responses were able to present their views on what the key reasons were for the emergence of statutory regulation for home video in the early 1980s. Key reasons cited were the uptake of VCR from the late 1970s onwards, the growing availability of home video and the quick spread of home video rental shops and sections within newsagents, petrol stations and other local shops, the work of censorship campaigner Mary Whitehouse and the moral panic over the so-called 'video nasties'. All of this offered fertile ground for candidates to offer coherent responses to the question. In a small minority of cases, some candidates took an overly general approach to the question, attempting to shoehorn all parts of the topic into an answer to the question. This rarely worked well as this left candidates without the time and space to develop their points into cogent whole, and as such this approach to responding to the questions is to be discouraged.

### **Developments in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Cinema and Film (2000 – present)**

As with the above topic, this was a very popular choice. With regard to Question 9, the success of Avatar looms large, with the vast majority of responses to this question mentioning the film somewhere in the answer. As a very successful example of 3D cinema this was good. Some candidates and some centres were able to link Avatar's 3D success to technological developments, writing about the kinds of production and exhibition technology needed to make the film the 3D experience that it was. Many candidates also linked the re-birth of 3D to the threat posed by internet piracy. Better responses were able to extend this discussion by considering the differences in the exhibition experience offered by watching films in 3D at the cinema versus pirated copies of films on handheld devices at home. Additionally, many candidates were able to demonstrate their knowledge that the use of 3D technology in cinema is something which has been tried on other occasions in cinema history. Disappointingly, there was scant evidence of candidates personalising their responses more and considering their own consumption or otherwise of 3D films.

One centre linked the number of 3D screens in China to the question and this was done very ably. The candidates here were able to link production decisions to exhibition practice. This work was evidence based, and as such the candidates were able to make points and support them credibly. This type of approach to Section B in general is to be commended to all centres.

With the final question on the paper, some candidates could ably demonstrate their understanding of the existence of the digital cinema network, being able to show their understanding of the number of screens involved in the programme UK-wide. However, some candidates were not able to securely identify the existence of the scheme, using the published scheme of work should help to prevent recurrence of such issues.

Overall, it is with some disappointment to report that too many candidates were unable to situate the national programme within the framework of how cinemas in their local areas operate. Being able to investigate such issues and gain evidence to use is an important part of candidates being fully prepared for the exam. The lack of ability to discuss the impact of the digital cinema programme in the local area prevented some candidates from being able to offer as full a response to the question as would have been desired.

### **Sociological / Economic / Technological contexts**

The better answers across the Section B responses explicitly addressed one or more of these contexts, Candidates determined which was the most relevant from their learning and adapted their answers suitably to the questions set.

Centres are advised to use these contexts to help frame tasks inside and outside of the classroom and in so doing candidates will then begin to generate material from their research which can then help them better contextualise issues and perhaps personalise their learning more. Some practical ways that this aspiration can be put into practice is signposted in the scheme of work available on the OCR website.

### **General Advice to Centres**

Section A – develop the candidates' technical knowledge and understanding alongside their understanding of the films and the seven Frameworks For Analysis. Technical prowess is integral to high performance in the exam.

Section B – enable candidates to personalise and make concrete the work of the topics – regardless of which of the four topics they study. Candidates need to be able to construct arguments in the exam, and to enable them to do so fully, they need greater personal / local evidence to help over and above what may be learned from reading books and websites.

## **F632 Foundation Portfolio in Film**

### **Administration**

The administration of this component by the majority of centres was excellent, with marks and work being submitted on time. Most centres completed coursework cover sheets thoroughly, with detailed comments outlining how and why the marks were allocated. A number of centres would benefit from being more explicit in justifying why certain marks were awarded. The majority of centres submitted work as physical folders which were suitably presented; the centre which submitted work online did so using a blog hub which is good practice.

Most centres were very clear about how and why marks had been awarded and avoided using subjective comments or just statements copied and pasted straight from the assessment criteria. Comments should clearly indicate how the individual candidate's work meets the assessment criteria as this makes it clear as to how the centre have applied the criteria as well as making the moderation process more straightforward.

The video work was often submitted as individual discs which can make the moderation process more challenging as moderators are constantly switching between discs. Separate discs were often used for the different elements of the coursework. It would be useful in future if the work of an individual candidate could be on a single disc, it would be ideal if the complete work of a centre could be put onto a single disc. Please continue to make sure video work is submitted in suitable formats.

### **Quality of marking**

Application of the criteria was generally close to the agreed standard, though some centres tended to be over-generous with specific elements. Harsh marking was very rare. In terms of the textual analysis most centres are assessing candidates in the right levels, however centres often seemed to be over-marking the planning. It was clear that if candidates had appeared to complete set tasks then this was rewarded as opposed to rewarding the actual quality of the work. Moderators often saw very basic planning being rewarded with marks in a much higher level. This included badly framed storyboards and out of focus shots as well as minimal detail about the links to the textual analysis.

The variety of the creative artefacts produced was pleasing and the majority of centres were accurately rewarding high quality work. The centres producing the script and key frames need to make sure that candidates demonstrate consistently high levels of appropriate production skills to justify awarding level 4 marks. This includes the ability to frame and focus still images as well as using appropriate landscape formatting. The video work produced was mixed but was often accurately awarded the correct level. Again where work was over marked it was due to a lack of excellent production skills.

Evaluations varied in approach with the majority of candidates submitting an essay style write up of their work and progress. Centres need to make sure that candidates address all the set questions.

### **Candidates' work**

Given that this is the first year for the specification moderators were pleased with the diversity of work produced and the choice of films being used in the textual analysis work. The wide range of films selected is in keeping with the spirit of the specification. All candidates would benefit from clear guidance being given on the correct ways to format planning and the importance of this

being carried out prior to the production of the creative artefact as opposed to after the production.

### **Textual analysis**

Candidates chose a wide variety of films to analyse and these were often carefully chosen and facilitated the textual analysis. The most successful work demonstrated a clear sense of engagement with the texts and made insightful links between the micro-technical elements and the contextual macro elements. This was often supported by the use of screen grabs to help illustrate the point being made and this visual stimulus proved to be useful in allowing candidates to make direct links between the two films.

The candidates whose textual analysis focused on small extracts from the whole film were able to gain appropriate marks for terminology due to the close analysis of micro-technical elements. As with the close focus on an extract the candidates who used one or two frameworks of analysis tended to produce more coherent and focused pieces of writing. This approach should be encouraged.

A number of candidates had tried to shoehorn in specific film theory, often rather clumsily. It is better if candidates are aware of the broader concepts of film theory and use these as a looser framework as opposed to trying to fit in theory.

It was clear that where centres and candidates had considered the whole portfolio from the start the choice of films for the textual analysis provided a clear and constant thread which linked all the elements together and allowed a cohesive portfolio of work to be produced.

### **Planning**

The range and quality of planning was varied with some candidates producing lots of focused and detailed material whilst others had obviously produced storyboard after the construction of the creative artefact.

The better work made explicit links to the impact of the textual analysis and how the candidates work had been influenced by the films analysed. Equally a number of candidates work appeared to be just a functional exercise which had been completed to meet the criteria with minimal influence from the textual analysis or any impact on the creative artefact.

Candidates producing the location reports often seemed to ignore them when making the creative artefact or chose to include badly focused and framed images. It is vital that candidates realise the importance of planning and the need for it to be presented in a suitable format. A number of candidates who produced hand drawn storyboards did not always use appropriate figure shapes to illustrate blocking within the frame, stick figures do not constitute good planning.

Candidates producing screen tests would benefit from having a clear rationale in the notes about what type of character they are after as well as some idea of the direction given. This is an approach that could be developed in future sessions.

## **Creative artefact**

There was a fairly even split between centres submitting filmed sequences and script and key frames. The quality of work produced in both areas was mixed.

The best filmed sequences had benefitted from clear planning and an understanding of technical conventions linked to the textual analysis. Where this was evident candidates had produced excellent work which was sophisticated and also demonstrated excellent application of production skills. The film sequences that were less successful did not demonstrate the same technical excellence and in some cases did not frame shots properly or manage to hold a shot steady. If centres choose to offer the filmed sequence they would benefit from highlighting the need for basic technical competence. In a number of cases the filmed sequences were marked generously and into level four when the work did not always merit it.

As with the filmed sequences there was excellent work produced in the script and key frame approach. Again as with the filmed sequence candidates who used the appropriate formatting for the script tended to produce work of a higher standard. These candidates also managed to relate their key frames clearly to the prior planning. In a number of cases the marks awarded for the key frames tended to be over generous especially where frames were repeated or suffered due to poor composition and lighting.

## **Evaluation**

The evaluations are an element that would benefit from more focus, it is important that candidates do more than just describe what they have done without much sense of evaluating its success or otherwise. A significant number of candidates produced level two responses which were brief and underdeveloped. Often the evaluations lacked any film specific terminology or links back to the textual analysis. The fourth question about the success of the artefact was often the most poorly answered and usually in a very superficial way. The better candidates were able to make clear and insightful points about how all elements of their portfolio linked together and this approach is to be encouraged.

All submitted evaluations were written and often presented as a continuous piece of writing. The specification does not state the format that the evaluation should be presented in so it may be beneficial for centres to consider the way this is presented in future sessions, evaluations could be presented as an audio commentary, a video presentation or through a mix of approaches. Centres would benefit from considering how the evaluation is delivered and structured in order to access the full range of levels. It is vital that all candidates answer all four questions in order to access the full range of marks.

Centres are reminded that all the elements are meant to interlink and inform each part of the process. It is also expected that differentiation takes place within centres particularly in the marking of the individual elements. Finally teachers are encouraged to supervise, facilitate and monitor projects and to advise on the work produced rather than just mark it.

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