OCR

Oxford Cambridge and RSA

GCE

Media Studies

Advanced GCE A2 **H540**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS **H140**

OCR Report to Centres June 2014

CONTENTS

Advanced GCE Media Studies (H540)

Advanced Subsidiary GCE Media Studies (H140)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

G321 Foundation Portfolio in Media

General Comments:

Most centres sent their work on time, though as in previous series, there were some late submissions. Centres with ten or fewer candidates are reminded that they should not wait for a sample request and should send all their work to the moderator by the deadline. Though most centres are now putting work online, which has drastically reduced the size of packaging, there was an increase this time in paper-based submissions and large parcels of material. Despite requests in all previous reports, there are still some centres submitting online work with no central blog hub - this forces moderators' to type individual URLs manually for each candidate. Often these URLs have been handwritten and contain errors, making the process unnecessarily lengthy. Centres should note that if all work is online, there is no need to send a DVD as well.

Candidate record forms were mostly completed in detail, but there were still some examples where teachers simply copied directly from the criteria, and lacked any personalised comments about the individual candidate's work. Centres are asked to use the online version of the cover sheet to avoid potential clerical errors.

The best centres using online submissions not only set up a blog hub, containing the name and candidate numbers of those in the sample, but also ensured each blog featured the completed construction (e.g. film opening or magazine pages) at the top followed by clearly signposted responses to evaluation questions. There were a number of poorly organised blogs that made it necessary to search for the final construction work and/or spend time working out which evaluation question was being addressed. Indeed, many candidates failed to label the evaluation questions so it was not always clear what they were answering. Across all elements, centres are reminded that it is expected that differentiation will take place within groups, particularly in the marking.

Comments on Individual Components and options

The best centres encouraged an equal measure of research and planning and advised candidates to see this as an ongoing process, representing all continuous stages of the project. In some cases, there was an imbalance, with lots of research and little planning, or vice versa. The best work is comprehensive and shows strong evidence of candidates reflecting on the process of the production in their blogs.

Hard copy research and planning tended to lack the sense of a journey or process - candidates tended not to capture the essence of their development as successfully as those using an online platform and evidence was often the product of retrospective work rather than the actual process. Some research tended to be very teacher-led and therefore did not always link to final products. There was still a lack of research into titles in particular, and in some cases an absence of effective research into codes and conventions which impacted upon the construction of final products.

Construction

Print

There was some very effective branding across the three magazine components, with the best centres encouraging candidates to fully embrace the brief.

Overall, front covers were the strongest element of magazine work with contents pages most likely to fail to conform to forms and conventions, particularly in the use of images. The quality of double page spreads was variable; the best followed forms and conventions closely and featured striking images while the worst showed lack of awareness of the required point size for magazine copy and often failed to show understanding of basic elements, such as the use of columns.

There was insufficient variety in terms of original images in many of the magazines. More variety in terms of costume and background is often required, and, specifically for a contents page, a variety of artists would be expected to feature. This led to many pages containing similar mid-shot or medium close-ups of individuals who were not styled in a way that made them readable as music artists. There were still a large number of candidates who failed to include at least four of their own images and/or included found images, which is not permitted. Candidates often still included far too many apparent snapshots of friends and musicians with little consideration of purpose. In some cases, it was unclear as to the provenance of images. Candidates need to include originals in the planning process and ideally show the stages of development.

Candidates would benefit from paying more attention to details of page layout. In particular, use of space, and use of font colour. Font size, particularly in the double page spreads, was an issue in many cases. Front covers were marred in many cases by text superimposed over images. In the very rare cases when this has to be done, then choice of font colour is very important. Particularly on a front cover, image and text should be striking. Text that is obscured by the colour of an image is ineffective. Candidates need to focus carefully on register and spellings; if mistakes are noticed whilst producing their evaluations the centre should encourage them to correct them at that time. Candidates should be mindful that there is a balance to be struck between magazines looking full but not cluttered.

Radio

A small number of centres submitted radio work, with some good examples of appropriate stories and a clear attempt to combine relevant sounds with good mixing of different layers and some good integration of internal and external sound clips. As with other briefs, the requirement to research existing local radio products carefully prior to construction is particularly important in order to establish the codes and conventions associated with this form of radio show. At times, the less successful candidates had researched radio conventions too broadly and this led to final constructions that were not as successful in reaching the needs of their intended target audience.

Video

There were several examples of highly proficient/excellent editing and more work is being done on creating an opening with some sense of enigma rather than trying to create a condensed narrative. There was still an over-reliance solely on actors' names and film title to constitute film titles, showing a lack of understanding of the range of titles expected of a film opening and of their construction, appearance and timings. Candidates need to be encouraged to create their own soundscape, combining diegetic and non-diegetic sound to suit their original footage, rather than sourcing an existing well-known track, which is not permitted for this specification.

There were some excellent examples of film openings where candidates had clearly worked hard to establish a sense of enigma and atmosphere. However, more often, candidates did not focus well on what the narrative was. Many film openings ended abruptly; candidates had put some thought into what they wanted to show in the opening sequence but not enough into how they would close the sequence. The combination of effective use of images, sound, titles and lighting worked extremely well in some of the better work. There were many examples of highly proficient editing and excellent camerawork, the outcome of work on skills development.

However, in some cases there was little sense of control of the camera, with an over-reliance on zooms and shaky material without tripods. Mise en scene was often well chosen, but weaker candidates still tended to focus on the hunted victim. Some submissions were very short- the target should be as close to two minutes as possible; there is no penalty for being either over-length or significantly under, but candidates cannot expect to do themselves justice in a piece as short as one minute unless it contains immense complexity. Equally candidates can be even more tempted to reveal far too much of the narrative too prematurely into the film if the submission reaches five minutes in length. Some openings contained far too much action - centres could advise candidates not to be over-ambitious in this regard. Titles were still often rather limited in terms of understanding of institutional conventions, and often featured non-existent job roles. Focused research into this area prior to construction is highly recommended.

Evaluation

At the top end, there were some really creative pieces and here candidates had generally used a different technology to answer each question, exploring a range of formats and experimenting with creativity. Centres that did particularly well, made sure that the evaluation was not an afterthought and that candidates spent a reasonable amount of time producing it to reflect its mark allocation, rather than just a couple of lessons at the end of the project. This issuing of the seven questions earlier into the project, rather than at the end, would also eliminate the number of candidates who failed to produce/complete an evaluation. It also appeared that more centres had advised candidates to use a variety of technology; often the evaluations were submitted on blogs with PowerPoint, Prezi, video, audio and embedded documents to support. Centres should note that director commentaries need to strike a balance between script and spontaneity to reflect their purpose. Centres are asked to consider the advice given in their moderator report and to respond accordingly. There were still many which produced evaluations in exactly the same way as the year before – essays to the screen. Where Web 2.0 tools are used, centres are advised to consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of them. In some cases, Prezis were used as just glorified essays, with one box per question. Fitness for purpose is essential.

A significant amount of candidates only produced Level 2 responses: brief, undeveloped short written responses done as an add-on rather than being treated as 20% of the mark**.** The candidates who had really made an effort showed thorough understanding as well as very effective use of ICT. There was a clear link between the research and planning and the evaluation; candidates who had done little research subsequently suffered in the evaluations.

G322/3 Key Media Concepts

General Comments:

The paper itself was well received and offered a plethora of opportunities for candidates to engage with the technical analysis of the extract taken from Downton Abbey. The representation candidates were asked to discuss was social class and status. For question two candidates engaged with a range of media areas whilst discussing the impact on media institutions and audiences of increasing hardware and content. Those candidates that achieved well offered sustained and detailed responses to both questions set. These responses were frequently punctuated with detailed reference to contemporary and relevant examples. On occasion, candidates were fully rewarded for some insightful and academic use of key media concepts pertaining to media representation for question one and to institutional and audience practices for question two. Candidates who did not meet the highest levels often lacked detail in the arguments presented and offered a basic response to the questions set. Where work was minimal, or there emerged issues of time management, candidates struggled to achieve a higher mark level.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1

On the whole candidates answered the question well and with reasonable accuracy, though there was some variation in the quality of the answers. The choice of Downton Abbey as the focus of the investigation seemed to have been a popular and engaging choice and it was heartening to see far more integration of terminology in candidate responses. The majority were able to show that there were a variety of class groups represented and that characters' status within the sequence fluctuated according to narrative events. Many candidates tackled the sequence in order, which worked for the strongest candidates who were able to provide a balanced, integrated analysis, covering all the micro-elements. However, lesser achieving candidates struggled to achieve a satisfactory balance with this approach, frequently omitting coverage of editing or lapsing into passages of description or analysis without reference to class and status. These candidates would have been better advised to adopt a more structured approach, basing their analysis around each technical area in turn or focussing upon the working class and aristocracy in turn.

Camera shots, angle and movement – Many candidates dealt with this technical area well especially with regards to the principles of pull focus, framing and camera movement, examples include the tracking shot of Lord Grantham, and some excellent discussion about the composition of the house juxtaposed to the set-up of the kitchen area. This in-depth discussion by many candidates moved away from the usual discussion of low angle/high angle shots which usually dominate these kinds of responses, a sort of 'spot the camera shot' approach. This session candidates seemed more prepared and confident to try much more detailed analysis and this was pleasing to see.

Mise en scene – This was one of the strongest areas of response for candidates. Although there was a lot of obvious 'costume' analysis between the servants and the 'master' of the house, many of the more engaged candidates focused on the choice of attire for Carson and how this subverted the expectation of a worker in the house. Comments were also drawn to performance, as well as the choice of lighting and the differences in set décor between the two areas of the mansion. Many candidates compared and contrasted the class and status differences between the kitchen quarters and the master's home to a very good degree. Some candidates are still wedded to deterministic colour analysis, leading to clearly inaccurate analysis, for example, stating that 'the lady's white dress signifies her purity'; this approach should be discouraged and

candidates should be able to understand that analysis is contextual rather than universal in value.

Sound – In this session there were a lot of detailed responses discussing the use of diegetic dialogue, for example the response by Lord Grantham to the deaths of the lower class led to some worthwhile discussion with regards to him breaking the supposed stereotype of the upper classes of not caring as much for the lower classes in society. However, candidates tended to cover dialogue as an element of sound rather than concentrating on the technical use of sound. Some good candidates were able to show how the sequence creates a specific soundscape and linked this to issues of class and status. Most candidates are able to distinguish between diegetic and non-diegetic sound. The sequence offered plenty of relevant examples of soundtrack and ambient sound features connected with class and status.

Editing –This technical area remains an area for development with regards to candidate responses. The more able candidates, however, did make some excellent comments with regards to the use of editing in the scene. The long tracking shots of Lord Grantham 'motivated' by his status within the household were excellently dissected by a number of candidates, as was the use of parallel editing between the rich aristocracy and the lower servants. On occasion excellent candidate responses would relate the technical features of editing with examples of how different perspectives are constructed and how the diegesis constructed a hierarchy of meaning. There was the repeated mistake of using 'jump cuts' to mark a difference between scenes, which was a common error. On many occasions editing was again marked by its absence or a few lines being sporadically applied with generic use in referring to continuity and seamlessness without application to the issue of representation. Candidates should be encouraged to examine how editing techniques set up perspective within the sequence and encourage the audience to identify with a number of different characters in different environments. Unfortunately, too many candidates simply omitted an analysis of editing in the response. Centres should ensure that candidates are prepared to address editing, at least in relation to pace, perspective and match on action of the extract.

Question No. 2

The question was well answered by candidates that had been thoroughly prepared with comprehensive, contemporary case studies within their chosen media area. The most able candidates responded with detail to both argument and the use of case study material. Those candidates that did not specifically address the question set had absent from their responses meaningful argument. The use of the term 'increase' and the specific words 'hardware' and 'content' meant that answers were a lot more tightly focused than usual for this section of the exam. Most candidates were well-prepared and had plenty to discuss on the subject. The highest achieving candidates wrote detailed responses in a style that integrated specific examples, terminology and a coherent and sustained argument.

Successful candidates compared and contrasted large conglomerates with smaller independent companies and were able to detail a range of responses because of this. Hardware was identified, but due to the nature of the question and the wide responses it elicited, some candidates failed to be specific in their answers. This meant, for example, that the use of the word app for the content section of this question was referred to vaguely with no linkage back to the film or musician that supplied that app. This point equally applied to discussions of YouTube, Facebook etc. This is the one area of teaching that needs to be firmed up; candidates need to be able to link the use of a specific app or piece of hardware to the specific case study they are writing about. At the moment there are many examples of centres that are not tying the two together leaving the candidates with responses that lack the well rounded critical response needed for the higher grades. Too many candidates persisted in providing potted histories of media producers or trotted out learned debates which were not contextualised. Common issues included answers which failed to focus on the impact of proliferation sufficiently and rehearsing prepared responses which simply described the different phases for different kinds of

companies. Weaker candidates frequently drew assumptions that big companies benefitted from proliferation, while small or poorly resourced institutions were not able to take advantage; this of course ignored the potential for new technology to be used in creative ways for smaller products and niche audiences.

Those candidates which addressed the area of film did so with some zest, evidencing how the rise in technology hardware and content had an impact on both institution and film. Many candidates' responses provided discussion across production, distribution and exhibition and how these traditional structures had been transformed with evidence of the advantages and disadvantages for the industry and audiences. Where candidates provided detailed and sustained argument they met the higher mark boundaries. Excellent case studies were used which compared Hollywood film practice with independent British film production companies like Vertigo and used to an excellent degree discussion of film texts, such as Gareth Edwards film, Monsters. The multi-platform release of A Field in England meant that many candidates found it easy to link content to wider issues in the film industry. The Dark Knight Rises was a popular case study for candidates who addressed the area of film. There is evidence that centres persist with teaching case studies which are not contemporary, particularly around Working Title films. In film, many candidates are still using case studies from 2008 or older which did not give them the opportunity to discuss the major role that digital marketing and technology play in the contemporary film industry.

The area of music was addressed with the same rigor as with film and candidates enjoyed varying success in response to the question set. Many candidates discussed online streaming sites and the changing demands of audiences, including the rise of prosumer activity. The most able candidates recognised how institutions responded to varying degrees to audience demands and how well they strategised content and availability. The most able candidates offered criticism of the consolidation of power by major record labels in the online age and also discussed the rising opportunities for record companies such as Domino, using the Arctic Monkeys success an example of this. Candidates also referred to the issue of illegal downloading and audiences downloading and sharing music, which was argued as a threat to the music industry. An area for development for some candidates is to use more specific examples of artists within their case studies – many were focused on the record label and not how the technology was used by the artist to promote/ sell the music. Where Apple was used as a case study, candidates needed to be able to show its distinctive differences from a record label.

The two areas of print media - newspaper and magazines, were addressed to varying degrees of success. On the whole candidates attempted to show how online versions were being transformed by the rising use of hardware and technologies with many citing the ability to offer extra content online. There were some excellent answers on newspapers and magazines, looking at the need for print media to diversify into multiplatform brands. These answers were illustrated with some detailed case studies, for example on lifestyle magazines, such as Men's Health and with newspapers, The Guardian. In many ways the question was tailor-made for this kind of approach. Candidates also demonstrated that audiences were more likely to participate with online technologies as it is empowering to offer feedback and to forge online communities. The most able candidates were able to offer a critical reflection on the use of technology and its wider availability. Overall candidates offered a discussion that proliferation of technology posed a threat to traditional forms of print media. The lesser achieving candidates often made this argument in a deterministic fashion and would refer to technologies in their generic form rather than with specified exemplification. Where candidates tried to address the question through traditional theories of audience they were unable to forge much meaningful argument.

Candidates covering video games were able to address the question through ideas around convergence and development of new consoles. Some candidates produced detailed responses that focused on how this convergence was of benefit to institutions and audiences. They were also able to reflect on content extras and gaming practice and the ability to form communities which can help shape a game's context. An area for development is to continue to discuss specific software developers and the products. Some videogame responses still focus on the platform (console, PC etc.) rather than the games producers and audiences. The links across media platforms is one media area that candidates need to explore in more detail-. Similar issues apply with the address of Radio as a media area, but these responses seemed to lack the breadth and knowledge that candidates had with video games. The best case studies compared independent broadcasters like Absolute Radio with BBC radio channels and contrasted the development of DAB and interactive features with the programmes format.

G323

There were a nominal number of entries for G323 Radio drama. The majority of candidates were not well prepared for the technical demands of a radio extract, which often led to responses almost wholly based around dialogue. In particular, there was limited understanding of editing and its impact upon the representations constructed. Very few candidates were able to comment upon the positioning of the audience in relation to the representations of disabled characters which led to some superficial comments. Only a few candidates were able to make the most of an extract which was potentially rich with detail to analyse.

G324 Advanced Portfolio in Media

The session again witnessed the exciting way candidates for this unit continue to embrace the range of technologies and rise to the challenges posed by the wide scope of demanding tasks at A2: the work at the very top end of the range was impressive and exhibited creativity, professionalism and maturity of thought. It was also extremely rare to see candidates working with relatively basic software packages like Movie Maker and Publisher, with the likes of Premiere Pro, Final Cut (Express and Pro), Audacity, Cubase, Garageband, Photoshop, InDesign and Dreamweaver the norm.

Administration and presentation of work

The administration by most centres was efficient and made moderation easier with the use of blog hubs linking clearly to candidates' work. This year centres were in a minority if they sent anything other than coversheets, and this is to be applauded. Coversheets continue to improve in many respects but some centres are still not using the latest version of the cover sheets or the interactive cover sheets and, in a number of cases, this caused problems: clerical errors where the component marks were not added accurately; no reference to re-submission; missed group membership, inaccurate transcriptions of marks etc. There were also issues with some centres' submissions missing material. However, these were largely dealt with promptly and efficiently. In fact moderators reported that in this session contact with centres was generally easier than in the past and centres dealt with queries and issues much more promptly. All but a handful of centres were prompt in submitting marks and sending coursework samples to the moderator. The few late centres ran the very real risk of not getting their candidates' work processed in time for publication of results. The vast majority of centres sent their CCS160 Centre Authentication Forms without needing reminders.

In terms of the presentation of work, centres are tending to provide a far more uniform approach to the organisation of blogs. The majority of centres used blog hubs to administer candidate blogs which was a tremendous help when sampling work and it is hoped that more centres will follow this model. In particular, where candidates had created blogs with long URLs, having a central focus for links really supported the moderation process. The practice of placing a final post linking to each piece of production work and to the four evaluation responses also offered useful direction to moderators. Indeed blogging remains the most successful method of presentation: as one moderator noted, 'the blogs themselves were in many cases very impressive and candidates appear to have a real sense of 'ownership' by using this platform: some candidates even commented on how enjoyable the process had been'. However, many centres are now presenting work via websites, which moves away from the chronological approach of the blog; web pages are certainly an effective way of organising content, however, the sense of the journey was absent from almost all work where the website, rather than blog, approach was adopted.

Access to blogs was generally problem-free, although in a few cases centres had used password protection which made it impossible to moderate without contacting the centre. In several cases, candidates had locked or removed material from their blogs prior to moderation.

The best blog hubs used by centres were those which listed candidates by number as well as name. Some were little more than the centre's own teaching blogs, which organised candidates by class and were consequently harder to navigate. Candidates in one centre had produced blogs which consisted of unlabelled files which had to be downloaded and then opened before they could be read, which was extremely time-consuming; centres are requested to avoid submitting any work that needs downloading to a moderator's computer to be viewed – it is time consuming and can potentially introduce viruses.

Some centres produced both group blogs and individual blogs which led to unnecessary duplication of material and additional work for candidates. It is easier for centres to differentiate between candidates who create individual blogs; these can record all group and individual work. Other centres submitted all work on disc (including cover sheets), which not only made things awkward for the moderator but also tended to present less successful work in terms of reaching the higher bands.

There were also far fewer instances of centres using Blogger videos, instead using the far more reliable YouTube. However, a number of centres submitted audio-visual productions on disc even though they were embedded on candidates' blogs or uploaded to sites such as YouTube. Such back ups are no longer required, as long as the work is available online. Print outs of work are categorically not to be sent. Some centres submitted a number of Word files on disc which are not in the spirit of the Specification, even if, technically, this is a digital means of presentation.

Assessment

The quality of centre comments was extremely varied. The best were detailed and clearly referred closely to the assessment criteria as well as providing personalised comments about candidates' efforts and skills. A few centres wrote just a word or two which made supportive moderation exceedingly tricky. Some centres addressed their comments to the candidate rather than the moderator, which should be discouraged. A number of centres wrote some very subjective comments which were not related to the assessment criteria at all and in these cases the marking was generally considerably over-generous. In a few cases poor application of the assessment criteria and/or a lack of internal standardisation led to merit order issues; this was the extreme case but the assessment of candidate work by many centres seemed to indicate that external standardisation materials had not been accessed. The site http://ocrmediastudies.weebly.com/ provides links to resources and examples of work from all units and the new community site at http://social.ocr.org.uk/ holds an archived forum for information and discussion.

It has been repeatedly reinforced in reports to centres and in Principal Moderator's reports that, where candidates have worked together in groups, the centre's comments should clearly refer to individual contributions to the group work in order to support the marks allocated. However this is something which a significant number of centres are still not doing; in these cases the same marks are being allocated to all candidates in a group without a clear delineation of roles and equality of contributions. For example, a number of centres submitted group blogs where the majority of posts appear to have been created by one or two candidates in a group yet all members of the group were allocated the same marks. This is something which centres need to address in order to ensure marks adequately reflect the differentiated input of candidates.

Research and planning

Research and planning is now being assessed more sensibly, with the volume of blog posting not being automatically converted to a mark.

Research into existing media products relevant to the main task productions was generally focused and relevant, establishing generic codes and conventions which then clearly influenced the planning and construction phases of candidates' work. However in a small number of centres this was a real weakness, with research lacking a clear focus which, as a consequence, was reflected in poor constructions. For example some centres who submitted work in response to the film promotion brief did not conduct detailed analysis of film trailers, focusing more on the films as a whole and the genre of the film candidates decided to create for promotion; as a result the trailers lacked understanding of the basics of film trailers, following the narrative order of the film; revealing more about the narrative than would be conventional; lacking appropriate pace; and not working in terms of provoking audience interest in the film. Quite often there was either

too much research or general theory compared to planning (for example, in music video work there was sometimes a regurgitation of Goodwin without application) or a lack of research which provided little foundation for planning, leading to production work which lacked verisimilitude.

It was disappointing that so many centres do not appear to consider research into existing media relevant to the ancillary productions as being as important; this left a marked gap in candidates' blogs and led to problems in the construction phase, particularly when it came to the digipak for the music promotion brief. Similarly, research into a potential target audience was conspicuous by its absence in the work of many candidates. Again this has been a weakness in previous sessions which has been addressed in reports to centres and Principal Moderator's reports and yet is still ignored by a number of centres. This is a real shame because without a focus on a clear target audience candidates end up producing work which is very subjective in nature and lacking a sense of who it is actually created for; work also cannot reach full marks for planning as this is one of the assessment criteria – the second bullet point refers to '…*research into similar products and a potential target audience*'.

Evidence of planning was both varied and variable. The best was very detailed, consisting of, for example: detailed drafting of print texts; storyboards, treatments, shooting schedules and risk assessments for audio-visual productions. There was some excellent use of pitches by many centres in bringing together aspects of the research and planning. It was clear in some submissions, though, that planning evidence was created after the construction phase, for example with photo storyboards constructed using stills from the completed production. The order of posts also appeared to reinforce this with planning being posted on blogs after the completed productions. Some blogs seemed to be fulfilling a 'tick sheet' criteria but little development or evidence of progress through the tasks (e.g. there were location shots, but no comment on them or evidence of understanding why location shots were needed). However, although some centres set a range of research and planning tasks for candidates to work through, sometimes these were restrictive - for example, all candidates researching the same trailers; candidates should be encouraged to use centre tasks as a minimum, to which they add their own posts to show their individual progress. Some centres set tasks which were not relevant, such as the history of the music video or lots of Wikipedia institutional facts about a range of tracks, instead of detailed textual analysis.

Thus generally, centres are advised to instruct candidates to conduct much more detailed and focused research into the codes and conventions of texts relevant to all three productions - and to a target audience - and to ensure this work is used to inform very detailed and appropriate planning. Where this isn't done it should be reflected in the candidate's marks and comments. This will avoid a clear bunching of marks in levels 3 and 4, which was a feature of many centres and consequently required adjustment by moderators.

Construction

Production work once again tended to be the most over-marked element and this is usually owing to candidates' technical skills not matching their aspirations and the centre's marks not matching the criteria - as in previous sessions, centres often rewarded 'basic' as 'proficient' and 'proficient' as 'excellent'.

As in all previous sessions, the best work came from centres where the range of briefs offered to candidates was limited to one or two and was tailored to the centre's strengths. It was usually obvious when centres had put time into developing candidates' technical confidence in each of the areas used for production and this is easier to achieve with a limited range of briefs on offer. Where centres had given candidates a free choice this tended to lead to problems with the standardising of marking across the range of briefs; it was also the case that candidates did not always seems to have been as effectively supported and therefore did not achieve level 4 marks for construction as frequently. While some may consider giving candidates a free choice is within the spirit of the specification, Centres do need to be pragmatic and consider the logistics and

resourcing numerous briefs. Focusing on a limited number of briefs ensures more consistent and appropriate support is provided and this not only advantages candidates, clearly leading to higher quality productions resulting in higher marks for construction, but also advantages teachers when it comes to workload and applying, consistently, the assessment criteria and establishing an order of merit.

The music and film promotion briefs continue to be the most popular undertaken by centres, followed by the short film and TV documentary briefs. In most cases the main task was more impressive than the ancillary tasks, but in some centres the standard was consistently excellent across all three, with a strong sense of synergy and an explicit 'campaign' feel. In some cases candidates' ancillary tasks were the strongest and this was usually in Brief 2, where the print and web artefacts (poster, magazine cover and homepage) had a better handle on codes and conventions than the trailers. Whereas the strongest of the moving image work had very carefully considered mise-en-scene, there were many city-based centres that did 'urban' or gang related films featuring drugs and street violence – which was often questionable in its suitability for public examination purposes - but which was often very clichéd almost on the verge of stereotype or parody at times. There were many ill-considered locations - with a lot of gangster films clearly being filmed in the school or college setting, losing an element of believability or polish.

The best music videos were extremely well planned and combined narrative and performance to very good effect, with a variety of shot types and movement and accuracy of editing to create appropriate pace and synching of sound and visuals. Some music videos were seen which were professional in standard, with candidates clearly having taken a tremendous amount of time during rehearsal and planning. However, it was disappointing that so many had the appearance of being made up as they went along; less successful music videos tended to demonstrate errors which have been outlined in previous reports: over-long takes, poor synching, editing which did not match the rhythm of the song, repetitive structure or a lack of thought in terms of mise-en-scene. Content often did not match generic expectation, so that texts didn't look like the form they were supposed to be (such as candidates producing narrative music videos in 'normal clothes' - it is not common to see a commercial video with the actors in anoraks, cardigans etc). In many cases there was poor lighting (lots of music videos filmed with candles for lighting which rarely looked atmospheric but just looked dark). Again more focused and thorough planning would have helped, particularly of the performance aspect, using different camera set ups.

In terms of filming technology, DSLRs are rapidly becoming the standard, although it remains the case that a clearer, sharper image does not guarantee quality; if anything, the increased clarity of captured images highlights the technical issues in some submissions. In much of the weakest work tripods were not used - and some appeared to use phone footage with vertical video only. There was often less focus on sound – few candidates appeared to consider the miking of their subject, thus the audio quality was often low level or indistinct. There was even less focus on sound effects or foley work. Furthermore, few candidates actually searched out copyright free or original music. Generally, there was far too much found sound used (music video aside), rarely with any mention of the need to gain permission.

There were some effective, well-researched documentaries; others were produced in a very formulaic way, with very similar products across a single centre (although these often concentrated carefully on the technical skills, making them look professional - with careful guidance by the centre as to positioning within the frame, sound bridges, stop motion titles etc - but the resulting documentaries had little scope for creative approaches).

The best film trailers showed excellent understanding of the genre and were genuinely entertaining and effective at promoting interest in the film. Horror and thriller continue to be the most popular film genres and it was really refreshing to see a few productions which didn't rely on the use of stalkers, hoodies and knives; although the majority of productions still relied heavily on these clichés. More alarmingly there seemed to be a huge increase in the number of productions featuring toy or replica guns, often used in public places. Centres should remind candidates of the suitability of handling an imitation offensive weapon in a public place.

Trailers were generally less successful than music videos, although some good examples were seen. The best trailers were able to balance narrative intrigue with an appropriate sense of tension, using a range of actors and locations to suggest that the trailer was genuinely part of a more substantial film; it was clear in these cases that source material had been carefully studied. Weaker examples either came across as short films (or the openings of films), focused on one or two scenes, or were very short and thus made it difficult to get a sense of the narrative; one trailer seen spent half its length on intertitles setting up the narrative and contained very little original footage.

There were a number of short films this session and some were outstanding (in particular, a piece set during World War 2 which used excellent camera-work and editing to build tension) while others were less successful (particularly where narrative momentum was not clear). Generally, those short films which took the approach of creating a mood and telling a 'short story' were successful; those which tried to tell a feature length story in 5 minutes were less so. It was clear here that the best short films had studied a range of award winning short films, rather than Hollywood movies. One stop-motion animation was seen, an effective use of the technique to explore the form.

For both short films and trailers, there were a lot of institutional idents (from existing film companies) that took up a lot of time for no credit.

There were a handful of regional magazine submissions, one or two of which were highly effective constructions, others which didn't show a great deal of development from AS, the music magazine brief. There were also some local newspapers (which still tended to look nothing like newspapers so much as newsletters) and a few soap trailers.

It continues to surprise moderators that no candidates sampled opted for Brief 4 or Brief 11: with gaming being so popular, and with the games industry being such a big earner in the UK, one would expect quite a number of candidates to choose the games options.

Print ancillaries continue to be the most popular and this is where problems were often encountered by moderators, in particular with the use of found material. It was extremely disappointing and concerning to see so many found images in print production work. The specification clearly states that all material produced must be original '*with the exception of acknowledged non-original sound or image material used in a limited way in video/radio work*'. Again this has been addressed in past session reports to centres and Principal Moderator's reports and it is something which centres need to reinforce to candidates and be much more vigilant about. Centres should ensure that candidates post their original, un-manipulated images (perhaps alongside images of themselves taking the photographs) to make it clear that they are not 'found'. In some cases candidates had made odd design and layout decisions, suggesting there had been a lack of appropriate research or planning, for example, film posters with the credit block at the top or cd adverts which looked like magazine covers. Most digipak ancillaries were at least 4 panels this session but inside panels were often not wholly successful. Many candidates just used screen grabs from their video for the cover – this often meant that the narrative video for one track ended up on the cover of the digipak for the album. A significant number of candidates did not demonstrate the awareness of how the final product would fold – actually printing and folding the digipak is good practice in order to check functionality.

There were a number of website ancillaries this session and some were detailed, stylish and had high levels of functionality, tying in well with the other promotional products and usually with supporting social media (Facebook pages, Twitter feeds etc.). However, many webpages were not online: some of the websites were not much more than just a plan showing how the site would look. Several had no working links – and that meant they were not actually websites and therefore did not fit the brief. One centre seemed to have 'security' issues and so it may be that websites were not the best choice of ancillary for centres with these issues. In fact, websites were generally less successful than other ancillaries, implying that research and planning of these were less effective. Use of sites like Moonfruit and Weebly was common, with work being very template-driven, which led to a somewhat generic quality. Often, websites relied on found imagery and text copied from existing sites. In many cases, pages lacked content/depth (for example, contact pages which were simply forms, home pages which simply contained links to other pages).

Evaluations

Evaluations continue to be the weakest aspect of some centres' submissions. However some centres are to be congratulated on submitting really detailed and imaginatively presented work which clearly shows how they have developed in their delivery of this component. The strongest candidates manage to combine excellent presentations with informed and intelligent analysis.

Evaluations that did not address the four set questions were less common than in previous sessions although, in a disappointingly large number of submissions, responses to the required questions were too brief and presented as illustrated essays. In doing so candidates are limiting themselves to level 2 and low level 3 marks at best. Another trend seemed to be towards a uniform approach to the four questions, with candidates often failing to consider the best tools for presenting their responses to each.

Questions 1 and 2 were invariably the strongest responses, with informed and focused material creatively presented. Short 'making of' videos seem to becoming more prominent for questions 1 and 2 and video commentaries were popular this session with many being thoughtful, selective personal responses; however many video evaluations were done far less well, with lengthy talking head shots and no illustrative material being edited in and with the candidates waffling and seeming very unsure of their ground. Best practice is a carefully planned and concise commentary (with hesitations and repetition edited out) over relevant images/video on screen.

Question 3 often was not properly answered, as candidates merely repeated what the feedback said without actually answering the question. Also many candidates asked closed or leading questions and the result was the feedback they *wanted* to hear rather than honest feedback *(Did you like our movie? Did it meet the conventions?)*. Centres that responded to this question by discussing feedback that they had received at various stages throughout the production process and then reflected on how that had shaped their final submission seemed like the best approach to answering this question. The best question 3 answers balanced primary research, often 'vox-pops' or interviews, with detailed and cogent responses from candidates. More successful answers explored the entire process of production, with candidates reflecting on how they had used feedback during as well as after completion of their work. The weakest answers simply presented audience response without any real commentary; in these cases it was impossible to see what had been learned.

Question 4 was often the weakest answer, with candidates simply presenting a list of technologies used with little commentary or reflection. The best question 4 answers linked clearly to candidates' research, planning and production, with detailed reflection and consideration. An effective model seen was a centre whose candidates had packaged this question in the style of a DVD-extra, following a "making of" model; this allowed candidates to consider their use of technology in context as well as in an entertaining and engaging manner.

It was refreshing to see a number of centres have sought out and used more variety of digital technology in the presentation of work and used methods such as Prezi and PowerPoint creatively, fully exploiting their potential. As always, some candidates' Prezis were thin and lacking content and, as one moderator put it, 'candidates shouldn't be allowed to confuse wooshing around from one part to another for 'skill', and centres shouldn't reward it when the presentation itself is basically text and a few screen-grabs'. Scribd was occasionally used – but this was invariably no more than a highly text-based Word document embedded on the blog and therefore not really in the spirit of the Specification. Other presentation packages used included Biteslide, Animoto and Pixlr – but centres and candidates should remember that the content is vital: just using one of these platforms is not enough – they have to be used well to show understanding. Some evaluation responses were weak precisely because the candidates had made ill-advised choices in terms of the digitech they chose – e.g. a brief Powtoons conversation which gave a very shallow examination of the finished pieces. In written responses moderators saw lots of grammatical errors and typos which detract from the candidates' ability to communicate – for example – lower case 'I'.

There were frequently problems with a large number of group evaluations. Moderation became problematic in one or two cases where candidates had worked in groups to write their evaluations, and it seemed that one or two candidates had done more work than others while all got the same marks. The specification requires each candidate to answer the four questions. However in a disappointingly large number of submissions it was clear that candidates had divided the questions up amongst the group and consequently each individual did not address all the questions. Also, where videos are used, on-screen graphics should be used to anchor who the individual candidates are; without such clues it is extremely difficult for moderators to determine respective contributions, especially where this is not indicated in Centres' comments.

Conclusion

In conclusion there is some excellent work being produced by a large number of centres, who are to be congratulated on the focused, detailed and entertaining work they have submitted which is clearly embracing the spirit of the specification. However, there remains a significant minority of centres who need to revisit the specification in order to ensure candidates meet the requirements fully and consequently are able to achieve the highest marks.

G325 Critical Perspectives in Media

General Comments:

The demands of this examination are significant and commensurate with A2, requiring candidates to account for their creative decision making as media producers, working within established industry practices; theorise their own media production conceptually and then take a critically informed, academic perspective on a contemporary debate relating to the role of media in society and in their own lives.

As is always the case, level 4 responses were those that managed to **sustain excellence across those three elements**, with an academic focus on the contemporary in section B, coupled with the ability to 'wear two hats' in section A (those of producer and analyst of their own textual outcomes).

Comments on Individual Questions:

1a Where candidates were able to explain the significance of post-production and apply this to a range of incrementally developing examples from AS and A2 and map post-production decisions to textual outcomes (ie what difference the decision made to the final text), candidates were awarded the higher levels. These candidates gave a wide range of precise examples - describing **and** evaluating their intentions in relation to, for example, effects/filters and the effect of their post-production decisions on the audience. A surprising number of candidates wrote about pre-production (research and planning) instead of post-production. A further significant minority included feedback and online promotion, re-filming and evaluation as post-production, which examiners disregarded unless there was a clear connection to the 'core business' of post-production.

1b In one sense (engagement with media theories), this was the strongest session so far for this question. However, the key determining factor in allocating marks was the ability to relate specific elements of genre theory (from Neale across forms and Goodwin in relation to music video, most often) to the text in question with conviction and precision. Where candidates were able to relate theories more generally understood in relation to narrative and representation to genre, this was creditable but in many cases the ideas of Mulvey, Hall, Barthes or Todorov were applied without a clear account of how these relate to the generic elements of candidates' texts. Once again, there were a significant number of cases of candidates objectifying women in order to 'apply the male gaze' and this confusion of theoretical concept with production technique does suggest a lack of the critical media literacy required for the higher levels at A2. Acceptable, but lower range answers accounted for codes and conventions, cinematography and mise en scene. Higher level answers discussed genre as a concept, rather than a 'given'. Sadly, a significant minority of candidates confused genre and gender.

Section B

The most popular themes were collective identity, media in the online age, regulation and postmodern media. Candidates achieving higher levels used a range of examples and theorists from across the spectrum of the debate in question to support their argument and directly answered the question set. As there is a choice offered for each topic, this is very important, as is deploying a range of contemporary examples from different media, with some historical context and future projection. Weaker answers failed to make connections between theorists' ideas and the candidates' chosen examples.

Tarantino and Lady Gaga dominated **postmodern media** answers. Both questions yielded some astute and well theorized material, with a lavish spread of difficult theories utilised. Weaker responses either confused or simplified these theories, or in some cases both. The higher level responses engaged with several key theorists (Lyotard, Baudrillard, Jameson) with conviction. When candidates applied theories to several well-chosen examples in detail, more was gained than through a scattergun approach to seven or eight texts.

For **regulation**, BBFC v PCC; along with Leveson and internet safety were the most common case studies. Online media regulation was often the least sophisticated of the analyses. In EVERY report since the inception of G325 we have advised centres to only facilitate candidates' engagement with "the Jamie Bulger case" if they are able to write about this as an example of how regulation relates to the effects debate and moral panic formation, NOT as a case study providing evidence of harmful effects (as this is as close to a 'wrong answer' as we get in this subject). Once again, that advice was not heeded by many centres. Human Centipede and A Serbian Film were common examples. Excellent scripts offered consideration of changing cultural values with candidates questioning definitions of what "harm" and "protection" mean with informed application to both audience and institutions. As with several topics, a significant number of candidates would have been marked in level 4 across the criteria had their case studies and examples been more weighted to the contemporary media landscape. Analysis of A Clockwork Orange, for example, is valuable if it provides a historical context for a more detailed discussion of controversial or censored texts from the last five years.

Online age, along with regulation, remains a topic for which candidates struggle to connect a description of the contemporary media landscape with academic theories that are responding to it. There was some clear, sophisticated industrial knowledge of music consumption and distribution in particular. Better responses also engaged with the way in which individual news media groups are attempting to remain viable through using social media and web-based sites.

Answers on youth dominated the **collective identity** responses. These worked well when the complexity of youth representation was addressed and were less accomplished when the negative, hegemonic portrayal of youth was itself asserted as 'common sense' and only supported by a description of Fish Tank or Harry Brown and the tabloid reporting of the recent riots as part of a straightforward linear modality. Whilst texts that provide historical context are valuable, the weighting must be on analysis of contemporary representations and too often, the older example was given too much prominence, to the extent that, overall, Quadrophenia was one of the most studied texts this session.

Global media was very much a minority topic this year. **Media and democracy** prompted the most proficient response so far, with candidates applying theories from philosophy, political science, economics, 'web 2.0' and 'wikinomics', network theories and academic perspectives on creativity in a more balanced and measured way than for some of the other themes. The level 4 candidates started with a clear model of democracy (using the ideas of the late Tony Benn in many cases), followed up with a historical account of 'Big Media' and its role in democracy, along with Chomskian / Zizekian and Foucaultian ideas about normative consensus and then placed the Gauntlett, Shirky, Castells, Rushkoff, Morozov 'big argument' into the context of their own experiences of both mass media and networked social media. Those that were able to combine all this with a sustained evaluation of Gillmor's projection were securely into the level 4 range.

General Advice to Centres

This advice is repeated from previous sessions.

Support candidates to prepare different approaches to 1(a) and 1(b) – process and decisions for 1(a), conceptual textual analysis from a critical distance for 1(b).

Ensure that candidates are able to make use of contemporary media examples for the majority of their answer in section B. Theory from any time is appropriate, but media examples and case studies should be **mainly from the five years preceding the examination**.

Enable candidates to engage with a range of theoretical, academic and research perspectives for whichever theme is addressed – there is an abundance of media theory applicable to ALL themes, including media in the online age and media regulation.

Develop time management skills for exam preparation, particularly for Section A.