

Media Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H540**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H140**

Reports on the Units

June 2010

HX40/R/10

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

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Any enquiries about publications should be addressed to:

OCR Publications
PO Box 5050
Annesley
NOTTINGHAM
NG15 0DL

Telephone: 0870 770 6622
Facsimile: 01223 552610
E-mail: publications@ocr.org.uk

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G321 Foundation Portfolio

This was the fourth entry series for the new AS coursework unit. This time, there were around 16,000 entries from over 600 Centres for this unit. About half of the Candidates worked on the film opening task with marginally fewer doing the print task. Less than ten Centres did the radio brief and even fewer did the website. Less than 20% of Centres offered more than one brief to their Candidates, almost all being the film opening and the magazine.

General Points

Generally more Centres seemed to have grasped the spirit of the Specification than last year, with evidence of advice from last year's report and the INSET being taken on board in many cases. Those Centres that presented the Candidates' work in easily accessible, clearly labelled packages made the moderation process more likely to run smoothly. Clear links to online work, clearly labelled DVDs, evidence of preliminary tasks, and helpful comments on the teacher coversheets indicating how assessment decisions have been reached all helped to facilitate this task. The best organised Centres presented their work promptly and conveniently, arranging the sample so that research/planning, evaluation and the main task were easy to access and cross-reference. This was most effective when research and planning and evaluation were presented in blog formats, but also useful when they were presented as extras on a Candidate's DVD submission.

Many Centres provided plenty of detail about Candidates' roles in group projects, with individual interpretations of how they had met the criteria, not just picking and lifting from the mark scheme. Most Centres seem to have taken on board the idea of producing less paperwork, seeing blogs in particular as an encouragement to Candidates to continually work on the development of their projects. On the whole, Centres had followed the briefs closely and preliminary tasks were generally done well.

There were a number of issues which, however, need addressing. Some Centres were late in despatching work or responding to requests from moderators. Others still send very bulky packages for planning and research, including at times hard cover folders with large quantities of paper. Some Centres use Candidate names or the title of the film or magazine on work rather than their Candidate numbers, which can also be time consuming to reconcile during moderation. In a few cases, consortia proved problematic in trying to obtain work and sometimes there did not appear to be much internal communication; if working as part of a consortium, it is important that the submission is moderated across the Centres involved as any adjustments will be applied to all work from the consortium, not just the sample seen by the moderator.

Hyperlinks and hubs are essential for blogs. Unfortunately, a significant proportion of Centres had not set up a hub, which makes the process of finding blogs unnecessarily complex, especially when URLs are not accurately listed even on paper. Some work on school or college VLEs was difficult to access because of the ways in which systems are set up. There were a significant number of Centres making clerical errors which necessitated changes by the Centre. It is very important that all addition of marks is checked carefully and that marks are transcribed accurately from cover sheets to MS1s. Some work was again submitted in unacceptable formats, such as Publisher, which does not work on mac computers. Video may be submitted online via Vimeo, youtube or other sharing sites or should be authored to DVD playable on domestic players, MP3 should be used for audio and Jpeg and pdf for print work.

Some Centres sent work on a number of different DVD and CD-ROM discs, meaning that discs had to be constantly swapped around to cross-reference materials. Many Centres even produced one DVD per Candidate with several Centres also producing a separate disc for the evaluation/research element. It would be much better to have the entire Centre's work on a

single DVD with menus to navigate. Cover sheets should be submitted on paper as attempting to read Centre comments while looking at Candidates' work on the same screen simultaneously is not feasible for moderators.

There were still a number of rubric issues despite the Specification having been available for several years. These included the submission of USB sticks, the use of found images and copyright soundtracks, paper or word document evaluations and group sizes exceeding four. None of these are acceptable, as clearly stated in the Specification. All Centres must read the Specification carefully and keep up to date with amendments as part of their professional practice. The most recent version is always available online at http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/gce/amlw/media_studies/index.html.

Standards of Marking

Once again this series, a significant number of Centres had to have marks adjusted to bring them into line with agreed standards. It is very important that Centres adopt a policy of best fit with the levels for all three criteria for all Candidates as it appeared that some Centres simply give their best Candidate full marks simply for being the best in that Centre, regardless of whether they demonstrated excellence in all criteria. The construction elements in particular were often marked generously. Sometimes the wording used by tutors suggested one level but the marks were often from another level. For example, some tutors described their Candidates' work as basic (level 2) but would then award the Candidates a mark from the proficient band (level 3).

Often the planning or evaluation marks were pushed into level four when they would be a better fit in level three. Many Candidates were over-rewarded for text-based evaluations. Teacher comments varied a great deal; Some Centres took time management and participation as the only research and planning section criteria, often rewarding in the upper bands despite a lack of evidence provided by the Candidates.

In general, Centres offering more than one of the briefs tended to have more trouble setting a consistent standard in their marking.

Research and Planning

Most Centres using online Candidate evidence tended to produce good interactive blogs with very little paper work needed, which worked very well. The best work showed a real sense of progression through the preliminary task, with research into textual forms and conventions, institutional contexts and target audiences that was clearly reflected in subsequent planning materials right through to the finished production. For video work these Candidates also tended to include a comprehensive selection of planning materials covering their development of initial ideas through scripting/storyboarding and organisation of shoot days. Storyboards and drafting were usually included, and good examples of animatics were to be seen on blogs. Where the planning for the print brief had been done well there was evidence of the whole process, from original ideas through several drafts. In general, online sources seem far more suited to the effective presentation of research and planning materials than Powerpoint, which is a summative medium, or indeed paper materials.

Candidates do need to clearly label their research and planning within their blogs, as it was quite problematic on a number of occasions to navigate around disorganised blogs. The blogs for weaker Centres doing video tended to have very little evidence of storyboarding, use of time and equipment, or any investigation into the key conceptual areas. Audience research was, in general, less well done than product research. Many Candidates did simple questionnaires and produced bar charts as a result but very few analysed those results in a meaningful way. For

magazines, at times research and planning lacked flat planning and evidence of organisation; in some cases, Candidates only appeared to have researched front covers.

Research into similar products was often more descriptive than analytical and was sometimes limited to one or two films or magazines, not always of the same genre. Where textual research had been done well there was detailed work on the codes and conventions of the Candidate's chosen genre and several relevant film texts or music magazines from the same genre had been analysed. There were some Centres where Candidates had all analysed the same texts, from different genres, with no regard as to their relevance to their own productions.

Some blogs tended to be very text heavy, as though some Centres had only registered accounts in response to criticisms from moderator reports from the previous year. In some cases there were less than ten short blog posts for a group project, whereas for others there were between 50 and 100 for an individual blog, which allowed the reader to trace with interest the challenges faced and overcome during the completion of the product. Examples of blogs at various levels with moderator commentary are available on the *'get ahead'* blog at <http://getaheadocrmedia.blogspot.com/>.

Construction

Most Centres offered one brief, with an almost even split between video and print. Very few Centres undertook the radio or web briefs.

Video

It was refreshing to see that in some Centres there was greater flexibility from the Candidates, indicating that they are being prepared in a range of genres and therefore having a choice to work with. Romantic comedy, film noir, teen movies and animation were all in evidence. However, overwhelmingly there is still a tendency to fall back on the thriller/horror hybrid, especially the stalker film often with a predominance of handheld POV shots.

More successful Centres produced their own production logos and made good use of props, locations and costume, with the best work not trying to cram in too much narrative, instead concentrating on the creation of mood and atmosphere. Weaker examples tend to fall back on the 'waking up in bed with a jolt' or 'walking through the woods' or 'white masked stalker' tropes (or even all three in the same opening), suggesting that a wider range of film openings need to be considered before Candidates start work on their own ideas. Very little variation was seen by many moderators in terms of the film's genre with the influence of the 'Saw' franchise taking over from 'Blair Witch'. Candidates would undoubtedly benefit from being steered towards other genres and examples.

Candidates need to be encouraged to consider how what they have learned from their preliminary task might be integrated into the main task as many broke the rules of continuity editing without apparently realising. Mise en scene often needs a lot more attention- apart from stray objects like tripods appearing in the scene; too many are filmed in school corridors without any attempt to 'dress the set'. Though acting is not an assessed element, the placement and dressing of actors as part of the mise-en-scene and needs to be carefully planned. Too often, the actors look like random members of the class in their hoodies. In some cases the self-consciousness of student acting detracted from the overall impression of the film opening with inappropriate grins, smirks and looks at the camera which should have been re-shot. Some of the most convincing acting actually came from parents drafted in, which is something perhaps more Candidates might consider.

Reports on the Units taken in June 2010

Some moderators reported concerns over health and safety, with some examples of imitation guns and knives in public places in evidence, though there seemed to be fewer than in some previous years.

More of the productions actually felt like film openings this time, but there were still a significant amount of Candidates who still wanted to condense and conclude the story in the opening 2 minutes.

Probably the most significant problem is in the use of titles, which very few Candidates did effectively. The task seeks 'the titles and opening' of a new film, so there needs to be a very strong emphasis both in creating these and in researching how they work in real films. A good source for examples and analysis of them is www.artofthetitle.com, as recommended at last year's INSET events. With appropriate choice of fonts, attention to pacing of titles, integration with action and understanding of institutional practice, film openings submitted for this unit could be considerably enhanced. But overall the range of credits tended to be weak – nearly all were production idents, starring and directed by –sometimes by the same duo- and very few ventured beyond that with a significant proportion of Candidates still just adding them, trailer like, at the end of the extract.

When marking construction for group work, it is very important for differentiation that Centres reference individual contributions if marks are to be supported. Often all members of groups are given the same mark without any indication as to why. Similarly, comments need to support the mark given and explain it- writing 'clearly excellent' or 'made a proficient contribution' are not enough.

Print

The strongest publications had used plenty of good quality photographic images relevant to the brief set and had a consistency in design and layout across all four pages. In such work, there was a clear sense of genre and strong evidence that research into existing models had found its way into the finished product. For this task, Candidates undoubtedly need access to and skills in appropriate software; where they have a good grasp of InDesign, for example, this is very evident in the finished work. Software such as Publisher does have real limitations and Centres should be aware that photoshop is not appropriate for making the whole magazine- the cover is possible to do with image software only but once columns are needed, desktop publishing programs are essential.

The main problems which tend to arise with this brief were once again in evidence. Many images were poorly constructed, out of focus and lacking variety; in four pages from a music magazine, the reader would expect to see more than one artist's photos appear, especially on the contents page. Many images were not manipulated or cropped effectively for the context, or worse still, simply stretched to fit the page. There was often a lack of attention to mise-en-scene or direction of models in terms of costume or pose. Some images appeared to be recycled from student parties or summer balls but were claimed as original constructions for the project. Centres are reminded that Candidates cannot access some strands of the mark scheme if they have not constructed their own images, that a minimum of four images must be used and that found images are not permitted at all.

On the whole, covers tended to be done best, but it is important to remember that this is only a quarter of the project. Contents pages often contained no institutional information and didn't follow the house style set up by the cover; there were many instances of contents pages which appeared to indicate a very thin magazine, showing lack of awareness of audience targeting. Double page spreads often lacked columns and appeared not to be based on any real examples in many instances. The quality of the content was too often far lower than the quality of the design; articles were often clumsily, if not badly, written, with glaring errors in the titles at times,

which no sub-editor would ever have allowed! Whilst we are not examining English, poor grammar and spelling are not conventions of the medium. It is very important that Centres insist that Candidates see this work as a significant proportion of their A level, which they need to take seriously to produce the best possible outcomes.

Print projects tended to be more likely to have been over-marked as teachers had often disregarded the lack of attention to detail shown by many Candidates. Centres are advised to attend the INSET for further advice on examples this autumn.

Radio

The best radio programmes demonstrated a good level of competence with editing software and appropriate location recording, with some excellent jingles and good integration of background music and other sounds, and varied content that was appropriate for the chosen audience with some interesting interactivity with listeners. There was a real sense of actual *local* news, and finished broadcasts had clearly been well informed by research and planning into real local news and topical issues. Outside broadcasts and vox pops and interviews felt very real and Candidates used effects appropriately. What was particularly encouraging was that the emphasis was on authenticity, creating their own news for their own community and with their own identity. Where the radio brief was less successful, Candidates either produced what they thought was a funny spoof news programme which is doomed to backfire at this level, or they lacked confidence and competence with the equipment. To do this option well, Candidates need to take the task seriously and to employ a carefully balanced and mixed 'soundscape' of voices, ambient, and non-diegetic sound.

The importance of detailed research into relevant radio stations and the conventions of broadcasts cannot be underestimated here, with BBC local radio being a crucial model. Candidates need to think of the whole package as flowing like a good video piece. Bouncing sound levels will jar the ear and when script writing, Candidates should write for the ear. Some Candidates wrote scripts that sounded like someone reading an essay, badly. It should sound as though it is NOT being read- even though it is! Any Centre attempting this task needs to have good recording equipment, editing software and to discourage Candidates from relying upon non-copyright free material. Presenters can work from scripts, but interviewees need to sound more spontaneous, so Candidates should give them the opportunity to respond spontaneously.

Web

Of the very few examples seen, Candidates got caught up in the form rather than the actual content and audience and purpose. Several relied too heavily on established templates provided by websites and probably got too caught up in the use of the technology, and their attempts to experiment with it, rather than focusing on the forms and conventions. The majority forgot to include sound and or video and chosen images tended to lack any sort of variety or effective manipulation. Navigation tended to be fine, but there just wasn't enough convincing content to form any sort of realistic campaign.

The main problem here though, was that Candidates didn't have a clear sense of purpose of the key elements that had to be included and therefore got overwhelmed by the idea of the campaign (which ultimately didn't work for the majority of the Candidates!). The Candidates seemed to be proficient in their use of ICT but needed more teacher guidance. Some of the links didn't work but it's vital for this brief that they do!

Evaluations

The evaluation of the portfolio was presented in electronic format by almost all Centres although there was some variability in the effectiveness of this. The best Candidates tended to use the blog format and to present their evaluations in a variety of task types, making the most of the audio-visual capabilities of the medium. There were also some good examples of filmed evaluation interviews and directors' commentaries. Several Candidates made use of all of these methods, providing a really comprehensive account of process and product. The best evaluations tackled the seven set questions in some depth, but also communicated well to the audience. Most Centres employed the Specification questions but there were still a number of Centres that did very little with the ICT aspect and a lot of Candidates who had very conversational or brief answers to the questions. A video of a Candidate presenting a PowerPoint may be submitted as part of the evidence of evaluation having taken place but should not be seen in itself as sufficient evidence of a creative approach to justify level 4 for ICT skills.

Some Centres did not address the seven questions separately making it difficult to see whether they had all been answered. Ignoring the set questions from the Specification and making up their own or producing an evaluation like the one for the old Specification which described the working process at length leads to significant reductions in the marks given. There were still too many evaluations which just comprised essays put onto a blog or PowerPoint, which meant access to level 4 for appropriate use of ICT was not possible. Likewise, many Candidates tended to read something out on camera, which again misses the point of the task. Sometimes, it appeared that the Centre had not expressed the value of this element to Candidates as there was so little focus upon it in their outcomes. Centres should encourage Candidates to focus on the seven questions so that they do not allow their evaluations to digress and drift into narratives accounting for technical disasters and artistic mediocrity.

A common issue was the writing of essay style responses for the evaluation element. There still seems to be some resistance to moving away from conventional assessment practices. The media's primary function is to communicate. Centres must embrace the focus of the study and employ it to enable Candidates to communicate in new and more sophisticated ways.

The question on codes and conventions was responded to well by the majority of Candidates but the questions on representation and distribution weren't entirely understood. These questions often elicited a vague answer and many Candidates talked about the distribution of print products in terms of the retail outlets that would sell them. The two audience questions were often merged together, which was not a problem so long as both were addressed. The best responses to the technology and preliminary task questions tended to be more visually based.

There were examples of extremely effective evaluations, which often incorporated several methods such as recorded interviews, directors' commentaries and blogs; their strengths lay in the ability to incorporate video, audio, images and text, often linking with other media such as YouTube. Interestingly what was really highlighted in the evaluations was whether the Candidate had really understood audiences and institutions and whether their research/planning actually informed their products. Several Candidates seemed to see the research and planning and construction elements as having very little connection!

Preparation for G325 question 1a and 1b

Centres are advised to consider how the work undertaken here will eventually be needed for the A2 exam and to begin preparation of Candidates from an early stage as the evidence from the June 2010 cohort for G325 seems to suggest that this is a priority area for improvement.

Summary

Administration

- minimise packaging of samples and despatch them swiftly
- check arithmetic and that scores on cover sheets match those entered on the MS1
- ensure Candidate numbers are on all paperwork, disks and blogs
- if using blogs, set up a Centre hub to allow instant access to all Candidates' work
- ensure the format for all submissions is universally accessible
- if working in a consortium, ensure cross-Centre moderation takes place
- ensure cover sheet comments and marks match levels and are appropriate for the work
- differentiate comments and marks for Candidates working in a group
- submit coversheets on paper
- minimise the number of disks submitted- one per Centre is ideal

Research and Planning

- ensure all research and planning is evidenced- see this as the Candidate's journey for the project
- ensure blogs are organised and labelled, with individual contributions to group blogs tagged
- ensure blogs use the potential of the medium- not just written text!
- research should be relevant to the production
- planning should evidence all stages of the project

Construction- Videos

- ensure Candidates are trained in the use of equipment and get plenty of practice
- Centres should have appropriate equipment for the task
- offer a wider range of examples to consider before they fix on an idea
- broaden from the thriller/horror hybrid
- research into titles and their functions/conventions is crucial to this task
- mise en scene should be carefully planned
- risk assessment should be considered before all shoots

Construction- Print

- ensure Candidates are trained in the use of equipment and get plenty of practice
- task should not be offered without adequate desktop publishing software
- ensure Candidates look carefully at real examples and follow conventions
- photographs need careful staging and manipulation thereafter
- a variety of models are needed for the magazine- not just one artist or band
- all written text should be proofread before submission
- no found images may be used

Construction- Radio

- ensure Candidates have access to and training on suitable equipment for the task
- Candidates should be advised against 'spoof' programmes
- careful attention to presentation and scripting is essential for successful outcomes
- research into real examples is very important

Construction - Web

- sites should be online
- close attention to content and audience is essential
- all elements of the task set need to be present

Evaluations

- must address the seven questions and be presented digitally
- must be more than just written text or an essay read to camera
- may be a series of tasks in different forms

G322 Key Media Concepts (TV Drama) and G323 Key Media Concepts (Radio Drama)

The entry for the June series for this unit was approximately 15,000 Candidates. There was a very small entry for G323.

Overall, this series evidenced an extensive range of Candidate responses, with some excellent analysis and understanding of the question set in response to gender and television drama and for question two, on the significance of digital initiatives. The Candidates appeared to have enjoyed responding to the TV drama extract; however at times there was evidence of Candidates failing to address the key issue of gender in micro analysis of the technical features.

The majority of Candidates addressed the technical features of camera shot, angle and composition and mise en scène well, with some fluency at times. However *sound* and *editing* needs to be developed further by Candidates as at times there was only a superficial analysis of these technical components in responses.

In Question 2 there were instances of excellent responses in relation to all the media areas studied. Candidates who had been well prepared with specific case study material and well rehearsed in the key conceptual areas of Institution and Audiences could offer sustained, excellent arguments in relation to the question set, because they had prepared well with case studies and were able to interpret and address the issues set in the question. There was significant improvement of the time management of the exam paper.

Television Drama

Question 1

Candidates had the opportunity to *negotiate* their own reading which they could justify through analysis of the four technical codes. There were a number of different interpretations provided by Candidates; most of these were entirely valid. There was a wealth of technical examples for Candidates to analyse.

The majority of Candidates were able to show that there were alternative representations of masculinity and femininity present and that status relationships between genders were in 'flux' throughout the sequence. Higher level responses showed a sophisticated understanding of the representation of gender and an ability to relate the technical codes to its construction. Lower level responses made simplistic relationships between colours and representation, or equally were a descriptive account of the extract with little or no analysis. Other errors included inaccuracies in the identification of camera and editing conventions. For example, close ups were confused widely with medium close ups, high and low camera angles and 'match cuts' were identified without context.

Many Candidates tackled the sequence in chronological order, which worked for the strongest Candidates who were able to provide a balanced, integrated analysis, covering all the micro elements. However, the weakest Candidates struggled to achieve a satisfactory balance with this approach, frequently omitting editing or sound coverage or lapsing into passages of description without reference to gender representation. These Candidates would be better advised to adopt a more structured approach, basing their analysis around each technical area in turn or focusing upon versions of masculinity and femininity in turn.

Strong Candidates also demonstrated a range of technical knowledge and an understanding of the ways in which these elements create meaning for an audience, though many Candidates would benefit from reinforcing their knowledge of terminology and developing a more sophisticated awareness of the potential effects of technical elements. Most Candidates were able to establish links between gender status and high/low camera angles (although quite a few students still confuse these terms). However, more Candidates should be looking at the range of camera shots and movements on offer. Few Candidates engaged with issues of composition, despite a plethora of relevant material available to analyse. Where Candidates did discuss camera movement, there was frequent misnaming of tracking shots as zooms.

Candidates tended to feel more comfortable discussing aspects of *mise en scène* and there was plenty of analysis of key props and costume, which was usefully linked to gender. Some Candidates are still wedded to deterministic colour analysis, leading to clearly inaccurate analysis ('the woman is dressed in white connoting her purity'); this approach should be discouraged and Candidates should be able to understand that analysis is contextual rather than universal in value. Some good Candidates were able to show how the sequence creates a specific 'soundscape' and linked this to issues of gender. Most Candidates are able to distinguish between diegetic and non-diegetic sound and the sequence offered plenty of relevant examples of soundtrack and ambient sound features connected with gender.

Editing was the weakest of the technical areas, frequently ignored altogether by Candidates. Some Candidates were able to identify editing techniques but struggled to link these to gender representations and would make passing reference to editing with cursory comments like 'this created a tense, fast paced atmosphere' or 'quick cuts showed conversation'. Candidates should be encouraged to examine how editing techniques set up perspective within the sequence and contribute to the differing status of gender. There were a variety of editing techniques within the sequence. Candidates frequently and inaccurately labeled transitions between different scenes as *jump cutting*, ignoring the actual example of jump cutting during the zip wire sequence. 'Jump cut' is a widely misused term although there were some Candidates that correctly identified its use in the ellipsis when Cutter prepares his belt for the zip-wire. Impressively, some linked the use of this technique to a stereotypically masculine ability to think and act quickly and to adapt.

There was a mixture of responses with regards to the concept of gender. Some Candidates had a very clear grasp of it and wrote confidently about how stereotypes were reinforced and/or subverted, most prominently through the character of Abby, the most confident expanding into interesting thoughts about patriarchy and 'metro-sexual' masculinity. A significant number of Candidates however operated at the surface level providing fairly obvious interpretations of actions to determine whether a character was masculine or feminine. Lower achieving Candidates simply did not grasp the nature of the task - either re-telling the narrative or cataloguing technical events without relating them to the representation of gender.

Question 2

This question covered a pleasing variety of case studies, with lots of focus on the areas of **Institutions and Audiences**. Most pleasingly, these concepts were identified by the vast majority of Candidates as being strongly linked rather than discussed as separate entities. Also pleasing was the fact that only a minority of Candidates chose to ignore the question and present a prepared answer. Terminology was well utilised across all media.

Appropriate differentiation was achieved in the marks for Section B through the detail in which the argument was explored and the detail to the exemplification. The question provoked a range of responses from Candidates who were able to discuss the use of digital technology in the production, distribution, marketing or consumption of media products or a combination of these elements. The most able Candidates were able to create a debate around the benefits and drawbacks of new technology for both audiences and institutions and were also able to draw

contrasts between mainstream and independent producers, or mass audience/niche audience targeting.

The best answers tended to come from Candidates who had been well prepared with detailed, contemporary case studies – not historical ones. Many Candidates were able to build their own experiences as consumers (and occasionally producers) into their responses and were able to contextualise these through wider understanding of the relationships between producers and audiences. More able Candidates are able to show awareness of the trends and strategies that characterise the contemporary media landscape and at times across different media areas.

However, there are still a number of Centres who are preparing Candidates with inappropriate material, for example with potted histories of media companies or textual studies which are unlikely to be useful for the kind of questions which this paper poses. Candidates should be encouraged to take a selective approach to their case study material, concentrating on what is most relevant to the question rather than trying to get entire case studies down into the response to question 2.

Music

This was the most popular subject area and generally the most successful. Most Candidates concentrated on the role of technology in the distribution, marketing and consumption of music, looking at issues of audience behavior and record companies' attempts to renegotiate the relationship with consumers. Many answers looked at major corporations and compared their approaches with examples of independent companies (EMI, Sony, Warner as examples of majors, Domino, Rough Trade, Hungry Audio, Finders Keepers as examples of independents worked well).

The Candidates examined a good contrast of case studies with the majority analysing a major label, like Universal, and comparing this to a more niche independent company to highlight the differences and challenges that exist for musicians and the record companies themselves. Questions of synergy, and vertical and horizontal integration were examined in detail and the differences between a major and minor company offered a very clear hinge upon which Candidates could hang their answers.

There was a sound understanding of the effect of Web 2.0 on the majors and the rise in the use of YouTube and My Space as both promotional outlets for established artists and also stages for new talent. Candidates were able to discuss the advantages/disadvantages of pirating music and many had a clear understanding of the repercussions on artistes etc. There were some very interesting case studies of how particular bands and artists had used the web to their advantage and the arguments that exist on the whole issue of 'free' music, for example Radiohead's 'In Rainbows' web release.

Candidates do need to clarify their knowledge of third party companies such as Apple and their relationship with music institutions. Less able Candidates often detracted from the question by focusing on the features of a record company or even at times focusing on the X-Factor as a sole case study, which is inadvisable.

Film

The second most popular topic and the most common approach was to compare major US studios with UK production companies, though technology at times was often interpreted in quite a narrow fashion, concentrating on 3D production and digital distribution, for example 'The Dark Knight' and 'Avatar'. Some good answers focussed on how major studios like Fox can finance the production of cutting edge films like 'Avatar', and how the technology they have at their

disposal can be employed in marketing via a range of new media platforms, all backed up with a range of relevant examples. The digital technology used in 'Avatar' was succinctly addressed as were the advances in 3D, but also characterised by some simplistic assumptions that digital distribution is cheaper and quicker than conventional film distribution because you do not need reels of film. There was often an assumption that UK cinema is not dependent upon technological advances, which obviously underestimates the importance of home exhibition windows in making UK film viable.

Working Title was the most frequently used UK case study, though many Candidates tended to offer a history of the company and their argument depended upon the relative of success of films such as 'Four Weddings and A Funeral', 'Notting Hill' or 'The Hudsucker Proxy', which clearly are not contemporary examples. Warners, Fox and Paramount were frequently used as US examples; Warp, Vertigo and Film Four were used a number of times as UK production companies. One Centre's Candidates had been prepared with a comparative textual study of 'The Cruel Sea' (1953) and 'Atonement' (2007) with which they struggled to answer the question.

Histories of film studios such as Aardman or film biographies of film personnel did not address the question that has been set. Centres should keep taught examples contemporary and varied for the Candidates for future series. There was evidence that a number of Candidates focused solely on digitisation of cinema and did not have a film company as an institutional case study. Where this was the case, answers (whilst detailed in some respects) did not show enough depth, as they were tackling only exhibition.

Video Games

Good Candidate responses focused on a particular studio or franchise and were able to show how technology was changing the relationship between institutions and audiences. Answers which focused upon improvements in graphics or hardware capabilities alone were less successful than answers which looked at games consoles as entertainment hubs, download services and the synergy between games and other media such as film/music. Rockstar and the GTA franchise were frequently used as illustration as were Activision and the Call of Duty games. There was also a wide range of responses including some highly detailed knowledge of Rockstar Games' Grand Theft Auto IV.

The most able Candidates could discuss the production of the game, focusing on the technological developments of new game engines to create a realistic game world. Candidates commented on the huge cost of such developments, but noted that in this example the profits justified the expenditure and also commented on the degree to which this sort of release allows the institution to construct a brand around the release and create other games which would be successful by association, such as Bully: Canis Canem Edit. Candidates also commented on the ways in which technology has enabled effective marketing of the game through creating an online 'buzz' in forums, on YouTube, and through social networking. A large number of Candidates were also able then to discuss exchange and the ability of audiences to download or stream software through new services such as Gaikai or Onlive; both of which negate the need for a physical product.

Furthermore, Candidates confidently covered media convergence and synergy, discussing the merits of iPhones, iPads, developing graphics (3D/HD) platform development. Some Candidates embraced wider debates on how audiences buy into computer games for example by using Nintendo Wii technology (females and the family) as an example and discussed how 'total immersion' in the game is now possible due to advances in technology. They also dealt with the problem of piracy and how easy it is to download games and how this affects the industry. They focused on solid case studies such as: 'GTA', 'SuperMario Bros', 'Fifa 10', 'Let's Dance' and 'The SIMs'.

Newspapers

There were fewer responses on this area than in previous sessions. At times, Candidates struggled to move beyond the presence of online versions of traditional texts to show how technology was altering the publishing industries in positive and negative ways. There seemed to be little awareness of the importance of advertising revenue or how this might be generated in alternative versions of products. Some very engaging debates on the newspaper industry and its relationship with digital media were offered by a number of Candidates, which were supported by rigorous and robust case studies, which allowed Candidates plenty of opportunities to engage with the key debates between old and new media. Noteworthy examples of excellent practice were detailed studies of *the Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Mail*. The work in these areas clearly illustrated how a thorough preparation across all key areas can allow Candidates to thrive and there is evidence of good exemplification, which reflected the democratic nature of online news and its advantage over hardcopy news.

Lesser achieving Candidates tried to bring in too many different examples without covering any in great depth or detail. Many Candidates tended to produce a simplistic argument in this area – that technology was either brilliant because audiences could read for free, or was a disaster because they would all be bankrupt. This area of the case studies was answered with great confidence and sophistication by one large Centre. Their focus on the Guardian and local online newspapers in Gloucestershire was detailed, precise and littered with relevant examples from their case study that even included a highly relevant interview with the editor of the local online newspaper. They tackled the issue of falling print sales well and showed how the Guardian and local newspapers had risen to the challenge offered by the explosion in new media technology to produce a global and interactive news resource. Their emphasis on local (interactive) news stories and the effect of Google searches on the language of headlines was deeply relevant.

Magazines

There were some strong responses in this area, with Candidates exploring both the advantages and disadvantages of technology for institutions and audiences – notably the Internet and the proliferation in online content. Candidates recognised the issues for institutions in moving to online content – although cover sales are lost, there is the opportunity to create a loyal online readership and boost advertising revenues.

Candidates commented too on the symbiotic relationship between online and printed content that publishers tried to create. Many Candidates were able to comment on recent developments of significance – the Apple iPad or the Paywall to access the content of *The Times* and likelihood that this would apply to magazine content. The best examples included the online magazines *Monkey*, *More*, *Look*, *FHM*, *Tatler* and *Cosmopolitan*. *Heat*, *Kerrang* and *NME* also formed good case studies to enable Candidates to explore the relationship between the more traditional print version and the online version.

There were some excellent Candidate responses using the *NME* website as an example and citing the following areas in response to the set question: audience interaction; the use of live music broadcasts; podcasts; the availability of downloads; how band news can be current and updated; the use of blogging; convergence; the *NME* having its own radio and TV station and the use of Facebook and other social networking sites to promote itself and to gain feedback about its audience's wants. The idea of global distribution and the fact that *NME* has developed into a brand was also discussed with great confidence and demonstrated how Candidates engaged with the question set.

Less successful case studies included *Gardener's World* and a study of the Bauer and IPC magazines, without the discussion of the magazines produced in relation to digital initiatives. Less able Candidates were ill prepared to answer the question and could only muster textual

evidence and arguments on representation in response to the question set. Centres need to be reminded that question 2 is not an exercise in textual analysis or representation. There is still some evidence that Candidates are being taught these key media concepts for this question, which is penalising the Candidates' opportunity to perform well in the exam.

Radio

The ability of Candidates to address this media area seemed in general much higher than previous sessions. Nearly all of these Candidates really knew about the developments in radio and were able to respond comprehensively to the question set using examples of myriad software, DAB radio, co-locating, networking, synergy and convergence.

There was evidence of a strong comparison of Channel 103 and BBC Jersey, which were useful choices as it enabled the Candidates to compare the challenges and opportunities of technologies for stations with very different brand identities, funding and demographics. These responses showed an excellent understanding of audiences and the ways in which technology does not necessarily result in a homogenized response. Radio remains a minority topic but this Centre's approach showed that it can be successful.

Summary

Question 1

- Do link analysis to the key concept of representation.
- Extend Candidates knowledge and understanding of editing and sound.
- Ensure that you cover all aspects of representation as outlined in the Specification.
- No need to cover every shot within sequence; choose appropriate exemplars.
- Chronological approach to answering question often leads to descriptive responses.

Question 2

- Cover all seven bullet points found in the Specification (page 19).
- Keep exemplar contemporary (ie post 2005).
- Teach a range of examples within a media area.
- Provide Candidates with plenty of evaluation exercises.
- Remember not to teach textual analysis for question 2.

G324 Principal Moderator's Report

This was the second series for this unit and there were approximately 9,000 Candidates.

This unit calls for an entirely digital/electronic submission by Candidates and where Centres embraced this new method of working it was clear that here was a truly dynamic and interactive way of working, assessing and moderating for Candidates, teachers and moderators alike. This work engaged Candidates enormously – and excited those moderators privileged to see it. Unfortunately for a significant minority of Centres this opportunity seems to have bypassed them and they have clung to elements of the legacy Specification or have presented work in a disparate and unconnected manner, through which the relationship between the components is less easy to see and each Candidate's 'journey' less easy to follow.

Quality of Administration by Centres

The new Specification encourages Centres to submit slim-line packages of work - often all that is needed in the envelope which the Centre sends to the moderator are the completed paper-based coversheets for the sample Candidates (on which is written a url central hub address from which the moderator can reach any blogs, VLEs, Wikis etc); an MS1, CCS160; and a backup DVD (which is playable on a domestic DVD player). Centres unable to post any work online may need to include additional work on DVDs with a clear menu system. The majority of Centres seem to have embraced the new way of submitting work and in such cases moderation was an exciting and dynamic experience, as indicated above. Thus, the volume of physical evidence of work sent for moderation is minimal compared with the legacy Specification. There were excellent examples of administration by Centres; these Centres provided detailed comments, followed the submission instructions carefully and made every effort to aid the moderation process through the use of clearly labelled DVDs, CDs, blogs with central hub and named blogs with Candidate numbers. Many Centres provided one DVD with all moving image work on, with a menu and labelled clearly with Candidate names and numbers, which was helpful as this didn't involve a constant changing of DVD for each Candidate.

A disappointing proportion of Centres had problems that required moderators to contact the Centre to either clarify how to access work (eg providing passwords for intranets to access work or blogs that were restricted to private viewing only, which sometimes led to a dialogue between moderators and the Centre's ICT department!) or to request work not sent (eg, videos on DVD, evaluations not on blogs or discs). Several Centres submitted work incorrectly: InDesign, Publisher and Photoshop files were commonly sent instead of the specified formats - jpegs or pdfs. Films and videos were frequently sent as AVIs on CD instead of being burnt to a DVD playable on a domestic DVD player requiring the moderator to copy the files to their computer before they could be played. Some sent discs that were corrupted, that didn't work perhaps due to a lack of finalisation - or which were blank! Several Centres didn't send discs at all and had to be contacted to request the work for moderation. A number of Centres didn't send URLs for websites or blogs. Frequently the websites created by Candidates were just *designs* for websites created in software that is inappropriate for website design; very many were not live, as specified in the Specification. Some Centres clearly require a reminder that no printed portfolios should be sent at all, as all work must be digitally/electronically presented.

As indicated above, blog hubs are becoming more prevalent and are a good and simple idea. The alternative has been to transcribe long URLs written on the coversheets into a browser – a greater problem if the address has been written incorrectly or if the handwriting is difficult to read. Equally frustrating is if Centres password-protect the blogs. With regards to VLEs vs Blogs there is unfortunately no comparison: most of the VLEs tended to be clunky, slow and not media friendly; many VLEs are not designed to present work - merely hold them, like online storage –

and downloading documents from VLEs is defeating the object of the Specification. Worst of all is the online file storage idea. Online storage such as 'freedrive' created huge problems around passwords, its lengthy navigation process, corrupted downloads and having to download a Word document from the web defeats the object of the Specification and can be what one moderator has described a 'a loophole for an unimaginative Centre'. Word documents as electronic submissions are not what is intended for this Specification.

Several Centres did not indicate which ancillary text was which on the cover sheets. Several Centres used out of date cover sheets which caused a variety of problems – particularly when Centres used sheets for the legacy Specification and marked out of 120 instead of 100 and then hoped just to apply a mathematical formula to come out with the right mark! A number of Centres had clerical errors on their coversheets or in the marks submitted to the Board. Many Centres did not clearly articulate whether Candidates were working in a group or individually - more information about the contribution of the individual Candidate to his or her group on the coversheet was often needed to justify the Centre's marks for that Candidate.

Centres were generally prompt in their despatch of work, but the email request system did appear to build in a significant delay before receipt of work. Some Centres failed to respond at all. The general feeling was that the delay was a combination of the email hitting the wrong person and various staff members not responding immediately to the request. Some work took many weeks to be despatched and this ran the risk of not being moderated in time for the publishing of results.

There were problems where Centres had not identified that they were working as a consortium. Centres must again indicate to the awarding body on the relevant JCQ form (which can be found on the JCQ website) their intentions to act and submit as a consortium so that the sampling and moderation can be handled appropriately by OCR. This paperwork needs to be completed as far in advance of the coursework deadline as possible.

The overall performance of Candidates this series:

The work reflected the full range of ability but generally Candidates had a secure understanding of the codes and conventions of the artefacts associated with their chosen brief and exhibited some confidence in the use of the appropriate media technology. At the very top of the range the work could have passed muster as a professional product, while the lower ability Candidates had a less secure grasp of both conventions and technology. It was fairly rare to see Candidates working with relatively basic software packages (eg Movie Maker, Front Page or Publisher), with most Centres providing access to, for example, Premiere Pro, Final Cut (Express and Pro), GarageBand, Photoshop, InDesign and Dreamweaver.

Overall the work that was entered by Centres did try to reflect the requirements of the Specification. However, it was clear that not all Centres had either read the requirements of the Specification nor had considered the approaches required by the new demands of the outcomes, in particular, regarding the presentation of the work using digital technologies.

The vast majority of work seen in this session illustrated audio-visual and/or print productions, there was very little in the way of specific website, games or radio production work.

Centres that gave a choice of briefs were generally less successful than ones which narrowed it down to one or two options, particularly if they were small Centres. The link between theory and practice was much less clear where a range of briefs had been tackled. Nevertheless, the set briefs did appear to present Centres both with choice and a consistent framework of choice from which Candidates could create their ancillary tasks and the production. The most popular briefs appeared to be brief 1 (a promotion package for the release of an album), brief 2 (a promotion package for a new film), brief 5 (a promotion package for a new soap opera), brief 7 (an extract from a new documentary TV programme) and brief 10 (a short film) - their popularity being more

or less in that order! The most successful were the album promotion packages and the promotional package for a new film although there were some very accomplished short films this series. There were a few newspaper submissions, children's TV work, TV advertisements and radio plays but these were less successful. There was one games package submission and very little in the way of website work as the main task.

The enthusiasm, knowledge and technical abilities which most Candidates showed in the different briefs was good to see, although it was clear that some Centres (or individual Candidates) had not used their time wisely, with many portfolios looking like the product of weeks rather than several months.

The moderation process can be really simple when all of the work is on a blog, including creative work. Blogs worked best for presenting work and really showed the dynamism of the production process. This was also true for weaker students. This option is not open to all Centres and work presented in PowerPoint could also be very effective when Candidates took advantage of the opportunities present in PPT and included hyperlinks to videos, sound files image etc. At worst, in common with some blogs, they were like an electronic essay with no reference to relevant visual or audio material.

Planning and research:

The best Candidates had a broad range of research and research methods and identified target audiences early on in the project. Also, when audience research was used part way through the project (especially video briefs) this impacted positively on the final outcomes. Planning of the final product and ancillary tasks was also best when a broad range of appropriate planning methods had been used such as call sheets, story boards, scripts, animatics, shot lists etc - and when these were adjusted as problems arose the final outcomes were even more effective. Other vital planning elements included risk assessments; letters requesting permission for the use of music tracks for brief 1; 'contact sheets' of images and subsequent drafts showing the development of the use of some of those images into print-based work.

The weakest planning and research was evident when Candidates did not have enough focus from the outset; when Centres had too many briefs on offer; when a target audience was not identified from the outset, which then also limited Candidates for the evaluation section, or when textual analysis was superficial (largely consisting of describing what they saw but not looking at the connotations or wider resonance re audience and institutions). Many of the Candidates had clearly allocated little time and space to the analysis of similar texts.

As already indicated, blogs, when updated regularly and creatively used, tended to gain the higher levels. Most Centres seem to have adopted Blogger as the site of choice. Blogger is free and perfectly up to the task. All sorts of methods for evidencing were employed, links to YouTube, Flickr, Vimeo, embedded PPT movies, and Candidate-initiated video, or using other web 2.0 like Issuu, Prezzi and Slideshare to show PowerPoints. Most of the artefacts were also embedded in the Candidates' blogs, although there were some of the Centres who sent a pile of DVDs yet whose Research and Planning and Evaluations were presented on blogs. Some Centres opted for a belt and braces approach and provided both blogs and DVDs. The blogs themselves were in many cases very impressive and Candidates appear to have engaged highly with the process: some Candidates even commented on how enjoyable the process had been.

Wiki could be a successful alternative to blogs if used more regularly and more creatively by Candidates.

In this series the use of PowerPoint often limited Candidates as slides were frequently too text heavy – the more interactive functions of PowerPoint were rarely utilised by Candidates. Thus the use of PowerPoint in general this series was weaker, as examples tended to be variations of printed documentation. There were a smaller number that were very sophisticated and were

much more successful. When video and audio links to online material were used for example, PowerPoint when used correctly had the capability of reaching high level 4. Centres do need to make sure that the files for these elements, eg video, audio, are included with the PowerPoint, or the slides won't work as intended.) Videoed presentations could be good when well recorded and this, of course, meant that the PowerPoint could be seen as intended, as a summary of/stimulus for the presentation itself! Some Centres seemed to stick a couple of pages of planning and research into their single Evaluation PowerPoint and then hope that this would suffice for both components. It did not.

There was still a number of Centres insistent on producing paper-based research and planning, and mailing this to moderators. This is not acceptable under the new Specification.

Construction

The ancillary and main task combination allows for a very mature look at media and many Candidates made the most of this opportunity. The work itself ranged from outstanding to basic. Moderators were privileged to observe that the work at the top end of the range was comfortably undergraduate standard; a number of Candidates clearly have careers ahead of them in media production. At the lower end of the range the basic nature of both main and ancillary tasks saw it attracting marks on the Level 2 borderline. In the majority of 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 campaign feel. In some rare cases Candidates' ancillary tasks were the strongest and this was usually in Brief 2, where the print artefacts (poster and magazine cover) had a better grasp of codes and conventions than the trailers.

It was the music option that probably worked the best for Candidates - music videos seem to allow Candidates to demonstrate a combination of skill and creativity. The majority of the high quality productions were music videos. At the top there was some very professional work that showcased a firm understanding of the form. Lots of videos focused on the interplay between performance and narrative. This appears to be a good framework to hand the production on as it allowed Candidates to be creative within certain beneficial constraints. The majority had some attempt at performance sections in them, which were generally well executed, although very few had synched drumming. Other examples saw Candidates striving to achieve a spectacle, something indefinable and quirky, a tricky task to keep up for the duration of a four-minute song. When done properly, this can elevate the production. Using unknown bands sourced through MySpace for example, was often a good option and the bands were often pleased to have the video and give feedback. It was noted that on too many occasions, Centres were allowing Candidates to film in locations that were unsuitable and showed little regard for the construction of mise en scene. Classrooms are fine so long as the narrative or song demands a classroom. Lighting is another stumbling block that is near impossible to put right in the editing stages. Many productions evidenced no thought in terms of something so vital. This was most obvious when even the slightest, meaningful decision regarding light, paid dividends. Moderators saw plenty of examples where Candidates had not shot enough footage and were forced to re-use large chunks throughout the promo.

There were some highly effective short films – especially when the Candidates cast roles from outside their peers or class members. The control of the narratives was often impressive, and some of the twists were genuinely surprising

The film trailers were often less well executed and didn't seem comparable in terms of the amount of effort involved in them with the other video pieces. Although many of them followed an appropriate non-linear narrative structure, many were slow and over dependent on intertitles, instead of voice-over and diegetic sound. They frequently used non-original music which was also problematic. Some Centres limited Candidates by not only dictating the genre but the title

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(although dictating the genre sometimes meant that Candidates were secure in the codes and conventions and this actually often led to better work). Horror and 'Urban Youth' were popular genres but were rarely executed well.

More documentaries were 'real' in terms of topic and interviewees, and this raised their level of success, but many still over-relied on captions and intertitles, which is a rather crude method of shaping the narrative. The documentaries also suffered due to a limited range of camera shot and movement as well as limited editing techniques.

Consideration of lighting was a common weakness in moving image work, and is perhaps an area that Centres lack confidence in teaching. A surprising number of Centres, according to their Candidates, do not possess a tripod!

Some of the weakest work seen was for Brief 8, where the local newspaper was a bit parochial in nature, at least in part because of the limited nature of the software used to create pages of quite a significant size: Publisher templates do not help Candidates produce effective templates; Word is worse! Print work at best was almost indistinguishable from the real thing but often it was not much more than a word-processed piece in columns with a picture in it which is not appropriate for an A2 task.

It was surprising that almost no Candidates opted for the game-related briefs, 4 and 11; with gaming being so popular and with the games industry the biggest earner of all the creative industries one might have expected more Candidates to choose the games options.

The majority of ancillaries were print based, although some used websites. The weakest ancillaries used found images instead of original images. The digipak was probably the most problematic – many Candidates produced a CD/jewel case design, and some merely a front cover, yet, when the digipak format was embraced, it allowed the Candidates to be more creative and explore the form through 6 panels. The magazine advertisement for the album was generally executed well and the majority of Candidates linked the three products very well, taking into consideration such things as typographical choices, mode of address, similar (but not the same) photos and overall atmosphere. Half of the websites were live and had obviously been invested with a lot of effort and care. Candidates sometimes used pre-constructed templates available on line which also limited access to the higher levels. Rarely did Candidates achieve high levels when the website option was chosen for an ancillary. The remainders were submitted in a variety of formats (paper, screenshot, template) none of which are acceptable for website work – many were only designs for websites. It appears that, in such cases, Centres are still having difficulty in realising the best briefs for the Candidates – the advice remains to choose the brief that best fits the Centre's resources.

Evaluations

Centres that are keen to embrace the electronic medium, are in a much better position than those that rely on what is nothing more than an electronic essay. They have apparently learnt from G321 and have moved the evaluation on even further. For other Centres there remains some confusion as to what electronic evaluation means.

The best evaluations employed a different electronic/digital approach for each of the four set evaluation questions in the Specification. The weakest were text based and barely touched on the four set questions. Still there were a number of essays on blogs (often, wrongly, focused on the legacy evaluation framework) and PowerPoint that had far too many words on one slide, completely missing the point of this software package. There were too many essays pasted into PowerPoint with a couple of pictures. For the full experience of seeing PowerPoint being used appropriately there really needed to be a video of the presentation but there were some video presentations that were very long – one Centre's Candidates produced 30min presentations.

The Director's commentary format is potentially one of the most interesting methods for evaluating. There were two types of Director's Commentaries. Firstly the reading from a script commentary, which actually isn't a commentary at all! This method relies on Candidates from the group taking turns to read a pre-written script. Often this had little correlation to the events happening on the screen. The second, and much more rewarding commentary had the group members discussing the set questions (possibly using notes) and using certain points in the film to highlight points being made. The director's commentary also allows for still images from the research and planning materials or ancillaries to be edited into the footage. Some other imaginative responses to the evaluation requirement included illustrated podcasts, video presentations, presentations using Issuu, Slideshare, and Prezi.

The use of the blog format is being taken up by most schools and used in a very effective way. It makes a document of the thinking that the Candidates are necessarily doing and often shows very mature approaches to media production and then allows for a powerful evaluation tool – all in one place. There were some Centres that had really organised their students. It was possible to moderate everything online, well structured blogs that allowed moderators to follow the whole process. The blog allows for the Candidates to incorporate/embed ALL of the above methods and examples of good practice – and such a media-rich approach was inevitably the most successful. Blogs do need tagging, however, for effective navigation. On the other hand it was somewhat of a challenge trying to come to grips with every different type of blog. What was very difficult for moderators was the “blog which downloads” endless documents, which came onto the moderator's desktop and then had to be opened. This was a particular problem with Centre's VLEs when they were unable to take the blog approach. Too often these ended up as a digital holding-bay for endless Word documents – again, not in the spirit of the Specification.

The set question approach has worked very well – but Centres are advised to give the Candidates these questions at the *start* of the course as they clearly help shape their research and planning too! The conventions question allowed for side by side comparisons, allowing even weaker Candidates to achieve; the audience feedback question led to a range of approaches from uploading onto YouTube and getting feedback, or videoing peers' group or individual responses, not to mention scans of endless questionnaires! The relationship between the artefacts question forced Candidates to relate their products and create a more cohesive package. The equipment question often led to endless photos of cameras, computers and images of computer screens - but also led to some excellent voice over demonstrations of software being used, for example, explaining how they achieved certain effects, for example, or debates over the use of Web 2.0.

Group evaluations were often the most difficult to moderate, particularly in the absence of any explanation from the Centre on the coversheet, as to who did what.

Marking of coursework by Centres

Just over half the Centres understood the levels from their descriptors and could apply the mark scheme relatively objectively and fairly; the others tended to over mark by an entire level. This was particularly the case in those Centres that had written little on cover sheets in support of their marking or had not used the wording of the assessment criteria. A few Centres seemed to still be working on the legacy Specification or had not fully understood the requirements of the new briefs. Marking within Centres was generally consistent, albeit over-marked as stated above. The application of the marking criteria was over generous in the main because Centres had not been thorough enough in their understanding of how the new criteria related to the outcomes achieved.

Centres were often too generous in the marking of Planning and Research: at times, vital elements were missing, yet the Centres were awarded level 4 marks; and some Candidates

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undertook no audience research or their research into similar products lacked the detail to justify the marks awarded.

Similarly some Evaluations had been awarded level 4 marks, yet were lacking in terms of ICT and presentation, having relied on a heavily text-based rather than media-rich response. PowerPoint can certainly reach level four but not if they are completely textual and completed in font size 12! Thus, in the case of Evaluations this over marking was often due to Centres not taking into account how well the Candidate had used ICT but could also be due to the Candidates' lack of detail of answers or their not addressing the four set questions. Only rarely were marks adjusted upwards for these elements. Some Centres appeared to be using their experience of the demands of creating evaluations from the old Specification rather than the outcomes required from the new Specification.

There were also fluctuations and inconsistency in the marking of the ancillaries, perhaps due to having so few marks to play with for each band; some had not accounted for the repetition of a single original image or the extensive use of found images.

If more than one teacher was involved in the assessment of Candidates there could be a distinct difference in application of the mark scheme and how summative comments are written. Therefore opportunities for internal moderation need to be fully utilised to standardise marking before external moderation.

Summary

- The expectations of the unit are greater than for the old 2733 and this needs to be reflected in the marking.
- Centres need to ensure that research on real media is reflected in the planning and construction of Candidates' own products.
- Centres need to read the Specification carefully to ensure they are meeting the criteria, especially in terms of digital/electronic presentation.
- Centres should ensure that their Candidates are given full opportunities to use digital technology for planning, research and evaluation – the presentation of these elements should be media-rich, making the most of the opportunities offered in terms of the ICT used.
- The marking scheme needs to be used in conjunction with exemplar materials in arriving at judgments about the levels and marks for each category.
- Visit <http://getaheadocrmedia.blogspot.com/> for further ideas.

G325 Principal Examiner Report

General Comments

The level of difficulty was appropriate and Candidates were generally better prepared than the cohort that had entered –prematurely in many cases – in the first series in January 2010. The level of theoretical engagement was pleasing and this unit does seem to have updated the subject somewhat with a large number of Candidates dealing with contemporary examples and theories/ideas relevant to such current material. That said, Centres **do** need to be clear about the different requirements of each area of the question paper and ensure that Candidates are adequately prepared. A relatively low number of Candidates are able to maintain level 4 quality across the three areas, and to this end a checklist of the things examiners are looking to credit for each part of the question paper is offered at the end of this report. A summary of the strengths of an exemplar A grade script which, along with a mid-range and E grade response will also be provided via the OCR website and blog site <http://getaheadocrmedia.blogspot.com/> and further feedback will be available via INSET training this autumn.

Section A has been the most challenging for Candidates, and the level of achievement has been much lower where Candidates are required to write theoretically, critically and reflectively about their own coursework and media production. It appears that section B has been taught more intensively than section A and if this is the case then Candidates are not being adequately supported in the very challenging area of critical and theoretical reflection on creative practice.

As was the case in January, some of the higher marked Candidates answered section B first, which may be sound advice as it carries equal marks to section A, which consists of two questions, so if Candidates run out of time damage is limited by them being left to answer a question that carries 25 marks rather than 50.

Writing for 30 minutes on two different aspects of their own production work in Section A is a significant challenge for A2 students and this part of the paper is every bit as ‘stretching’ as section B. Candidates need plentiful practice at quickly interpreting the set question, identifying the most fruitful production work to select for analysis/reflection and then maximising their potential to achieve high marks by using a structure that fits with the marking criteria. Advice follows later in this report and will be extended at OCR training events on this Specification.

A surprisingly high number of Candidates made rubric errors, answering two questions for section B. In such cases the higher marked answer was awarded, but Centres are strongly encouraged to ensure Candidates are aware that they have a choice of topics and a choice of two questions for each topic, but that only one answer is required. The question paper is very clear about the requirements – not only for the number of answers required but also in relation to the rules about what each question ‘should’ or ‘must’ cover/include, so in addition to preparatory work, Candidates should also be advised to check the rubric on the question paper very carefully.

Generally answers to questions 1a and 1b were weaker than for Section B and this seems to suggest that Centres are dealing well with the requirements of the new topics/themes but that adequate preparation for writing theoretically, critically and reflectively about Candidates’ own work is a priority for the next series. To be fully prepared for this exam, Candidates must be in a position to write about whichever of the listed elements/concepts appears on the paper. In many cases Candidates were not able to apply theories of genre to their own work coherently and in equally large numbers answers lacked any convincing examples of existing media products.

Section A

1(a)

Whilst Candidates were typically able to discuss research in general terms, there was a distinction between those that could focus in on the precise ways in which their work was influenced by or responded to specific media texts/products and those that dealt with research and planning in a less applied and relevant manner (to the question set). Candidates in the latter category were restricted to levels 1 or 2 for use of examples. Terminology was utilised with variable conviction also – the stronger answers used appropriate theoretical or technical language to explain how creative decisions were informed by research into real media at the micro level. Candidates are advised against the ‘scattergun’ approach – merely listing every instance of research and planning. They are also urged to be clear about the outcomes of research – reporting that they used YouTube to watch trailers, for example, is not sufficient for credit at A2. The words ‘informed by’ in the question were important. Evaluation/critical reflection is required here and the question demands explanation. Many Candidates provided description only – Centres should share the wording of the mark scheme as well as this report with Candidates ahead of the next series.

Equally, progression is an important part of this section and this was another neglected element. The higher level answers were able to synthesise all of these aspects – specific examples with emphasis on the outcome of the research in relation to creative decisions; critical reflection on the process of the research; and an awareness of progress made from AS to A2 and with reference to other media production work where relevant – the distance travelled. There was a little overlap with 1(b) due to genre conventions being a feature of research but the stronger Candidates were able to provide a broader answer here. They dealt with genre conventions along with a number of other aspects of real media texts, including narrative, media language and more technical and institutional/professional areas of media production related to several of their own productions and then go on to ‘zoom in’ on theories of genre for the next question with a more sustained discussion relating to just one production.

Finally, it is important that Candidates can be specific and informed about real media conventions but there are a range of ways of relating their own work to real media – these might be more institutional. For example the institutional information in magazine contents pages or the title sequence of a film – these are equally conventional to the more genre ingredients examples that proliferated in answers. Or they might be more technical – observing industry practice in a particular medium.

A suggested outline structure for question 1(a) June 2010 will be placed on the OCR A Level Media Blog <http://getaheadocrmedia.blogspot.com/>.

1(b)

Stronger answers to this question were able to do three things well. Firstly, they set up the concept of genre for discussion, with reference to writing on the subject from the likes of Altman, Buckingham, Buscombe, Neale, McQuail, Stam, Boardwell, Miller, Goodwin or in some cases, with varying relevance, Propp and Todorov, Mulvey and Barthes, Strauss and Saussure. Level 4 answers generally offered references to writing about the particular genre in question as well as the more general work. Secondly, these higher-marked answers went on to apply these ideas to a range of specific elements of their own chosen production. And thirdly, the extent to which the ideas in the referenced writing fit with the product being analysed would be discussed. Mid-range answers would more straightforwardly list generic elements of the work with less reference to theoretical material. Lower level answers would neglect theories of genre altogether and/or lack specific examples. To what extent the production in question adhered to or challenged genre conventions is, at least, required in order for Candidates to be credited for both understanding and applying the concept. An alternative approach is to deal with more institutional aspects of the workings of genre and format. Many answers dealt with narrative theory which is, of course, appropriate – as it is so closely linked to genre – providing

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Candidates explicitly make this connection for the examiner, so it does not have to be inferred in the marking. Clearly, to prepare for all the concepts which may arise in the exam and then to condense understanding and application into thirty minutes of writing is challenging, so Centres are strongly encouraged to devote as much time and pedagogic energy and differentiation to this part of the exam as to Section B .

A suggested outline structure for question 1(b) June 2010 will be placed on the OCR A Level Media Blog <http://getaheadocrmedia.blogspot.com/>.

Section B

Media and collective identity was the most popular theme, with a good number of Candidates engaging with postmodern media, contemporary media regulation and media in the online age. We media and democracy and global media were minority topics in this session. The most common texts/case studies/examples/theories for each topic were as follows:

Collective Identity – Britishness, with *This is England* and *Fishtank* appearing regularly, Youth (*Skins*, *Kidulthood*), gender magazines – especially *Cosmopolitan* and *Nuts/Zoo*, celebrity culture, social media and identity, representation of Muslims in the UK/globally, masculinity, representation of women/men more generally, soap operas, social realism, teen films, James Bond, Gauntlett, Butler, Foucault, Hall.

Postmodern media – *GTA4*, *Blade Runner*, *Mighty Boosh*, *Inglourious Basterds*, *Second Life*, *Project Natal*, *Lady Gaga*, *Extras*, *DJ Shadow*, *Simpsons*, *Sims*, *Baudrillard*.

Regulation – *Byron report*, *Jan Moir*, *GTA4*, *Manhunt*, *Call of Duty*, *PCC*, *OFCOM*, *ASA*, *BBFC*, *Ross and Brand*, *Child's Play*.

Online age – *online news*, *music industry*, *facebook*, *online gaming*, *the Long Tail*, *Wikinomics*.

We Media – *Gillmor*, *youtube*, *twitter*, *Big Brother*, *facebook*, *blogs*, *citizen journalism*, *Google in China*.

Global Media – *global news*, *world cinema*, *Slumdog Millionaire*, *Disney*, *J-Pop*, *Bollywood*, *McLuhan*.

The above list is provided to share common approaches and it was pleasing to find that there was such a rich variety of material covered with very little evidence of standard responses so Centres are encouraged to continue to look for interesting and far-reaching angles and not to play safe. At the same time, there was too much recycling of historical case studies – *Child's Play*, *Friends*, *Blade Runner*, *Passport to Pimlico*, *Rebel without a Cause*, *Brief Encounter*. Such examples are perfectly useful for historical context or comparison but these should not be given equal status in an answer requiring contemporary material. All of the topics lend themselves to consideration of current issues in media and current examples of media texts/products/events. The contemporary examples of media texts, products and case studies/events/debates which **must** form the majority of an answer should be, wherever possible, contemporaneous with the duration of the teaching itself but at most this should be within five years. However, theories from any time period can be applied to these examples. For example, a Marxist analysis of contemporary representation of social class is perfectly valid but if the answer was dominated by analysis of kitchen sink drama from the 1950s and 1960s such an answer would not qualify for the higher marking levels.

The same applies for a feminist analysis of contemporary female gaming or an application of the theory of moral panics (from 1970s sociology) to childrens' use of social media. Crucially, where a theorist is long dead, Candidates ought to show that they understand that they are applying

the theories of a late thinker to contemporary material. For example, Adorno was not writing about the X Factor, though his 'culture industry' theories are highly pertinent to an analysis of 'talent TV' in the context of media and democracy.

Where Candidates fail to deal with more than one media area at some point in their answer, they were restricted to level 1. Where there was no reference to the past and no projection to the future, credit was given if this could be inferred from the answer but if this was impossible, then Candidates were restricted to level 3. The question paper clearly indicates the respective importance of each requirement by the use of the word 'must' for the former and 'should' for the latter.

For example, a Candidate is at liberty to write about the BBFC for most of their answer, with a short comparison to the PCC and OFCOM. In so doing they will avoid being penalised. However, it is more advisable, in order to respond to a debate, to offer a more sustained cross-media comparison. The situation is different for section B where Candidates must make one historical reference and one future projection and they are advised to devote the majority of their answer to contemporary material also. For example, an answer on the representation of youth might reference *Quadrophenia* but then 90% of the answer will discuss material from the last few years with a statement about whether or not the way such representation is described in the answer is likely to remain constant or be subject to change in the future.

Centres are advised to ensure that media theory is taught for all of the topics. Media in the online age is about much more than a description of the impact of the internet in terms of platforms and affordances and what each has provided. There are a range of theoretical ideas, from 'the Long tail', to 'Media 2.0' and for each theory a sceptical response – see the recent discussion in the journal *Interactions* – available for free online – between Gauntlett and Merrin and their critics, or the recent work of David Buckingham, Graeme Turner or the more in-between position of Henry Jenkins – all of these are ideal for the online age topic, so Centres should not view this topic as less informed by academic ideas than, say, collective identity or postmodern media.

Collective Identity – stronger answers were able to explain two or three different theoretical ideas about the relationship between identity and media and to apply these ideas to a range of examples. The high level 4 answers offered a critical response to the theoretical ideas, informed by what the examples offer by way of confirmation or rebuttal. There were different 'ways in' to this question, all of which were equally appropriate. Some Candidates spent more time on theories of representation, others on debates around identity and media, and some dealt with both. Writers referenced ranged broadly – a good thing – with common application of Marx, Althusser, Hall, Gramsci, Butler, Gauntlett, Winship, Mulvey, Geraghty. There were some simplistic attempts to state uses and gratifications and even the hypodermic theory as fact but equally plenty of Candidates mapped these against more recent and complex theories of identity. Teachers should be careful when preparing Candidates – marks are lost, not gained, by inaccurate or tokenistic references – a whole Centre claimed Lacan's mirror stage as a comment on media acting as a mirror on society. An important reassurance – Candidates were credited and always will be for discussing a group of people, several groups of people or a broader representational/identity theme across more than one media area.

Postmodern Media – this was generally well-worked, with Candidates able to set up philosophical ideas about hyper-reality and then apply them to a range of texts with confidence. The choice of questions allowed for a more or less textual response. Fewer Candidates were able to weigh up the debate in each case and to discuss the critical responses to postmodernism and equally few chose sufficiently contrasting examples – for example a text which is postmodern in style as opposed to themes, or a postmodern reception (or remix) as opposed to a postmodern engagement context (for example, a virtual world). Baudrillard and Lyotard featured often, with their more basic ideas generally well handled. Some of the most commonly used texts are a little old for this topic – *Truman Show*, *Blade Runner*, *Scream* – these are

relevant but should be used as the historical reference alongside a more sustained discussion of texts/products/events from the last five years.

Regulation – Candidates generally made good work of finding contrasting case studies - for example OFCOM and the ASA or the PCC and the BBFC and thus they were able to deal with the critical issues prompted by the questions – temporal or not. It was pleasing to see most Candidates referencing the Byron report and thus ensuring a contemporary focus, but see the comments above on Child’s Play. It is crucial, though, that the effects debate is considered as the theoretical foundation of this topic and that the examples mentioned above are used to apply the more theoretical ideas about who decides on the need for protection and according to what criteria. More far-reaching approaches explored economic regulation as well – from ownership to intellectual property – and political regulation with google in China a contemporary example.

Media in the Online Age – see comments above. A problem here was the one-sided nature of the responses, If anything, the ‘right answer’ is that the internet has transformed some areas of media exchange beyond recognition but ‘old media’ dynamics stay in place. The work of Henry Jenkins was largely absent here when it might have been expected to dominate. As discussed earlier, Candidates are encouraged to ensure an adequately academic discussion of online media – there is a plethora of material to choose from, but a significant minority of answers were completely lacking in any media theory and were dominated by factual information without critical context. The stronger Candidates referenced theories of the long tail, wkinomics, wethink and the ideas of Gauntlett and Wesch.

Global Media/We Media and Democracy – these were in the minority this session. Candidates who did choose these options tended to look at the former through an industry lens or a classic case study such as Disney and the latter was very rare but the few answers reported dealt with Gillmor and citizen journalism in the guise of blogging in the main.

It is productive to remind Centres that most of the topics overlap and so to some extent the above guidance is constrained by the need to report on each separately. Some common issues across all of the themes are as follows. Treating ‘the audience’ or ‘the media’ as a monolithic mass is problematic. At level 4 there will be an awareness of the ways in which people in culture do not fit into neatly packaged groupings – this is as important for regulation and online age as for collective identity.

The defining aspects of the mark scheme for Section B concern connections and adaptation, balance and language. Linking together theoretical ideas by use of examples and application; ensuring the prepared learning is then anchored to the specific nuance of the question chosen; demonstrating an understanding of the debate as a site of conflict between competing ideas about media and culture and applying these ideas to examples that are appropriate and show primary research work in action. These are key criteria in examiners’ assessment of this paper. Full marks are awarded to Candidates who achieve all of these. Thus an important function of this report is to remind Centres that the theoretical requirements for this sole A2 exam are considerable and that Candidates will need a range of skills across the three sections with the common requirement being a strong, referenced and substantiated understanding of a range of theoretical ideas about the relationship between people, media and life.

Checklist of requirements for success in the exam

Question 1(a)

- Creative decision making
- Process
- Progress over time
- Specific examples
- Reflection on own development

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- It's about the Candidate

Question 1(b)

- Showing understanding of the concept (ideally with references/quotations)
- Applying the concept
- Textual analysis of the work (ONE PRODUCTION) using the concept
- It's about the work.

Section B

Candidates need to show a deep understanding of a debate, with application and assessment of theories, research and conflicting ideas, with a range of contemporary examples, at least one reference to the past and one projection for the future.

This list of requirements was provided for examiners for this series, to be used with the mark scheme, which is also available to Centres.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

14 – 19 Qualifications (General)

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

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Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

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