

## **Media Studies**

Advanced GCE **A2 H540**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H140**

### **Examiners' Reports**

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**June 2011**

**HX40/R/11**

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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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## CONTENTS

**Advanced GCE Media Studies (H540)**

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### EXAMINERS' REPORTS

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
Chief Examiner's Report	1
G321 Foundation Portfolio	2
G322/3 Key Concepts in Media	5
G324 Principal Moderator's Report	11
G325 Principal Examiner Report	15

# **Chief Examiner's Report**

## **Introduction**

Centres are reminded of the online support material offered by OCR. The new site at <http://ocrmediastudies.weebly.com/> will provide links to resources and examples of work from all units and the new community site at <http://social.ocr.org.uk/> holds an archived forum for information and discussion. A full programme of CPD is available once again in the autumn and the annual one day conference in March will once again take place in 2012. Centres are strongly advised to take advantage of these opportunities.

## **G321 Foundation Portfolio**

### **General Comments**

There are many encouraging signs that centres have fully embraced the demands of the specification, with advice from previous reports, from INSET and from the online resources increasingly taken on board. Most centres used blogs for the presentation of work this session. These worked best when a centre hub was provided, giving easy access to well-labelled candidates' blogs. Best practice involved cover sheets that were accurately completed with detailed reference to both criteria and candidate work, work that was despatched on time in a well-organised parcel and accurate use of the levels for marking.

Centres are reminded that differentiation between group members, both on the blogs and in the marking, is crucial to accurate assessment. File formats must be universal (such as jpeg, pdf or .mov) and where work is presented on disk, these should be clearly organised with menus and folders using candidate numbers and full names. Where possible, the whole sample from a centre should be on just one disk. If research and planning is on paper, the material sent should be restricted to just what is relevant. All centre material should be checked before despatch, to ensure that marks are accurately transferred to MS1 from cover sheets and that all candidate work is accessible on disks or blogs. Where centres are re-submitting the work of candidates, it is expected that any improvements made will be clearly evident to support any changes in marks from the previous session.

### **Research and Planning**

This area is worth 20% of the marks and over the period of a project should involve the collection of a considerable amount of evidence. A blog post every other day for three months would amount to 45 in total and this should be a reasonable expectation for candidates. In the best cases, such posts were varied and included images, video and links. The best centres provided an easy-to-navigate hub containing all of the work, well signposted and with each candidate's work clearly marked. They also encourage candidates to make good use of blogs, using them to give feedback, mark progression and encourage a variety of means of communication and expression. There were many examples of candidates who have clearly enjoyed and made the most of communicating in this medium, for their planning and research. Where centres used VLEs for blogging, there were often more difficulties in accessing the work and there were many more files to open individually.

At its best, research focused tightly on relevant, similar products, with an analytical, rather than purely descriptive approach. Research into audiences worked particularly well when a triangulated approach was used, which for film openings included analysis of film classification, audience statistics and primary interviews. As in previous sessions, the multiple questionnaire approach had little value. Institutional research was especially effective when linked to exploration of similar products, rather than treated as a standalone feature. Research for magazines was often confined to the front cover whilst research for films often needed more focus on titles and soundtrack. The best centres considered research as an ongoing process, not just something to be done at the start of a project. Some of the less relevant research included candidates who had deconstructed trailers in preparation for their film openings and this discrepancy showed through in their finished pieces, which had the feel of trailers rather than openings.

The best blogs recorded the journey of the production and gave real insight into the evolution of the product. Evidence of planning of locations, actors and costume tended to be better for film openings than for magazines. The quality and the depth of the planning evidence presented varied considerably; it was clear from the quality of the final construction that, in some cases,

candidates had done detailed and relevant planning but that not all had been presented as evidence in the submissions. In some cases, the material for planning was submitted retrospectively, which meant that explanations for decisions made were often missing.

Group blogs ought to reflect the input of all members and should be tagged to attribute contributions. In marking research and planning, centres need to clearly distinguish the contributions of individuals and differentiate accordingly. It is worth considering that if an individual blog contains 40 or more posts, a group blog might be expected to contain considerably more.

## **Construction**

There were a number of very strong submissions for both the video and print tasks. The best candidates demonstrated a good understanding of generic conventions from their study of real media texts, the ability to use artistic and creative flair to subvert or extend the conventions and high levels of technical competence. There was still some serious over-marking within this area with teachers pushing candidates too easily into level 4.

The film opening was the most popular task, usually submitted as a group project. Key to the success of this project is a proper consideration of the function, purpose and conventions of titles; the best projects had taken care to look closely at titles in real film openings and learnt from them. A number of centres produced production company logos and idents which helped in the process of establishing an institutional context. Soundtracks at best featured layered sound, with foley work and attention to dialogue and atmosphere. Centres are reminded that audio should be original or be from a copyright-free source. Where candidates had considered the conventions of film openings rather than trying to tell too much of the story, the projects tended to work best. The stalk and slash narratives usually lacked careful planning and consideration of camera, editing and mise-en-scene. More creative productions thought carefully about the impact of sound and lighting and variety of shot types as a way to create enigma and atmosphere. Ideally, productions should be as close to two minutes as possible. Those which are considerably over-length usually do not meet the needs of the task. In a few cases, openings featured unacceptable language, given the context of an external assessment.

The magazine task worked best when there were a variety of images of different models and when careful note had been taken of all the conventions of layout, text, photography and design from real examples used in research. The best work was that which gave a clear sense of the genre, together with imaginative layout and page design and good quality images. The image of the model on the front cover needs to be big enough to avoid large chunks of blank space, the number of pages referenced on the contents page needs to reflect the price and the layout of the double page spread needs to be seen as two distinct but joined pages. Many problems with layout were due to centres not having access to suitable software; proper desktop publishing is essential to the success of this task, rather than just Photoshop or Publisher, which are not designed to complete a task of this kind. Some candidates chose models whose style and look were not appropriate for the genre, which meant the finished magazine had more of the look of a lifestyle magazine. The best work showed excellent close study of conventions and the need for linkage between the three products to create the look and feel of a music magazine. The candidates understood where and how to place image and text and to integrate it with professional skill.

Whereas each section (front page, contents, double page spread) all have their own conventions, they should all be branded so that they are clearly part of the same magazine. Branding can be done by logo/mini-masthead, or by colour, or by font, or by some other style feature. The best examples made good use of photographs – well taken, well lit, with a variety of dynamic poses, and with a variety of subjects. The weakest examples used a few, dull, poorly lit snaps of the same person on each of the three pages. Most contents pages have a number of photographs (not snaps!) of different subjects. This gives the impression of a lively, diverse and

interesting magazine. The quality of pictures is crucial. A poor photograph has the exact opposite effect to a good photograph; the reader needs to be attracted and intrigued, not diverted and dulled. The very best magazines, especially on the double page spreads, were good journalistically. The articles were well researched, well written and well presented. Magazines rely heavily on style and presentation, but substance is also important at the highest level.

There were very few websites produced and centres are reminded that to undertake this task, the brief asks candidates to produce a campaign website including sound and video and also including original photographs, written text, audio, video and easy navigation. The examples seen did not fulfil all these requirements and often the links didn't open.

Similarly, the radio task was only attempted by a handful of centres. Those offering this brief tend to do so because of the enthusiasm and expertise of the teaching staff, which itself is usually reflected in candidates' work. Where candidates were most successful they were required to construct material for "real" media contexts. Partnership with local community radio was one such example of excellent practice. This was clearly a motivation for candidates and constructions were fully contextualised and used forms and conventions which enabled them to sit comfortably alongside professional artefacts. As with other briefs, where centres have been successful in delivery, there has been investment in appropriate hardware and software.

## **Evaluation**

The time spent on this component needs to reflect the weighting of the marks. The seven questions must be explicitly used to structure the evaluation and this element should be seen as an opportunity for some creative critical reflection. The best work demonstrated a broad capability for employing different digital media in the presentation of their evaluations, with specific detail and references presented in varied and lively ways. This element should be distinguishable from the research and planning and should show skill in the use of ICT; level four evaluations usually gave the reader/viewer an excellent understanding of the process and what the candidate was trying to achieve with the project. The most successful format was the blog as it allows for a variety of formats to be easily included; candidates are trying to express some complex ideas about the media which the use of a range of formats allows them to do more effectively. The best centres tend to see that presentational devices can develop meaning beyond the written word. There were some very good examples where candidates had used directors' cuts or PowerPoints with lots of links to relevant online material.

## G322/3 Key Concepts in Media

Overall there was evidence of some excellent analysis and understanding of the questions set. There were many good responses, which showed consistent, and at times sustained analysis, a clear and sometimes sophisticated style and an ability to consider key concepts in media.

The best answers integrated formal description of the TV extract, with convincing discussion of the context and the concepts. The very best essays were extremely well argued and logically organised. 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 second question, because centres had prepared candidates well with case studies and enabled them to interpret and address the issues set.

Given the very small number of entries for Radio drama this report focuses on the unit G322 Television Drama, which shares the same question 2. In this report, there is reference to and repeated advice from the previous Principal Examiner reports.

### Question 1 – Television drama

The extract allowed candidates the opportunity to negotiate their own reading, which they could justify through analysis of the four technical codes.

The question requires candidates to move from description of key technical areas to analysis of how representations are constructed. Some candidates began by addressing the concept of representation in the extract and a discussion of the representational differences between Arthur, the 'knight in shining armor' and the pauper/magician, Merlin and this mentor, Gaius. Candidates would then analyse their chosen examples of representation in a chronological address of the extract, whilst integrating different technical aspects, for example, combining the analysis of camera composition with sound.

A slightly more popular approach saw many candidates addressing the technical areas one by one. Stronger candidates could provide an integrated analysis of the extract through analysis of key examples identified. These candidates explored how the technical features could be applied in combination with each other. Weaker candidates could list many technical aspects, with varying degrees of accuracy, but struggled to say anything meaningful about the representation of class and status.

Long introductions were unnecessary for this question; the best responses got straight on with analysis. It is advisable that centres make the mark scheme available to candidates so that they are aware of how the work is assessed. This could also be used for the marking of timed assignments in the classroom. It is important that candidates balance their responses to include all the technical features used in the extract that construct meaning if they are to score highly.

### Representation

Confident candidates were able to analyse the ways in which the extract attempted to position the audience in relation to the young knight, Arthur, and the young magician, Merlin, and how it used cross cutting to the elderly and concerned Gaius. As a result candidates were able to explore the nuances of status representation, in terms of the representations used: Stronger responses showed a good grasp of the ambivalent nature of the representation of class in the form of Prince Arthur and the pauper/magician, Merlin. There was plenty of evidence that candidates understood the representation of class and status with a variety of interpretations, for example, with the armed conflict in the medieval market between Prince Arthur and Merlin and the ambivalent status that emerges.

Where candidates often relied on the use of binary oppositions and generalised analytical assumptions, in discussion of class and status representation, they did not take this opportunity to explore a range of representations offered by the extract, for example that Merlin had the respect of Gaius/Prince Arthur, despite his lower status in the medieval hierarchy.

### **Camera Shot, Angle and Composition**

Most candidates used the correct terminology and could describe shot composition, movement, framing, and angles in relation to each of the characters and their situations and to link these to the construction of class from Morgana to Merlin and Gaius. The best responses identified the use of over the shoulder shots when Merlin is talking to Morgana, giving her dominance and the composition of Prince Arthur being in the centre of the frame with his guards behind him to show his power. Candidates could also discuss the binary oppositions constructed with the use of shot-reverse-shots, which strengthened their analysis.

Less confident candidates confused high and low angles and were unclear on panning and tracking, and though able to describe key shots used in exemplification, they tended to lack explicit links to how these shots assisted in the construction of the representation of social class and status. These candidates would also tend to focus on just identifying the narrative flow of the extract through the naming of the shots.

### **Mise en scène**

The majority of candidates discussed this area with confidence. Location, character appearance and body language were all handled well, with some excellent attention to detail on objects in all settings. Some analysis of colour symbolism was less successful as it tended to be based on assumptions which could not be substantiated from the sequence.

### **Sound**

The analysis of sound is continuing to improve with candidates attempting to link music with the representation of the characters. Music was generally well recognised and analysed with better candidates linking the choral, mystical music to the 'witch' and her status, the majestic music to Arthur and Merlin's own theme. There seemed to be more confident use of terminology in relation to soundtrack this session. Many candidates were proficient in analysing diegetic/non diegetic sound and recognising the synchronous/asynchronous sounds, the importance of the ambient sounds and soundbridges in relation to how meaning is constructed.

Most candidates identified and analysed the jovial nature of the music during the fight to link with status – some analysing it as mocking Arthur, others as mocking Merlin. Candidates made frequent reference to the dialogue in the extract, especially the conversation between Arthur and Merlin, for example Merlin's use of the terms 'prat' and 'ass' and the sarcastic 'my lord' were particularly commented on showing that Merlin has lower status but does not comply with it. Many candidates also commented on Merlin's final speech as an example of his understanding of his low status. Some candidates commented on the sound of Morgana's footsteps as a presence and the accompanying music, which added to her sense of superiority, as well as the tone of her voice.

### **Editing**

Candidates often engaged well with the nuances of editing and the ways in which the use of long and short takes represented power and how eye line matches were used to reinforce a sense of dominance. Slow motion was identified as linking to status, either showing the power of Arthur through his skill or the uncaring nature of his class in destroying the villagers' livelihoods.

Shot-reverse-shots were also linked very well to class/status. Many candidates referred to the use of this during the conversations between Merlin and Morgana and made references to eye-line matches to show equality between the characters. As in previous series, this technical area proved to be the most challenging for candidates and the one technical area of analysis that was often omitted in responses.

## **General Comments on Question 2**

The question provided suitable differentiation of candidate responses. The majority of candidates addressed the issue of distribution and marketing more than that of production or audience. The question provoked a range of responses from candidates many of whom were able to discuss the relationship between production, distribution and marketing in ensuring the success of media products. The best answers were able to create a debate around the relative strengths of production and marketing/distribution practices by institutions in engaging appropriate audiences. Frequently strong candidates were also able to draw contrasts between mainstream and independent producers, and/or mass audience/niche audience targeting.

In addition, many candidates were able to build their own experiences as consumers into their responses and were able to contextualise these through wider understanding of the relationships between producers and audiences. More candidates are able to show awareness of the trends and strategies that categorise the contemporary media landscape. A few candidates attempted to answer the question without any kind of institutional knowledge, focussing exclusively on texts, suggesting that there are still misconceptions as to the demands of this section of the specification. Strong responses from candidates were those who had a wide range of relevant and contemporary examples of marketing and distribution strategies in their chosen area and could discuss them with confidence. Those candidates that fared less well used a 'saturation approach' to addressing the question writing all they could remember, rather than addressing the set question. There was some confusion by candidates between convergence, synergy, horizontal and vertical integration as key media concepts.

It is advised that centres ensure the appropriate preparation for this section by covering audience in the same depth as institutions. It is also recommended that centres find a balance between giving candidates independent research tasks and modeling the kinds of material they need to produce.

The following comments on each media area are a summary and not exhaustive of the range of issues that emerged in candidate responses.

### **Film Industry**

The most common approach was to compare major US studios with UK production companies, often focusing on the role of budgets in determining production and marketing strategies. In the latter case, there was frequently a simplistic assumption that digital distribution is cheaper and quicker than conventional film distribution because you don't need reels of film and a white van!

There was often an assumption that UK cinema is failing because of low cinema attendance, which obviously underestimates the importance of home exhibition windows in making UK film viable. Working Title was the most frequently used case study, though many candidates tended to offer a history of the studio and their argument depended upon the relative success of films, such as *Four Weddings and A Funeral* or *The Hudsucker Proxy*, *Notting Hill*, and *Bridget Jones Diary* which clearly are not contemporary examples. Warners, Fox and Paramount were frequently used as American examples; *Warp*, *Vertigo* and *Film Four* were used a number of times as UK production companies.

However, many candidates seem to be prepared with a simplistic view of film production, distribution and marketing strategies which fails to acknowledge the wide range of approaches taken by studios both big and small.

Many responses failed to address the question directly and just presented their case studies. Candidates who tried to develop an argument with counter examples were more successful but the case studies often lacked relevant detail and failed to sufficiently differentiate between Hollywood and local production companies. Candidates demonstrated keen knowledge and understanding of concepts such as interactivity, globalisation, conglomerates and convergence.

Excellent answers engaged thoroughly with new media forms such as social networking sites, YouTube and blogging and how these relate to their chosen case studies. Other strong areas for discussion were in the consideration of audience consumption and distribution through digital technology such as iPhones, BluRay, downloading, iPads, and Sony PSP's. Candidate discussion of this technology would be better supported with examples.

The advantages of digital distribution and exhibition were also sometimes discussed, but with limited effectiveness at times. Many candidates engaged with the crucial issue of piracy and illegal downloading and the implications for the media sector under consideration. Marketing and advertising was also considered with reference to extensive online campaigns, websites and viral marketing.

### **Music Industry**

This area was handled well by candidates as most were able to engage with the issues in the question. The question was designed to provide opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of music institutions and audiences. Most candidates approached the area by contrasting one of the 'big 4' labels – (Sony, EMI and Universal were popular) with a smaller, independent label, such as Ghostbox, Domino or Finders Keepers records. This was good practice as candidates could contrast production and distribution practices of major and indie labels. Candidates also explored the use of synergy by the majors (especially Sony and UMG), distribution methods transformed by convergence and digital initiatives and the labels' attempts to combat piracy. Indie labels included XL, Rough Trade, Domino – all of which were used to contrast the approach of the majors well by picking up on the part of the question related to the targeting of specific audiences by identifying the niche audience targeted and then the ways in which they were marketed to.

Candidates also discussed the role of technology in enabling artists to attain relatively high production values relatively cheaply and then distribute the music digitally via My Space and iTunes. It was encouraging to see some candidates also discussed contemporary developments such as 'VEVO' and the recent changes to the business model of the streaming site Spotify.

The candidates' responses that needed developing the most were applying key concepts to examples and case studies. An absence of exemplification and a reliance on generalised examples held back candidates understanding of the task demanded. Likewise, where candidates discussed YouTube, Spotify, iTunes they would benefit more from discussing specific examples and the features of these online technologies, such as interactivity, the ability for audience responses etc.

### **Newspaper Industry**

There were fewer responses to the Newspaper Industry than in previous sessions. Most able candidates are able to explore the significance of newspapers as institutions and the practice of marketing and distribution. Responses compared News Corporation with the Guardian Media Group, including their respective online presences and policies of the Sun, The Times and the Guardian. Candidates demonstrated a good understanding in the shift from print based to digital

formats and explored the impact of the online editions and the general shift from purely print based editions. Most candidates gave a useful contextualising overview of the industry and then focussed on a large institution like News International and looked at how they had prioritised marketing strategies and went on to offer detailed case studies of The Sun & The Times and the pay walls, News Corporation has used. Candidates often argued that this contrasts to the free access policy from The Guardian. Most case studies were backed up with reference to the online content, its interactive nature and the proliferation of multi-media and user-generated content.

Weaker candidates who tackled the newspaper industry tried to draw comparison between the Guardian and the Sun without bringing marketing or distribution into their answers. There were many instances where candidates made errors such as citing the Mail, Express and the Independent as 'Murdoch' newspapers.

Candidates need to show more knowledge of companies such as News Corporation as well as the Sun newspaper. At times candidates lacked a wider perspective on news production and the weakest of candidates would make assumptions about the all-powerful media moguls who own and control news, without any version of institution and or audience. There was some encouraging discussion by candidates on the marketing and exchange of news, particularly through the use of digital technology, such as the iPad and the use of online newspapers.

### **Magazine Industry**

Most candidates had a good understanding in the shift from print based to digital formats and explored the impact of the online editions and the general shift from purely print based editions.

Candidates often presented good knowledge and explanation of how magazines have embraced the cross media platforms and how this has helped to sustain their businesses in times of the declining sales of print copies. Most candidates gave a useful contextualising overview of the industry and then focussed on a large institution like Bauer or IPC and looked at how they had changed their production/marketing/distribution patterns. Candidates could offer evaluation of detailed case studies of mass market female readership texts like Vogue, Marie-Claire, Elle, Kerrang and niche publications and online magazines such as Monkey. Most were backed up with reference to the frequently updated content and use of online multimedia as well as lots of facts and figures and quotes from press packs to give a convincing argument. Virgin's iPad magazine 'Project' was also looked at in an attempt to cover next generation online magazines.

The most common and strongest case study was Bauer publishing, comparing different titles in terms of production, distribution and marketing. The most able candidates managed to present a wealth of case study examples in a way that was relevant to the question and constructed a comparative argument. Well-selected case studies included NME and Men's Health. In less successful responses, it was evident that candidates had misunderstood the question and began discussing advertising inside the magazine rather than the marketing of the magazine itself or gave accounts of reception theory, which is not appropriate for this exam.

### **Radio Industry**

Centres are advised, teaching about radio needs attention to commercial stations rather than just the BBC, to ensure a wider range of examples and issues can be discussed. Candidates were informative on the marketing of radio shows and the role of digital initiatives, such as the iPad, DAB radio and the role of twitter and facebook.

### **Video Games Industry**

The best answers tended to come from candidates who had been well-prepared with detailed, contemporary case studies and were able to select relevant material from these to respond to the question. Many candidates were able to build their own experiences as consumers into their responses and were able to contextualise these through wider understanding of the relationships between producers and audiences.

The best responses came from candidates who appeared to have studied the area from an institutional perspective and recognised the role of big corporations and franchises in discussion of the marketing of games. Some candidates did very well in this area focussing on Rockstar Games (Grand Theft Auto 4), discussing distribution, marketing and exchange across platforms. Candidates were able to discuss the franchise and were able to discuss the importance of synergy and technological convergence with relevance to the question. Weaker responses tended to just describe the games with limited analysis of distribution and marketing in relation to the game targeting specific audience.

## G324 Principal Moderator's Report

### General Comments

Most centres responded effectively to the electronic nature of this Specification; many presented work through blogs and in the best practice candidates' blogs were accessed through a central blog hub. Blogs allowed centres to present all five elements of each candidate's work (the research and planning, the main construction task, the two ancillaries and the evaluation) in a dynamic and flexible manner. The blogs that worked best were labelled with candidates' names and numbers and permissions were set so that the moderator could access the blog with ease. There were also Centres that submitted effective work via presentation software that exploited the multimedia capabilities of PowerPoint or Prezi, for example; PowerPoint and Prezi both allow for hyperlinks, audio, video, embedded image etc and *can* be used very well – although this was more rare than good blog presentation of work.

The most effective administration had the central blog URL on each coversheet and all other boxes were completed in detail. Coversheets outlined the task; the names of each member of the group who had worked on that task; gave detailed assessment comments (that related to the level criteria from the Specification) and referred specifically to the individual candidate's own performance. Coversheets should be printed not on disc. Marks should be checked so that they are accurate and correspond with the marks submitted. The majority of Centres remembered to send the mandatory Centre Authentication Forms with their work.

Any disc work should be sent on one disc per Centre, where possible. As with G321, file formats must be universal (such as jpeg, pdf or .mov) – Publisher, Photoshop and Fireworks files, for example must be converted into one of the appropriate formats before submission. Moderators are not expected to download work onto their computers in order for it to work, which is often the case with work submitted via school VLEs. Where work is presented on disc these files should be organised with menus and folders using both candidate numbers and full candidate names. Centres should check discs and blogs for functionality before sending them to the moderator.

### Planning

The best research and planning was evidenced through ongoing blogs, demonstrating the real processes undertaken by the candidate.

Such blogs included embedded video, such as work they had analysed or of audience interviews, experimental footage, perhaps with an audio track explaining the process, or animatics. This was uploaded via providers such as You Tube (often using the annotation facility), Muzu or Vimeo. The best blogs also included audio such as podcasts, audio commentaries or audience interviews (which could be recorded on or uploaded from their phones via Soundcloud, for example). The most effective blogs had images of a wide range of things, including drafts of print materials, storyboards, mind maps, recce shots, make up tests, permission request letters for the music video brief, risk assessment forms. The best ones were thoroughly hyperlinked to the range of sites visited and referred to.

Blogs also allowed teachers and classmates to be able to comment on the work in progress, giving invaluable feedback and suggestions for further exploration at every stage.

PowerPoints did not lend themselves to the same ongoing presentation, but did have the potential to have similar embedded multimedia content and hyperlinks as blogs. Where these PowerPoints were submitted as videos of the candidates actually presenting the PowerPoint it was noted that the effective ones were carefully considered, with close miking of the candidate and the screen clearly seen. Better still were the PowerPoints with an audio track of the candidate's presentation.

VLEs were used by a fewer centres but work from many VLEs was not as flexible as either true blogs or even PowerPoints or Prezis as they often limited formats and required the downloading of every item of planning or research presented by each candidate.

Hard copy research and planning is not allowed at A2 and will not be considered by the moderator as evidence.

All the best research was focused, relevant and analytical, rather than descriptive, and looked closely at a range of similar products which then informed the candidate's planning of all of their own products. It proved vital that candidates researched and planned all three of their products carefully, the main task and the two ancillaries.

Audience research was done well in those centres that did more than just questionnaires and graphs. Social networking sites were used to good effect by some candidates undertaking both audience research and audience feedback. Others used online survey sites. The most detailed audience research produced more effective productions, in terms of being genre products, and were more appropriate for their selected target audience.

Drafting is essential for all productions, not just because the assessment criteria says it needs to be there – but also because it produces the best constructions; magazine draft layouts and page plans, website layouts designs, storyboards or animatics all help identify potential problems before production starts. This can also help in more effective deployment of the Centre's resources – less time will be needed re-filming, for example, if an animatic shows early on that there is a gap in a narrative that needs to be filled. Storyboards completed after filming have no use. All three tasks benefit from careful research and planning.

Stronger candidates also included shooting schedules and call sheets. Risk assessments were undertaken by a small proportion of centres. Several centres demonstrated very worrying health and safety issues that must be addressed in future sessions.

The best blogs were also well labelled, tagged and titled so that the moderator could easily identify each of the relevant entries.

## **Construction**

The music promotion, film promotion and short film briefs (briefs 1, 2 and 10) were the most commonly presented tasks, followed by the documentary extract (brief 7), although there were also more newspapers this session (brief 8) and a few TV advertisement campaigns (brief 3), There were a few radio submissions (brief 13) and a couple of Children's TV opening sequences (brief 6). Print was the most popular format for the ancillary tasks. There were a number of very strong submissions for all three of the most popular briefs. The best responses demonstrated real cohesion between the three construction tasks.

Video was the most popular medium for Centres and the most successful work clearly resulted from careful training in the technical capabilities of the cameras, consideration of sound, lighting and the use of a tripod. Weaker work was marked by frequent unsteady panning and zooming.

In the Music Promotion brief this session, there was an increase in the proportion of lip-synched performance over a purely narrative approach. This development is to be encouraged, as the narrative videos look more like short films and tend to lose function as a promotional tool for the artist. Some of these responses, as in previous sessions, have shown real flair and imagination combined with technical control; more candidates seemed to show more of the visual aesthetic with some excellent shot choices and mise en scene. A greater number of candidates submitted the required number of panes to be a digipak (ie at least four) and had clearly been taught the technical skills to be able to manipulate their images and combine effectively with text, although a surprising number did not include basic institutional elements such as a barcode and copyright

information. The magazine advertisements and web pages were generally less successful. Many web pages were not online with working urls but were just jpegs of a design for a site. This is not acceptable under this Specification. Not all candidates evidenced the requirement to ask the rights holders of the music track for permission to use it in their video.

Short films that ran to the recommended length of five minutes tended to work better than those that were over long. The best had interesting narratives, often featuring an older cast of family members and friends from outside the peer group. The stronger ones also showed effective understanding of film grammar using multiple camera set ups and a range of shot sizes taken of the same scene and then demonstrated excellent continuity editing. Some candidates took a documentary approach to this brief and produced interesting responses. Verité-style work rarely resulted in successful outcomes at this level. The poster and radio trailers ancillaries generally worked quite well but many of the review pages looked like newsletters.

The best film trailers were short, well-paced, had a non-linear narrative structure, used a range of techniques to intrigue the audience and had been produced by candidates who had closely studied the conventions of the form and of the genre in which they were working. They also had a clear sense of the whole story of the film they were 'teasing'. Most relied on intertitles; few included voiceovers. Some submissions read as the opening of a film, being wholly linear in narrative, and so were uncomfortably close to the Foundation Portfolio video brief.

A significant number of candidates producing Print-based tasks (both main and ancillary) used found images in their work. Royalty free images do not constitute original images and an overuse of such material means that their work demonstrates minimal ability in the technical skills at best. Print work was generally well executed with a good grasp of Photoshop and an improved integration of images and text compared to previous sessions. A significant few showed in their planning that they had looked at a range of relevant print texts which they had annotated and analysed – yet seemed unable to replicate their forms and conventions; newspapers often demonstrated very large body-text font sizes, for example. A number of newspapers looked more like the real thing but a few still resembled Microsoft Publisher templates for newsletters or even Publisher templates for magazines.

## **Evaluations**

The best evaluations were clearly well planned in terms of using a variety of methods of presentation and choosing the right method to explore each of the four set questions in an explicit and reflective manner. A few Centres did not seem to have encouraged their candidates to answer the set questions at all and this produced very weak responses.

The most successful Evaluations tended to be on blogs and were media rich, using the right medium for the right question. However, there were also some highly successful PowerPoints and these used embedded video and audio, hyperlinks and incorporation of other methods such as Prezi. Heavily text-based PowerPoint responses were rather too much like essays and missed the extensive opportunities to explore the questions and show their understanding and skills that a media-rich approach to PowerPoint or Prezi can take.

A number of Candidates submitted responses as Word files on disc, which limited their success.

A proportion of filming in the Evaluation is good – but some candidates produced their evaluations as one video and these tended to be overlong. Some of the most unsuccessful presentations were half an hour long with a whole group of unidentified candidates talking directly to the camera, answering the questions without cutting in any images, other footage, clips, captions etc to help evidence their words. This was a difficult format to moderate. In other cases presentation took precedence over content. Candidates used variety and skill in the presentation of the work but the responses to the questions were brief and lacking sufficient detail.

*Examiners' Reports – June 2011*

Many responses were detailed, reflective and informed. On the other hand, there were some very brief responses that could not reach the higher levels; Question 4 in particular elicited a number of list-like answers, illustrated with software logos, social network icons, photos of equipment etc, and this was rarely a high-level approach.

## G325 Principal Examiner Report

### General Comments

In this fourth session of G325, it was very pleasing to see so many A2 Media candidates engaging with contemporary media debates, referencing relevant theory and really demonstrating that they have a 'stake' in their mediated environment. In section B, the higher-performing candidates were able to deal with their chosen critical perspective as such – engaging with a debate and offering an informed critical perspective rather than a one-sided acceptance of one argument. Level 4 answers supported this with contemporary examples.

It was also apparent that many candidates were able to deal with their own understanding of media conventions beyond the level of production techniques, instead discussing the extent to which their outcomes challenged or reinforced media conventions and what the significance of these conventions are in terms of meaning-making. The performance of candidates was, in many cases, inconsistent across the paper as many found difficulty in applying the theoretical concept of audience to their own production work in response to question 1(b). It is clear that centres need to focus on the importance of facilitating learning at A2 level that will prepare candidates to apply a theoretical concept to one of their production outcomes, from a textual analysis perspective.

The vast majority of candidates achieved their lowest mark for 1(b). In many cases, candidates adopted the same approach for 1(a) as for 1(b) – writing about their own decision making and the process of production. The distinction between 1(a) and 1(b) is clear – 1(a) requires critical reflection on creative processes and decision making in the context of a range of productions and progress made from AS and A2 (and is thus synoptic). 1(b) requires a more distanced textual analysis of one production outcome – as a media text – to demonstrate the ability to apply a theoretical concept – in this case audience – to the text.

Once again many candidates chose to answer the section B question first and this is good practice if time management may be a concern, as this question provides the larger mark weighting on the paper. A future projection was a missing element in many papers which detracted from what otherwise would have been an excellent response. Some centres had only prepared candidates with material that was over five years old and the lack of inclusion of contemporary media material impeded responses.

### Section A

**1(a)** Responses to this question tended to be grouped into three categories. Level 4 answers evaluated the relationship between symbolic conventions and candidates' own outcomes across the whole of their course, and commented explicitly on progress over time. Mid-range answers generally failed to describe progress or focussed mainly on one production or confused media conventions with production techniques (these can be the same but higher-scoring answers analysed conventional symbolic meaning-making) and weaker answers merely provided a narrative of the production process or (in a significant number of cases) attempted to provide a prepared answer to another one of the questions that the specification covers, failing to adapt to the question set for this session.

**1(b)** Successful responses demonstrated understanding of the concept of audience (which can be easily done by referencing particular audience theories and relating them to a product); the best answers making use of more contemporary theory (such as Gauntlett, Jenkins or Hills). There were relatively few high scoring responses for this question as most candidates adopted the same approach as for 1(a) – writing about their own decision making rather than analysing a finished product as a text from a critical distance. The majority of candidates reduced 'the

concept of audience' to some very basic ideas about 'target audience' and there was too much reliance on Todorov, Hypodermic Needle & Hall which did not enable candidates to stretch their discussions and subsequently these responses were fairly one-dimensional.

## Section B

### Collective Identity

Stronger candidates for this theme were able to bring in theorists 'as and when' necessary, rather than top-loading them in one/two paragraphs at the start. It was the attention to distinct points-of-view drawn from close study of the texts which facilitated this skill. The result, in such cases, was an 'organic' answer that avoided the shopping list approach of weaker answers. Whilst examples were dominated by *Kidulthood*, there was a wide range of different groups discussed – Youths, Northerners and Southerners; 'the underclass'; Asians; Black people; Muslims; Women, Gay men and the English. There was a tendency for candidates to discuss a broad range of historical examples in order to chart changing representations of a group, often with detailed reference to seminal media texts across the two media areas, sometimes at the expense of contemporary examples. A problem with some responses to these questions tends to be a tendency to take a one-sided approach – that collective identity IS informed by media, whereas stronger answers discuss the extent to which this is the case, with examples 'for' and 'against' the hypothesis.

### Postmodern Media

There were interesting and knowledgeable responses to the questions on postmodern media and most of these demonstrated a strong awareness of the ideas from theorists such as Jameson, Lyotard, and Baudrillard as well as interesting perspectives on 'digimodernism'. The concept of hyperreality was foremost of the postmodern thinking and analyses of *The Matrix*, reality TV and online gaming were often well handled. It was pleasing to see Lady Gaga replacing Madonna as a case study of choice. Some centres used spoof movies – such as the *Scary Movie* franchise – to useful effect. But the filmic examples chosen tend to be dated – *The Truman Show*, *Bladerunner*, *Scream*, *Pulp Fiction* & *Kill Bill*. *Inglorious Basterds*, *Kick Ass*, *Scott Pilgrim v the World* and *Inception* were more contemporary examples that worked well. The high level 4 answers were able to present an argument around the theories of Baudrillard, Lyotard, Jameson, Derrida, Kirby and Marx, with excellent use of related theoretical terms. One centre also offered some interesting responses to Q11 – "how far do you accept the idea of post-modernism?" Through discussing Lyotard and the idea of meta-narratives some felt that they couldn't accept post-modernism due to their religious views – with some excellent debate and discussion about postmodernism as shallow, paradoxical and lacking a future. Complex texts such as *The Wire*, when utilised well, provided some excellent discussion. Some very good responses were seen which discussed the nature of hyperreality using *Grand Theft Auto 4* and the *Call of Duty* franchise as the crux for discussion.

### Regulation

I would expect this topic to be very popular next year and it was a strange experience marking so many answers on the PCC given the events taking place shortly after the exam. That said, there were plenty of strong answers that compared the roles (and effectiveness) of the PCC and BBFC – this case study works well, especially when extended to include the Byron report and its recommendations for online media regulation and the idea that media literacy might offer a form of protection. However, such strong case studies only reach level 4 when they are contextualised in theoretical understanding of the effects debate. However clear the facts are – on the roles of these two institutions, an A2 answer must (for the higher levels) discuss this in an academic way.

Stronger candidates were able to discuss regulation across media – for example film, games and print with contemporary examples such as Ryan Giggs and twitter. Far too many candidates are still making too much use of old case studies – *Child's Play*, *Clockwork Orange*, *Straw Dogs*. These are fine for historical reference but contemporary media is rich with current examples of regulation or the call for it, so centres are strongly advised once again to update their practice in this area where required. On the other hand, some interesting contemporary film examples included *Human Centipede 2*, *Grotesque* and *Serbian film*.

### **Media in the Online Age**

Answers to these questions were the least theoretical in scope, generally. Candidates tended to achieve a much higher mark for argument and examples than for terminology because only a high-scoring minority were able to couch their arguments about the impact of the internet in the theoretical terminology from the ideas of Gauntlett, Merrin, Leadbetter, Shirky, Jenkins, Hills, Curtis and others. There is a high degree of knowledge and personal engagement but candidates need to read the competing theoretical ideas and research evidence in relation to web 2.0 and its importance to contemporary media.

### **Global Media**

Interestingly, overseas candidates were in many cases the most successful with this topic. Stronger answers dealt with a range of theories – from McLuhan to Michael Wesch – and then used them to discuss examples that serve to support and others that challenge the idea of the 'global village'. Rich examples were provided in the form of 'glocalised' TV formats and hybrid media. Level 4 responses tended to engage with the complexity of global flow and counterflow to some extent, whereas more basic answers tended to straightforwardly 'buy' the idea of global culture without much discussion.

### **We Media and Democracy**

Stronger answers to these questions provided a clear framework for gauging democracy, and then applied this to chosen examples. It was perhaps surprising that few candidates sought to discuss the British General Election of 2010 at all but there was some strong engagement with the implications of the Arab Spring. Level 1 and 2 answers presented arguments in very basic, simplistic terms, suggesting little more than that Facebook and YouTube were democratic because 'everyone could upload whatever they wanted.' Many candidates discussed *The X-Factor* in terms of what level of democratic choice it does or doesn't afford the viewer, with some linking this to the online campaign to stop the *X Factor* winner getting to number 1. A great many candidates used Anderson's theory of 'The Long Tail' to discuss consumer choice as a form of democracy (whereas this was often ignored in 'online age' answers). Weaker candidates again focused on the ease with which those with internet access could make their voices heard. *Wikileaks* was cited by some, but many cited Justin Bieber as 'proof' that anyone could use the net as a platform, and therefore it was democratic – this needs 'unpacking'.

### **General Advice to Centres**

Candidates need support in preparing the different approaches to 1(a) and 1(b) – process and decisions for 1(a), conceptual textual analysis from a critical distance for 1(b).

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

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

Candidates need support in developing time management skills for exam preparation, particularly for section A.

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