

# **Unit G325 Critical Perspectives in Media January 2010 Principal Examiner Report**

## **General Comments**

The level of difficulty was appropriate but the majority of candidates were not well prepared to answer all three questions and this was not surprising considering the holistic, synoptic nature of this question paper. There were some notable exceptions but even in the strongest cases, it was difficult for candidates to sustain the required level of theoretical engagement for level 4 marks over the three sections. I expect the average level of response to be markedly higher in June because candidates will have had the full length of their courses from which to select material for section A. In some cases candidates attempted to predict future outcomes for production work, which was disregarded. A small number of candidates answered two questions from section B so centres are encouraged to check the specification carefully. Exemplar material will be selected from this session to represent the full range of responses and a variety of approaches to section B. Crucially, candidates must be prepared to demonstrate their ability to engage with contemporary theoretical approaches to media, both in relation to 'real' media and their own production work. As there is now one examination only, and a part of that is related to coursework, the level of expectation from examiners is higher in relation to theoretical conviction than was the case for 2735 and so a level 4 candidate will need to sustain this conviction over the span of the three responses – theorising their own production processes, analysing their own outcomes using key concepts and discussing a contemporary media issue with the use of a range of theoretical arguments.

Time management was an issue for some candidates and in some of the higher marked papers, 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 so doing during an answer that carries 25 marks rather than 50.

## **Section A**

Stronger answers to 1a managed to select a range of relevant examples of creative decision making informed by research and planning. Weaker answers offered a basic narrative of the process. It is best practice to prepare examples that demonstrate more or less successful decisions as this gives scope for higher levels of critical reflection. Centres are advised to prepare candidates to reflect on processes, logistics and the mechanics of production – research and planning cannot be reduced entirely to looking at real media texts or discussing audience needs. Better answers offered a broader range of pre-production activities and decisions arising with a clear sense of how the more 'glamorous' idea of creativity is often a product of serious 'nuts and bolts' operational care in the process.

1b was generally the weakest area and this appeared to be largely due to the difficulties candidates faced in adapting their material to the concept identified. Representation was, by many, described only in terms of conventions or simply what was produced, as though 'representing the school in a positive way' (with regard to a preliminary task) is demonstrative of an A2 level of understanding of a complex idea. What was required (and managed by single figures of respondents in this session) was a robust discussion of how the media product selected can be analysed as representational – candidates can discuss whether or not this is straightforward or more complex but they MUST engage with the theoretical concept either way and reference reading they have undertaken on this area in relation to specific examples from their product. Of more concern was the fact that some candidates appeared to be unfamiliar with the concept of representation entirely. Further problems arose from some candidates referring to

more than one production item (one was disregarded in this case) and from too much overlap with 1(a). There may be some common ground between the two answers – for example, if a part of the research and planning involved a consideration of how representing a social group in one way might alienate potential audience members or even lead to ethical and legal issues, but in some cases genre dominated both answers to the extent that 1(a) was a list of decisions in relation to the observation through research of genre conventions and 1(b) was a similar list of how the product ‘represented the genre’. It appeared that in these cases candidates had entered too early and only had one area of expertise to adapt to whatever the questions required. Centres are advised to prepare candidates to write about all of the concepts.

## **Section B**

Section B was broken down as follows in this first sitting. Media and Collective Identity and Regulation were the most popular, followed by Postmodernism and then Online Age (only a small number). A few centres offered candidates a choice across the themes and this worked well in the main, as the themes are so convergent.

### **Media and Collective Identity**

One very strong centre facilitated rich learning where candidates were able to utilise the ideas of Gauntlett on identity along with Judith Butler and a range of others very well in relation to film and magazines (with the exception of Lacan whose ‘mirror stage’ was usually misunderstood). There did tend to be an overwhelming sense of a prepared answer with almost all candidates beginning with ‘Gauntlett says ‘identity is complicated’’) but whilst this may have been dull for the examiner after a while, candidates are not penalised for this approach. Other candidates considered the representation of youth and urban communities in music and other media and answers varied from sensitive and informed negotiations of the nature of subculture in 2010 whilst weaker candidates set up unhelpful and crude binary oppositions and crass generalisations about whole swathes of young people, ironically perhaps. Most pleasing was the ability of some candidates to take highly contemporary examples – eg the music of Dizzee Rascal and discuss them in theoretical contexts such as hegemony, democracy and representation and, again through Gauntlett, negotiated ‘self-help’ gender representation. A key piece of advice for centres is to move candidates away from generalised ideas of how ‘the media’ represent people and ideas and towards more ‘micro’ level discussions of how people give meaning to particular kinds of media in relation to their identities.

### **Postmodern Media**

Stronger answers demonstrated an informed and intelligent understanding of the concept, and supported their answers with well researched case studies. But it seemed that many students had learned by rote some phrases that they repeated ‘parrot fashion’ and this rarely worked. One centre had clearly urged its students to remember the term ‘immersion’ as a feature of postmodernist texts. One candidate must have mis-heard and repeatedly referred to ‘emulsion’. Lyotard and Baudrillard were often referenced (perhaps due to their prominence in the Hodder A2 textbook) and on one level this was impressive but this was accompanied by varying degrees of understanding so centres are encouraged to be more strategic in differentiating the material they work with. The candidates who had understood and engaged with the concepts and the debates surrounding postmodernism had clearly benefited from the course, and offered some very interesting answers.

## **Regulation**

The questions were not always directly answered, and this will be penalised in the marking as adapting understanding to a specific question features in the marking criteria at levels 3 and 4. Equally, candidates need to make connections and synthesise between their case studies and examples of reading, rather than treating things as discrete. There was a strong bias towards film and the BBFC with, sadly, some rather old case studies dominating such as Natural Born Killers and Child's Play which can hardly be relevant in candidates' lives other than as historical examples. However, when games were used for contrast, GTA and PEGI made the answers more contemporary. It is very important that candidates a) get their facts right about case studies and b) contextualise them in theoretical debates, such as the effects debate and notions of protection and the balance of rights and responsibilities for citizens.

Most candidates managed to comply with the obligation to make at least one reference to the past and one prediction for the future and all managed to discuss more than one medium. However, if anything, the past is TOO prominent and centres are reminded that examiners will be expecting the majority of answers in section B to be dealing with media from the last five years, hence 'Contemporary Media Issues'.

Overall this report should be received in the context that most candidates were under-prepared for this examination given its synoptic demands but my primary objective for future sessions 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.