

GCSE

Media Studies

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J526**

OCR Report to Centres June 2014

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This report on the examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

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

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Media Studies (J526)

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B321 Individual Media Portfolio

General comments

This year the majority of centres submitted work of a high standard for this unit, with many examples of excellent practice.

It was pleasing to see a wide range of approaches, topics and texts, which had clearly engaged the candidates and enabled them to demonstrate their understanding of **Media Language** and **Representation**, the two concepts that are tested in this unit.

As always, the best work was seen from centres that selected their topic, texts and production exercises to suit the expertise of the staff and to engage their candidates' interests. It also benefited candidates when they were given a certain amount of autonomy in the selection of the texts for study for the Analytical Assignment. This ensured that the candidates could demonstrate an excellent level of understanding and engagement and produce very impressive portfolios, while meeting the assessment criteria.

Examples of successful tasks are given below, in order to help centres ensure that they make the best choices for their candidates.

Centres are reminded that a minimum of two existing media texts must be studied for the analytical assignment. The element of comparison between the two existing texts is essential for candidates to achieve the higher levels.

Where centres are new to the specification or uncertain, they are advised to use the exemplar tasks suggested in the specification, or in the OCR GCSE Media Studies textbook. Particularly popular topics are Popular Music, Film Genres and Advertising, but moderators saw successful examples in all the available topic areas this year.

The sections of the portfolio

Centres are reminded that three distinct sections are required for the portfolio and that these should be presented in the following order:

- the Analytical Assignment
- the Production Exercise
- the Evaluative Commentary, together with evidence of research and planning material.

Evidence of research and planning

There are still a number of centres that submit little or no evidence of research and planning. The assessment criteria for the Evaluative Commentary on pages 31-32 of the online specification highlight the importance of research and planning as part of the portfolio. The expectation is that evidence of these is provided for the moderator. If research and planning evidence is scanned in and presented as part of a retrospective commentary, it is essential that this is made clear to the moderator and that all details are included.

Key concept areas

Each of the three sections of the portfolio should focus on **Media Language** and **Representation**, the two concept areas that are being tested in this unit. Best practice was demonstrated where there was a coherent approach to the portfolio, which meant that all three tasks were linked and candidates were able to refer back to the analytical task in their evaluation of the production exercise.

Organisation and the recording of marks

The majority of centres submitted portfolios that were well organised and well presented, with clear labelling of each section of the portfolio. However, there were still some centres that sent work that was disorganised and in the wrong order. Moderators should not have to search through a portfolio for the whereabouts of the Production Exercise. Generally it was felt that centres that presented work meticulously tended to be those where they had taken a more rigorous approach to the whole process, resulting in the work being assessed appropriately.

There were still a number of clerical and transcription errors, which held up the moderation process.

Centres are reminded that it is essential that cover sheets are correctly filled in, with candidate numbers and a detailed breakdown of the marks awarded. Marks should be checked, as should transcription from the back of the cover sheet to the front. It is also vital to check that the total mark on the cover sheet matches the mark on the MS1 before sending the work to the moderator.

The topic and tasks must be clearly set out in detail on the cover sheets. In one case, a centre had attempted two topics. This is not advisable, as the 25-30 guided learning hours for this unit only allow for the detailed study of one topic area. Centres are reminded that they must select their topic from the list of options on pages 9-11 of the online specification. Centres are reminded that the use of three sided plastic wallets is not permitted, as this holds up the moderation process (see page 2 of the Controlled Assessment Submission Instructions).

Teacher comments and annotations

Almost all centres included detailed and thorough teacher summative comments on the cover sheets, making the reasons for the allocation of marks clear, and referring to the assessment criteria. They also offered detailed, helpful annotations on the work itself; this made it easier for the moderators to support the marks awarded.

Centres are reminded that it is essential that hard copies of the cover sheets, with detailed summative comments, are sent to the moderator, and it is expected that hard copies of the work, together with detailed teacher annotations, are also sent.

There was some excellent use of original images this year, enabling the candidates to demonstrate their creativity, originality and technical skills. There were only a small number of centres that relied entirely on found images. Centres are strongly advised to avoid this approach, as it makes it harder for candidates to demonstrate creativity, personal engagement and therefore achieve the higher levels.

Assessment

The majority of centres applied the assessment criteria accurately to their candidates' work. There were a small number of adjustments made. Centres are strongly advised to look at exemplar work, on the Professional Development section of the website at <http://cpdhub.ocr.org.uk>.

Where centres marked the comparative Analytical Assignment too generously, this was usually because the work was underdeveloped and lacked a detailed discussion of the ways in which the technical elements constructed particular representations. At the same time, there were a small number of centres that were over-hesitant about rewarding their candidates with high marks, even when the work clearly merited it, and contained impressive independent thought and insight.

The Analytical Assignment

In the Analytical Assignment there was generally a good focus on the ways in which representations are constructed through the analysis of particular technical elements. For the topic of Film Genres this works best when key scenes are analysed, rather than attempting to write about the whole text. This helps candidates to avoid the over-descriptive approach. Similarly, candidates focus better when writing about three or four advertisements in detail, rather than six or more.

There was an increase in the number of centres that offered candidates some element of autonomy in their choice of texts for study and these centres are to be congratulated. The candidates' enthusiasm and engagement were clearly evident in these centres, and learning was particularly well demonstrated.

On the whole media terminology was used accurately and appropriately, but there are still a small number of centres where candidates rarely use technical terms (for example, in relation to camerawork or editing), and this inevitably impedes their analysis.

Effective approaches included those that looked at material from the past and compared it to current representations. These approaches are almost always successful, because they are a good way of highlighting changes in cultural messages and values. They were particularly effective where candidates analysed the technical elements of camerawork, editing, sound and mise-en-scène in detail.

Music videos and advertisements were fruitful areas for discussions of representations, as their brevity helps to ensure that candidates focus on the technical elements. In addition, they often offer explicit traditional or alternative representations of gender, race and class.

The Production Exercise

This section of the portfolios was often a pleasure to moderate, as candidates demonstrated a strong sense of engagement, creativity and individuality in the construction of their own advertisement, film poster, newspaper or CD cover.

The majority of centres had structured their courses carefully so that the Production Exercise was a coherent part of the portfolio, and reinforced their candidates' knowledge and understanding of Media Language and Representation. This was a definite improvement on last year.

The final productions were well supported by thorough research into similar media texts and candidates had been well guided by this. Some of the weaker responses only had tenuous links with the Analytical Assignment and were often vague and undefined. One candidate submitted sketches described as work for a "future undefined genre". Clearly if there is no genre, then candidates cannot hope to achieve as they also struggle with the use of codes and conventions. Centres' support is vital here as candidates need clear advice and guidance on their choice of productions.

The majority of centres are now using original photography, resulting in some very impressive work, which enabled candidates to demonstrate an "excellent sense of creativity and stimulation employed in targeting a specific audience" (page 30 of the online specification). The use of original images for magazine covers or articles, websites and advertisements were among the best responses and resulted in a high standard of presentation and a strong sense of engagement. A number of centres submitted a very successful mixture of original and manipulated found images.

However, there was still concern over the small number of centres that relied entirely on found images. When an original image is used, students are likely to consider framing, shot length/angle, mise-en-scène and cropping. These considerations are often ignored when candidates use found images alone to make print advertisements, CD covers and film posters. Centres are reminded that it is essential that the final production/s are clearly identified for the moderator. In a small number of cases, it was impossible to work out which was the final submission. Centres are asked not to include multiple drafts without comment or annotation. Careful, detailed annotation of drafts and of the final outcome of front covers, film posters, DVD cases and CD covers was a feature in the most successful centres.

The Evaluative Commentary

The Evaluative Commentaries generally demonstrated an improvement, with the best centres ensuring that their candidates wrote about their use of research and analysed the ways in which they had constructed specific representations in their production exercises. The more successful ones were also able to reflect on their research, planning and on the final outcome. The candidates who had completed the research and planning stages with care and precision tended to be the candidates with the more detailed commentaries.

Reflection on the relative success of the production was sometimes very well tackled, but in other instances only touched on very briefly, if at all. Some centres had devised a check-list for their candidates, based on the assessment criteria in the specification (pages 33-34 of the online specification). This offered candidates guidance through this element of the portfolio and led to some thoughtful evaluations, without being too restricting.

PowerPoint style presentations tended to work very effectively, as they enabled candidates to illustrate decisions with screengrabs and annotate and analyse their own work. These presentations also aided a sense of engagement and reflection.

Evidence of research and planning

There was a small number of centres that had only minimal evidence of research and planning, either as separate documents or within the Evaluative Commentaries. In comparison there were excellent centres that had clearly guided their candidates to produce a stage-by-stage account of the whole process. This included a wide range of documents, including considerable research into similar media texts and detailed, annotated work. Several centres produced printscreens and demonstrated a clear development from inception to the final product. Those who submitted thorough, detailed research and planning tended to produce better work through all of the three stages of research and planning, production and evaluation.

Conclusion

There was an excellent variety of analytical and creative work and an improvement in the overall standard in the work seen for this unit. Candidates had engaged well with the texts and the challenging concept of representation. The majority of centres demonstrated good practice in their delivery of the course and ensured that their candidates successfully fulfilled the requirements of the three sections of the portfolio. Centres are to be congratulated for the successful planning, delivery and assessment of this unit.

Summary of best practice

- Work in the portfolio is presented in the correct order.
- Cover sheets are correctly filled in with candidate numbers, topics, texts and titles; a detailed breakdown of the marks awarded; summative comments which refer to the assessment criteria and the specific candidate's achievement.
- There is detailed annotation on the Analytical Assignments, Production Exercises and Evaluative Commentaries, in order to make it clear to the moderator how the marks have been allocated.
- Clear evidence of the research and planning processes is included in the portfolio.
- There are good levels of skill in the production exercise, using original photography and technology.
- Additional information to help support the marks is given in the summative comments on the cover sheets, such as whether the candidate used original photography or found images.

Examples of successful tasks 2014

Topic 1: Documentaries

- Compare the representation of teenagers in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and *Benefits Street*. Produce a magazine advertisement promoting a new documentary that targets teenagers.
- Compare and contrast the techniques used to represent the topic of gun crime in *Bowling for Columbine* and *Dispatches: Gun Nation*. Create two DVD covers that show different representations of one issue.

Topic 2: Film Genres

- Compare how *Forrest Gump* and *The Village* represent learning and physical difficulties. Produce a poster marketing a new film with a positive representation of disability.
- Compare how women are represented in the fantasy film genre and the action adventure film genre, using *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, and *The Iron Giant*. Create an action adventure DVD cover and poster with a woman in the main role.
- Compare how women are represented in *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *The Bourne Identity*. Create two film posters to advertise a new film, showing two different representations of women.
- How is gender represented differently in children's films and teen comedies, using *Beauty and the Beast* and *Kick Ass*? Produce a DVD cover for a new teen comedy.

Topic 3: Popular Music

- Compare the ways in which teenagers are represented in *Teenage Dirtbag* by Wheatus and *Ill Manors* by Plan B. Produce a CD front and back cover for a new artist with a specific representation of teenagers.

- Compare the representation of gender in The Verve's *Bitter Sweet Symphony* and Beyoncé's *Run The World*. Produce a CD cover for a new artist from a genre of your choice with a specific representation of gender.
- Compare the representation of age in *Hurt* by Johnny Cash and *The Suburbs* by Arcade Fire. Produce a CD front and back cover for a new artist with a particular focus on age.

Topic 4: Celebrity

- Compare how Disney ex-stars are represented in the media and how this has affected their transition into adult stars. Produce a magazine front cover and article on a child star.
- Compare the representation of Justin Bieber in still and moving images at different stages of his life. Produce a magazine article on a new youth celebrity.
- Compare the ways in which celebrities by birth are represented differently in documentaries, chat shows and lifestyle magazines. Produce a magazine front cover on a new celebrity by birth.
- Compare the representation of One Direction in the American Media with their representation in the UK media. Produce the home page of a website for a new celebrity.

Topic 5: Sport

- Compare how male and female tennis stars are represented on television and on news websites. Design a web page for a new sports person.
- How have representations of the Paralympics in 2012 changed since the first official Paralympics in 1960? Produce a storyboard for an advertisement for the next Paralympics.

Topic 6: Soap Opera

- Compare the ways in which social and cultural issues are represented in two soap operas. Produce a magazine article for a new soap opera.
- Compare the ways in which working class young people are represented in *Waterloo Road* and *EastEnders*. Produce a magazine front cover and contents page to subvert traditional representations of young people.

Topic 8: News

- Compare the representation of young people in the London riots of 2012 in the *Daily Mail* newspaper and the *Independent* website. Produce a radio news bulletin representing young people in a particular way.
- Compare the representation of the American election debate in Fox News and Al Jazeera English. Produce a magazine article representing a country, city or town in a positive way, using original photography.

Topic 9: Advertising

- Compare the representation of men in three television detergent advertisements. Produce a print advertisement selling detergents to men.
- Discuss the representation of women in a series of cleaning adverts from the 1950s to today. Produce a billboard advertisement advertising a cleaning product.
- Compare and contrast the representation of gender in two television Gillette advertisements. Design a radio, internet or print-based advertising campaign for a new product of your choice.

Topic 10: Video games

- Compare how women are represented in *Tomb Raider* and *Mario Brothers*. Produce the packaging for a new videogame with a female artist.
- Compare the way men and women are represented in *Halo* and *Mirror's Edge*. Create a game box cover challenging traditional representations of gender.

Useful resources

<http://cpdhub.ocr.org.uk> offers: a short filmed introduction to GCSE Media Studies; exemplar material; schemes of work and other training materials.

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse-media-studies-j526-from-2012/>: OCR's home page for GCSE Media Studies

OCR Media Studies for GCSE: Lewis, Rodgers, Morris and Goddard. Hodder (2009): OCR endorsed text book.

<http://social.ocr.org.uk/groups/media-studies>: OCR discussion site for GCSE and A Level Media Studies.

B322 Textual Analysis and Media Studies Topic (Moving Image)

General Comments:

Most candidates allocated their time appropriately over the four questions and answered all four questions.

Question 3 is still often the least developed answer, but this is improving.

The new format to question 4, which required candidates to list the texts and scheduling decisions they are to analyse, meant that fewer candidates failed to cover all three of day, time and channel for 4(a) or two texts for 4(b).

Some candidates gave unnecessary theory rather than answering the question (especially Propp and Todorov in Question 1). There are no marks awarded for use of theory in this examination.

Some candidates lost marks by misapplying terminology rather than answering the question (e.g. using the term 'diegetic soundtrack' when they were referring to the music for Question 2). There are marks awarded for use of terminology in this examination, but this is more significant in the higher mark bands. For those otherwise achieving in the middle mark band, the misuse of terminology is sometimes self-penalising.

Candidates should be advised:

- to clearly note at the bottom of the page if the answer continues on an additional sheet or pages fifteen and sixteen
- to give the question number if they continue on an additional sheet or pages fifteen and sixteen
- never to continue an answer on the page for a different answer (if running out of space they should use additional sheets)
- to hand in their notes to be destroyed by the centre.

The extract is from the opening scenes to the film *Spy Kids*, starting at the point where the mother says, 'her mission was to take him out' to the point where the married couple land in a speedboat. This proved an accessible extract with clear generic conventions – perhaps due to the slight parody, obvious use of media language techniques, and a somewhat unusual, and thus more visible, representational strategy.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This question was answered reasonably well this year. Many candidates were able to identify two conventions.

Better answers picked two elements from the generic repertoire: the mission, the jeopardy, the chase, the underdog heroes and so on. Better answers used appropriate terminology within this context.

A large proportion of weaker answers discussed the spy elements with no sense of the wider genre.

Many simply described the extract - 'there are two spies', for example - signing off with a vague reference to the question such as: 'which makes it an action adventure film'.

Some weaker answers used terminology without establishing conventions - simply stating, for example, that 'there are antagonists' or 'there is a narrative disruption'.

Question 2

This question was answered well. Nearly all candidates understood the meaning of the four media language elements. The majority of responses were able to cite examples using media terminology, especially for camerawork, and many gave two examples for each bullet point.

For soundtrack, many answers commented on the romantic guitar music, the loud music during the helicopter attack, the exaggerated sound effects of the bubble gum popping, the spy glasses, and the ice swan smashing.

For editing, many answers usefully commented on the faster pace of editing as the helicopters arrived, the use of dissolves at the wedding (often wrongly described as 'fades'), the shot-reverse-shots, and the slow motion.

Candidates often struggled to analyse connotative effect for 'eyeline match' and 'match on action', and sometimes struggled with 'shot-reverse-shot'.

CGI was often cited under editing. This was rewarded where this was clearly established as a post-production effect, but weaker candidates might simply cite any event they decided was created by CGI without reference to editing (e.g. 'there were helicopters'). Similarly, some candidates successfully established elements of the soundtrack as a post-production effect.

Many candidates misidentified 'jump cuts' in this sequence. There were two breaks in continuity in this extract, but few candidates spotted these, so the use of the term was nearly always a mistake.

For *mise en scène*, many answers usefully commented on the costumes, the airport setting, the gadgets, the moustache, the wedding setting, and the helicopters.

For camerawork, many answers usefully commented on the tracking shots, the low angle shots, the aerial shot, and the one point of view shot.

Weaker answers failed to give specific examples or failed to analyse connotative effect.

Some weaker answers attempted to describe the overall soundtrack (e.g. 'the music is very fast') or camerawork and editing (e.g. 'the editing is fast-paced', or 'there are a lot of close ups'), and thus failed to give a specific example (e.g. 'the music is fast when the helicopters arrive').

Some weaker answers used the vague term 'non-diegetic sound' instead of a specific example (e.g. 'the music' or 'the sound effect as the glass shatters').

Weaker answers would sometimes attempt to analyse effect in terms of audience effects or generic conventions, rather than examining the meaning of the media technique.

Question 3

Most candidates understood the concept of stereotyping. Many better responses considered gender and nationality, with many answers offering interesting arguments about counter stereotyping.

Weaker answers restricted their analysis to representation in action-adventure films, an approach that often led to repetition of generic conventions from question one. However, where reference was made to unusual gender representation, for example, such answers could reach level three. Thus, a discussion that 'women are usually stereotyped as damsels in distress in action-adventure films', for instance, often moved beyond generic conventions into gender stereotyping.

Nationality raised interesting issues about what counts as 'foreign'. A surprising number of candidates suggested that that anyone not British counted as 'foreign', ignoring the origin of the text. There was also much guesswork as to nationality. Many assumed that Gregorio was 'Italian' because of his moustache and slicked-back hair and that Ingrid was American, or even British.

Some otherwise well-written and insightful answers failed to make any reference at all to stereotypes. Such answers failed to progress above level one unless there was an implicit analysis of stereotyping, which would allow access to level two.

Question 4(a)

Candidates who produced good responses only picked one contemporary scheduling decision for each programme to analyse and did this in detail.

They spent roughly equal time on each of the three; day, time and channel elements (but usually weighted slightly more towards 'channel' than the other two elements).

They took care to link channel ethos and/or target audience to the nature of the programme, without getting bogged down in too much programme detail.

They used terminology accurately – watershed, inheritance, stripping, channel ethos, and PSB, for example.

Candidates with programmes that were scheduled in branded slots (e.g. a 'comedy zone') often scored more highly as they concentrated on explaining the scheduling decision as to day and time, not vague assertions about what audiences might or might not be doing at any particular time on any particular day.

Some candidates still lost marks due to not giving complete scheduling information. Many were vague about the day or the time.

Weaker answers:

- discussed very old programmes
- picked programmes, such as *The Simpsons*, that are not scheduled on specific days
- wasted time discussing the history of the different permutations of one programme on different channels (e.g. *Gavin and Stacey* or *Friends*)
- stated the date of first transmission and not a day.

Nearly all candidates wrote on texts that are clearly comedies, with only occasional reference to texts that are not clearly comedy such as cookery programmes, police dramas or documentaries, *Game of Thrones*, *Countdown*, *Teletubbies*, *CSI*, *Spongebob Squarepants*, *Take Me Out*, *The News* or *EastEnders*.

Question 4(b)

This answer may have been rushed, but nearly all candidates attempted it with some success.

Better answers focused on pleasures and not target audiences. These offered a range of audience pleasures with a wealth of examples.

Commonly cited pleasures were:

- different forms of humour (this only counting as one pleasure)
- familiarity
- the positioning of the audience as superior to the characters
- audiences relating to, or identifying with, the setting, the characters and the narrative
- escapism
- narrative disruption and resolution.

Better answers concentrated on explaining and exemplifying how each pleasure was offered by the text(s). Two or three pleasures for each text usually proved more productive than a long list of pleasures.

Some pleasures are usually more difficult to exemplify. Better answers for 'escapism' and 'familiarity' gave examples to show how the text offers an alternative reality into which the audience was invited to escape, and exemplified the key familiar elements of the text by showing how these were inflected in one or more episodes.

Contrasting programmes - any two from situation comedies, panel or sketch shows, and stand-up comedy - work well as texts for an answer requiring two texts.

B323 Textual Analysis and Media Topic (Print)

General Comments:

Most candidates allocated their time appropriately over the four questions and answered all four questions.

Question 3 is still often the least developed answer, but this is improving.

The new format to question 4, which required candidates to list the texts and scheduling decisions they are to analyse, meant that fewer candidates failed to cover all three of day, time and channel for 4(a) or two texts for 4(b).

Candidates should be advised:

- to clearly note at the bottom of the page if the answer continues on an additional sheet or pages fifteen and sixteen
- to give the question number if they continue on an additional sheet or pages fifteen and sixteen
- never to continue an answer on the page for a different answer (if running out of space they should use additional sheets)
- to hand in their notes to be destroyed by the centre.

The extract for this examination was from the August 2012 edition of *Tatler* magazine - the front cover, two contents pages and the contributors' page. This proved an accessible extract. The fact that the extract was once again a women's magazine did, however, encourage some candidates to conflate the conventions of the women's magazine and the lifestyle magazine, which cost them marks in question one.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question 1

This question was answered well this year. Better answers discussed and exemplified two conventions of the lifestyle magazine genre as a whole, such as: hybridity of contents; the direct address to the audience; the use of a cover model dominating the front page; the sense of addressing the implied audience's lifestyle; the aspirational tone.

Weaker answers discussed the features that made the extract typical of a women's magazine (e.g. 'beauty') or were descriptions of the extract with no reference to conventions.

Question 2

Most candidates understood what is meant by layout, but fewer answers could discuss connotative effect, and some described the style of the overall layout without giving a specific example.

Typography was often answered well. Many better answers discussed the variety of serif and sans serif typefaces used and linked these to connotations such as a mixture of formality and fun. Many candidates analysed the font used for *Tatler*. Weaker answers tended to generalisations, misidentified sans serif and serif fonts, or analysed a page that contained contrasting typography (e.g. the front cover) without specifying which part of the page they were analysing.

Colour, as usual, was effectively analysed. Most answers linked the bright yellow and blue to freshness and summer, the black and red to maturity, masculinity, or seriousness, and the pink lipstick to femininity.

Language use was again well analysed and this was often the strongest part of the answer for question two. Only a few very weak answers failed to give specific example; some, however, limited their quotations to the words 'you' or 'your'. Most answers gave examples of direct address, puns, imperatives, and alliteration, and most could discuss their connotative effect.

Weaker answers would sometimes attempt to analyse effect in terms of audience effects, target audience or generic conventions, rather than examining the meaning of the media technique.

Question 3

The majority of successful answers analysed the stereotypes of femininity used in the magazine and fewer explored stereotypes of masculinity. Some explored norms of heterosexuality and the presence of lesbians. Absences - especially of people with disabilities - were fruitfully linked to discussions of norms of beauty. As usual, answers that adopted a critical stance towards the representations analysed more deeply.

Some otherwise well-written and insightful answers failed to make any reference to stereotypes. Such answers failed to progress above level one unless there was an implicit analysis of stereotyping, which would allow access to level two

Question 4(a)

Candidates who produced good responses only picked one contemporary scheduling decision for each programme to analyse and did this in detail.

They spent roughly equal time on each of the three day; time and channel elements (but usually weighted slightly more towards 'channel' than the other two elements).

They took care to link channel ethos and/or target audience to the nature of the programme, without getting bogged down in too much programme detail. They used terminology accurately – watershed, inheritance, stripping, channel ethos, and PSB, for example.

Candidates with programmes that were scheduled in branded slots (e.g. a 'comedy zone') often scored more highly as they concentrated on explaining the scheduling decision as to day and time, not vague assertions about what audiences might or might not be doing at any particular time on any particular day.

Some candidates still lost marks due to not giving complete scheduling information. Many were vague about the day or the time.

Weaker answers:

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Question 4(b)

This answer may have been rushed, but nearly all candidates attempted it with some success.

Better answers focused on pleasures and not target audiences. These offered a range of audience pleasures with a wealth of examples.

Commonly cited pleasures were:

- different forms of humour (this only counting as one pleasure)
- familiarity
- the positioning of the audience as superior to the characters
- audiences relating to, or identifying with, the setting, the characters and the narrative
- escapism
- narrative disruption and resolution.

Better answers concentrated on explaining and exemplifying how each pleasure was offered by the text(s). Two or three pleasures for each text usually proved more productive than a long list of pleasures.

Some pleasures are usually more difficult to exemplify. Better answers for 'escapism' and 'familiarity' gave examples to show how the text offers an alternative reality into which the audience was invited to escape, and exemplified the key familiar elements of the text by showing how these were inflected in one or more episodes.

Contrasting programmes - any two from situation comedies, panel or sketch shows, and stand-up comedy - work well as texts for an answer requiring two texts.

B324 Production Portfolio in Media Studies

General Comments:

Unit B324 represents 30% of the final GCSE qualification. This unit offers candidates the opportunities to demonstrate their skills in Research and Planning, Production, and Evaluation and their understanding of the key concepts of audience, institution, media language and genre. It is often seen as a synoptic unit bringing together elements first seen in the other units. It is expected that centres will 'play to their strengths' and choose tasks for which they have the resources and expertise to deliver and which also appeal to their candidates. (Ref Spec P15, also P25 4.2.1e)

The 12 set briefs in the Specification were successful in offering a range of viable choices for most centres. Some centres made changes to the briefs in such a way that they became difficult to moderate in terms of the specification assessment criteria. It must be remembered that for Unit B324 centres must follow one of the set briefs as described in the specification (ref Spec P16-17). The briefs offered in this unit are not 'exemplar topics' like those available in Unit B321 and must be followed exactly as they are set out in the specification.

Portfolio Evidence

Where candidates had provided separated sections of their portfolios for 'Research and Planning', and 'Evaluation', they were able to demonstrate that they had met the requirements of the specification clearly. In the best instances they had also provided a contents list with page numbers, which brought discipline to their approach, as well as helping the process of moderation.

Centres need to ensure that candidates **separate** the presentation of 'Research and Planning' from the 'Evaluation' in their candidate portfolios (ref Spec 17-18). These elements occur at different times, and each has its own particular nuances. For instance, audience research would be expected to feature in both Research and Planning, and the Evaluation; however preliminary research and planning work would concentrate on identifying a target audience and their issues; whereas post-production evaluative research would use audience feedback to inform candidate interpretations. The 'Research and Planning' element and the 'Evaluation' element are assessed separately, and each has its own specific assessment criteria (ref Spec Research and Planning P41, also Evaluation P42-43).

In some centres candidates had completed thorough primary audience research as part of their research and planning, using questionnaires, interviews or focus groups. They had collated, processed and interpreted it so as to inform the planning of their own projects. In other cases candidates had confined themselves to secondary research in a theoretical sense, leading more to assumptions rather than convincing conclusions.

Most centres had made use of sensible age appropriate research materials for their candidates. It cannot be over-emphasised that centres must always have proper regard for BBFC and PEGI advisory ratings. Centres must make sure that candidates do not engage with any material designed for those aged 18 and over, such as horror and extreme violence films, violent computer games, magazines (soft core porn) or some types of music videos (language and misogynistic attitudes).

Notable good practice was seen this year in centres where candidates had been instructed to prepare a research summary (in some cases a 'pitch'). The discipline provided by this approach proved useful in informing subsequent planning and improving the quality of the finished production.

There were many instances where centres had encouraged and facilitated candidates in developing relevant technology skills. Candidates had clearly derived satisfaction as they had responded to the set briefs in a variety of creative ways.

There were in some instances a disproportionately high proportion of 'found images' used in print based briefs (up to 100% in some cases). There needs to be sufficient use of original images, their selection, digital processing and export for use in DTP to allow the candidates to demonstrate their achievement as a number of the assessment criteria depend on this (ref Spec P33-34).

Costumes and props was an area where considerable inventive skills had been demonstrated. In some instances centres had allowed candidates the use of suspect items without apparent regard for safety, or evidence of appropriate risk assessments, centres are reminded of the need to ensure age appropriateness of such items..

Centre assessors need to refer to specific pieces of evidence in a candidate's portfolio when completing the Controlled Assessment Cover Sheets (CCS339), making sure they have referred to the appropriate assessment criteria (ref Spec P33-43). For example, to attain the higher mark levels in the Evaluation there is an expectation that candidates will be able to move beyond simple over prescriptive 'question and answer' format determined by their centre and demonstrate analytical skills and a degree of articulate personal reflection.

Some centres had made assessment judgements appropriately, applying the assessment criteria as intended. However a significant majority had inflated the marks submitted, particularly in the Production element with little justification. It would be wise for centres to review the exemplar portfolios on the OCR website in order to better gauge the national standards expected for this unit's specification: <https://www.cpdhub.ocr.org.uk>

Most centres had encouraged their candidates to demonstrate initiative in exploring and presenting their response to a set brief. Candidates who were allowed to do this provided evidence to satisfy the requirements of the assessment criteria. However, some centres persisted in organising their candidates using templates, writing frames, or question and answer formats. There were also centres that allowed drafting of candidate responses that had been marked and handed back for further revision, thus undermining the principles of assessment.

All centres are reminded of the changes in Specification for the 2014 entry. In particular Section 4.2.2 (P.26) makes clear what centres can, or must not do in terms of assisting candidates (for example the ban on using templates, or feedback on drafts).

The portfolio itself needs to be presented in **three sections** for each candidate:

- Research & Planning (plus an optional Appendix)
- Production itself
- Evaluation

The Appendix can contain items such as drafts, research sources, and shared materials.

For 'Research and Planning' and the 'Evaluation' centres are advised to check the specification carefully for the list of criteria that illustrate each of the mark levels for these two different elements (ref Spec P41-43).

Authentication and Group Work

Clear assessor comments / candidate descriptions provide essential background information in the process of assessment, as well as making it easier for the moderator to verify the Centre's submitted marks. In the best instances comments were clear, related to the evidence submitted, the assessment criteria, and importantly were personal to the individual candidate. In other cases comments were either omitted completely, or were mere copies from the assessment criteria and did not advance the moderation process at all.

Centres must be able to authenticate candidates' work. Centres that do not complete the required centre authentication form for this unit (CCS160) will have their results held until the exam board has received the required documentation (ref Spec P43 s4.3.5). Candidates must identify and credit their sources in all cases and not claim found work as their own (ref Spec P26 s4.2.2). There were some instances where centres had permitted that situation to occur. The inclusion of source material in a separated Appendix would be less controversial (ref Spec P17).

The only shared element in this unit is the production itself.

It is important for candidates and centres to identify, where appropriate, the individual's contribution when working in a group. Each candidate is assessed upon their own individual contribution even when working in a group. Centre assessors need to use the Controlled Assessment Cover Sheet (CCS339) boxes to help differentiate an individual's contributions for the moderator (ref Spec P41). If individual contributions aren't outlined it can make it more difficult for a moderator to support centre assessment decisions.

Centres are also reminded that the maximum size for a group is 5. Group sizes any larger than this **are not allowed**.

Evidence of research and planning, as well as the evaluation, should be individual to each candidate. Each candidate needs to present his or her work in a separate portfolio for moderation.

Centres need to instruct candidates clearly about the individuality of their portfolios, AND the need to identify their sources.

This session some centres submitted group portfolios for 'Research and Planning', and/or 'Evaluation'. This is in contravention of the clear instructions in the specification (ref Spec P15-16 and P41-43), and is impossible to moderate. Moderators need to see evidence of all three assessed elements in this unit otherwise they are unable to support centre marks. Centres are reminded that the formats for Evaluation include podcast, therefore oral evidence for Evaluation can be provided if required. However, the assessment criteria remain constant.

Formats for submission

There were some problems for moderators when they were unable to access candidate work because electronic/digital work was not offered in standard formats. Moderators will not have access to all of the many proprietary software formats that candidates may use to create their work, such as QuarkXPress™, Adobe InDesign™ and Microsoft Publisher™. Candidate work needs to be exported to a universal format; for example print magazines should be submitted as PDF documents if submitted electronically. Audio should be playable on a domestic CD player or made available in mp3 format, and video should be playable on a domestic DVD player or if supplied on a DVD-Rom it should be in a standard video file such as *.mpg or *.mov.

This principle also applies to portfolio work as well as production work if submitting work electronically. The variety of word processor packages and various versions of MS PowerPoint and MS Word software require centres to check that their material can be accessed on other computers than their own before submitting. One way of cutting down on problems is to make sure PowerPoint and Word documents are saved in the most compatible file type e.g. the *.doc file type for MS Word – not *.docx. There have been some problems this session with fonts, font sizes and pagination on work supplied to moderators. Some centres have found that using OpenOffice.org is a useful, free way of checking that material will be accessible for moderation. All documents submitted in electronic format MUST be in a standard universally accessible form (there is a list in the specification p59-60).

The best way to offer all digital print material (production and evaluation) is PDF.

It would be good practice when submitting presentations (e.g. PowerPoint, Keynote, Impress), to provide an ancillary copy of the slides in PDF format.

If exotic fonts are really considered necessary, they can always be converted to images (e.g. JPEG) for inclusion in website assignments.

Whereas some Centres had submitted website work on authenticated disks as required, others had attempted submissions for website, or other briefs via URL using a variety of hosting websites, ranging from Centre based ones, to web hosting or template based sites including Weebly, Wix, YouTube and Facebook. Centres are reminded that web based submissions are not allowed for this qualification. This is due to problems of security and online exposure for controlled assessment (unlike coursework requirements).

USB memory sticks are not an acceptable way of submitting work; they are unreliable, affected by heat, knocks, subject to electronic interference, and prone to passing computer malware. DVD disks are easy to prepare, stable, reliable, and also cheaper.

Resources

Resources should be taken to include technology AND expertise. There have been excellent examples where centres have trained their candidates in the choice and use of software prior to its application in an assessment context. However it has also been clear that in some cases, candidates have been left to find out about software with minimal support, and at times their achievement has reflected this.

Centres can obtain further support by consulting the OCR website, where exemplar material and additional advice will be given in due course.

Comments on Set Briefs:

All of the set briefs were attempted by candidates this summer. There was a clear range of work with examples of excellent work including:

- Print magazine extracts where candidates had researched and written personal material for an identified audience, used appropriate original imagery, used appropriate software to manipulate the images, and suitable DTP software to assemble the page layouts.
- Imaginative print advertising campaigns where candidates had demonstrated photographic flair, manipulated the images using appropriate software, and laid out the advertisements using the relevant conventions (for billboards a 40cm x 20cm aspect ratio worked well).

- Music videos that moved beyond simple miming alone, and explored aspects of style and narrative to engage their audience.
- A variety of approaches to the television productions, which included - TV documentary, and children's programme.
- Some film openings showed a creative flair on the part of candidates, and were presented in a variety of genres – subjects included suspense, supernatural, crime, thriller, war and horror.
- Radio work included magazine extracts, which were well produced, and included topics such as general lifestyle, sport, health, celebrity and local events, transfer from primary to secondary school, also there was some scripted radio drama with sound effects.
- It was pleasing to see working websites submitted on disk, with all the individual components appearing in the upload folder. Subjects for the entertainment website included a 'what's on' approach, and regional events focus.
- The cross media brief also gave candidates the opportunity to bring together a number of media as part of a coherent promotion package, including examples of CD covers, websites, posters and video adverts.

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