

GCE

Media Studies

Advanced GCE A2 **H540**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS **H140**

OCR Report to Centres June 2015

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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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G321 Foundation Portfolio in Media

General Issues

Most centres sent work on time, though as in previous series, there were some late submissions. Centres with ten or fewer candidates are reminded that they should not wait for a sample request and should send all work to the moderator by 15 May. Most centres are now putting work online, with central hubs from which all candidates' blogs can be accessed; this practice is essential for moderation to run smoothly. Best practice features the name and candidate numbers of those in the sample on the hub, and each blog featuring the completed construction (e.g. film opening or magazine pages) at the top followed by clearly signposted responses to evaluation questions. Where candidates are working on a group blog, a 'welcome post' seems to work well, allowing them to define their roles in the project. Candidate record forms are best when completed in detail, with reference to both the criteria and individualised comments about the candidates' work. For group work, centres must differentiate between the contributions made by individual members. Centres are asked to use the online version of the cover sheet to avoid potential clerical errors.

Research and Planning

Best practice encouraged an equal measure of research and planning and advised candidates to see this as an ongoing process, representing all continuous stages of the project. Blogposts should not be saved up for the end of the process in order for everything to look 'neat'; a degree of 'messiness' in the process is actually encouraged to demonstrate the reality of the project. The best work is comprehensive and shows strong evidence of candidates reflecting on the process of the production in their blogs, starting with the general and moving in to the particular, focusing on texts which clearly relate to their finished products. The best audience research is that which occurs regularly throughout the process, and uses qualitative methods such as interviews and discussions, rather than the traditional questionnaire. Some research tends to be very teacher-led and therefore does not always link to final products. A degree of independence is needed in order to demonstrate understanding on the part of candidates.

Task building skills, including parodies and re-makes of existing texts, often worked well as part of the process, enabling candidates to overcome common pitfalls and led to much better final pieces.

Print

There was some very effective branding across the three magazine components, with the best work fully embracing the brief.

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

There was insufficient variety in terms of original images in many of the magazines. More variety in terms of costume and background is often required, and, specifically for a contents page, a variety of artists would be expected to feature. This led to many pages containing similar mid-shot or medium close-ups of individuals who were not styled in a way that made them readable as music artists. There were still a large number of candidates who failed to include at least four

of their own images and/or included found images, which is not permitted and often still included far too many apparent snapshots of friends and musicians with little consideration of purpose. In some cases, it was unclear as to the provenance of images. Candidates need to include originals in the planning process and ideally show the stages of development.

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

Centres are reminded that the skills for print work do need to be taught; candidates cannot be expected to arrive on the course knowing how to use the programs and just be left to their own devices. Final productions should be the outcome of a rigorous sequence of activities which develop their skills. Likewise, research needs to involve looking at the contemporary market and not just historical examples of magazines.

Radio

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

Video

As always, there was some outstanding work, with minute detail evident in the planning, with annotated drafts, treatments, risk assessments, call-sheets and different types of storyboard. Strong research featured detailed evidence of a range of opening sequences having been studied appropriately and of conventions of titling having been taken on board. Where the research and planning is weak, the productions do tend to suffer, and again this is an area where teaching can prepare candidates in a systematic and rigorous fashion for the challenge of producing the openings.

As in previous sessions, there was a preponderance of stalker/slasher narratives, but it was refreshing to see a range of other genres mobilised. In many cases, there was good, varied, controlled camerawork and editing. However, in some cases there was little sense of control of the camera, with an over-reliance on zooms and shaky material without tripods.

Sound and lighting still tend to be the most problematic areas, especially sound levels with dialogue. Candidates need to be encouraged to create their own soundscape, combining diegetic and non-diegetic sound to suit their original footage, rather than sourcing an existing well-known track, which is not permitted for this specification. Night shoots are not advised without sophisticated use of lighting. Title screen placement needs to be considered carefully as does the order in which the titles are shown.

Some openings had narratives that felt like the development of a scene from a movie or standalone idea rather than an enigmatic opening built on solid understanding, usually because not enough work on genre research and comparable texts had been done. Some candidates seemed to have been assessed on their knowledge of film language rather than their ability to make an opening.

Evaluation

At the top end, there were some really creative pieces with candidates using a range of approaches to address the questions. The best work came from centres where sufficient time had been allocated to the tasks, rather than seeing them as an afterthought. In many cases it was clear that candidates had considered the seven questions throughout the project, rather than just at the end. In such cases, they were well prepared to fully address the areas under consideration in creative ways. Where Web 2.0 tools are used, centres are advised to consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of them. In some cases, Prezis were used as just glorified essays, with one box per question. Fitness for purpose is essential.

Differentiation within groups in evaluations is essential. All members of a group must contribute to all seven questions or do their own individual sets. In some cases, there had been limited challenge to candidates where they read essays to camera or recorded a podcast of them reading essays. This is not in the spirit of the task and cannot gain high marks.

G322/3 Key Media Concepts

In this we witnessed a positive range of responses to the paper. Candidates rose to the challenges set by the exam questions and produced a wide range of answers. Q1 was a challenging extract on the representation of ethnicity in the TV drama *Treme*. The challenge provided for candidates was the difference in the style of this TV drama to those set in previous years. The sequence produced a variety of responses from candidates in interpretation and analysis of the concept of representation of ethnicity. For Q2 candidates substantially provided good answers making a good argument on the impact of media ownership on distribution and from a variety of valid perspectives in relation to institutions and audiences. There were some great examples of good practice here with many candidates effectively accessing the question and clear indications that centres are becoming more confident in teaching it. The use of media terminology on the whole throughout the paper was also good. Please note that due to the nominal number of entries for G323, there is no comment on the performance of candidates.

Question 1

The extract, *Treme*, was rich in examples and comparisons of ethnicity, so many candidates grasped the comparisons between the lives and culture of the different ethnic groups. Better candidates were able to analyse the construction of the extract in all four technical areas whereas weaker ones did not offer full responses missing out analyses of technical codes. There were varied interpretations of ethnicity in reading of the text, on occasion, 'misinterpretations' of the extract, and the candidates responses were marked on their merits. Candidates are unlikely to have the contextual knowledge to make sense of every element of *Treme*, and in the very first scene, candidates variously identify one of the characters as white, black, Hispanic, Middle Eastern, Mexican, Mediterranean, Korean and mixed race.

A significant issue which emerged was candidates testing the sequence against a preconceived notion of stereotypical representations, which led at times to a reductive and shallow analysis. The best candidates could analyse the sequence by exploring a particular ideological framework and understand how the sequence confirmed or subverted dominant ideology. However, the weaker candidates ended up writing really weak analysis and often an essentially assumptive commentary on ethnicity. More nuanced responses engaged with the representation of the characters and how this told a story of exclusion and segregation. They were able to be more nuanced because they were not trying to put the characters inside or outside a representational box. The discussion of *mise en scène* was a starting point for many candidates and most were able to illustrate the differences between Afro-American culture and its low status and the higher status of the white middle classes of New Orleans. There was plenty of evident contrasts of setting and analysis of this. On the whole candidates were accurate with the identification and use of camera shots and composition – the mostly widely misused term was the term 'establishing shot' used for the master interior shot of the affluent white household.

Sound was addressed well in the extract with much reference made to the diegetic jazz music and the association with Afro-American culture. This was supported by much analysis of how ethnic culture has embedded positive values in this musical form. It was also notable that a number of candidates confused non-diegetic sound with off-screen sound in the opening sequence of the extract. The extract was further challenging due to the dialogue laden text. Nonetheless, many candidates were able to utilise the dialogue as crucial to understanding ethnic differences. Overall, candidates were much more confident in analysing editing techniques. Many recognised the purpose of continuity editing and were able to match the editing to the representation of ethnicity and to the narrative, for example, in terms of pace drawing contrast between the faster cuts on the Davis family tension and the slow smooth edit of the final scene. Editing enabled candidates to compare and contrast the two broad set of ethnic

differences through the use of cross cutting and the juxtaposition of identity. The identification of eye line matches, shot reverse shots and ellipsis all provided the most able candidates opportunities to analyse ethnicity. Even the most basic address of this technical element allowed candidates to say something about editing as a technical feature and the relationship between status and society as being fair/ unfair. Such analysis enabled candidates to describe to a greater or lesser extent the hierarchy of power relations between the communities. There was plenty of evidence of too many candidates misusing the term 'jump cut'. These less achieving candidate responses omitted any discussion of editing.

Question Two

The most successful responses discussed the process of distribution and how ownership affects the success of a product. Ultimately across all media areas candidates argued that media ownership and budgets influenced how successful distribution was for a text. In most cases candidates argued that the larger the budget, the more successful distribution for a media institution. It was recognised by most candidates that digital technology had lessened the cost of distribution compared to its physical formats. It was also recognised that media companies (*sic* conglomerates) invested most heavily in advertising campaigns (as a business model) which guaranteed success. Better candidate's responses focused on the discussion of these texts and the best responses demonstrated encyclopaedic knowledge of the texts and successful distribution practice. This enabled them to provide detailed and sustained arguments supported by excellent case study material. Lesser achieving candidates missed the point about the impact of ownership - either failing to compare different institutional examples or responding with a response which included an 'all I know about' the area studied. Lesser achieving candidates would offer basic and descriptive arguments on the process of distribution. On the whole the candidate's responses were pleasing in response to Q2. At times, there was often confusion between horizontal and vertical integration or just a complete absence of any terminology. Historic case studies were still common and did not achieve the highest level for use of examples.

Film was by far the most popular choice of media area to be addressed. The most popular blockbuster studied included *The Dark Knight Rises*, *Avatar*, *Skyfall*, *Frozen* and *Avengers*. Popular UK productions included *Monsters*, *StreetDance3D*, *Attack*, *The Block* and *Best Marigold Hotel*. *A Field in England* was frequently explored and candidates rightly discussed the films innovative distribution strategy. The least successful candidates failed to address the question set and drew on little knowledge or understanding of the concept of institutional practice. There was plenty of comparison between the US as major film practice and UK smaller independent film making studios such as *Warp* and *Vertigo* films. More able candidates were able to compare the different release patterns and platforms in distribution, with facts and figures used to support their analysis. There was plenty of reference to online platforms being used to distribute and market films (*Netflix*) and the relative success that different films texts had with these. Plenty of candidates made reference to *Kickstarter* as a crowd sourced funding website which offered newer opportunities to fund and distribute film. There still remains reference to outdated case studies particularly of *Working Titles* productions – *Notting Hill* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Reliance upon such examples limits candidate's potential to achieve well on Q2. We would advise centres to retain a focus on contemporary texts when teaching this media area.

Overall some dynamic responses were provided by candidates which would cover a range of relevant points including comment on *Web 2.0.*, *3D cinema*, *viewing online*, *piracy* and the future of online distribution (*crowd sourced movies* and the role of *You Tube*). The best answers set in context the rapid changes taking place in this industry from the traditional ways of distributing film through to the digital formats used today. The better candidates gave an insight into the future challenges the industry faces.

There were some surprisingly good answers, which focused on the music industry and musicians for their case material, with plenty of solid examples used. Candidates made reference to material relating to successful 'alternative' methods of distribution and platforms stimulated by access to the web and portable convergent media technology, for example, in discussion of online technologies to help market and distribute the product. Like film, music lends itself to a useful comparison of the practices of majors and indies. This allows candidates to consider recent technological developments that have affected both types of organisation. The ownership dimension of the question was interpreted in different ways with some candidates successfully constructing arguments about the ownership that a record label had of an artist under a traditional business model and contrasting this with artists who have adopted innovative approaches to distribution of their music via new technologies and innovations such as crowd funding and Amanda Palmer. Successful music case studies included: WB, Sony, Universal, Spotify, iTunes, Tidal, Fool's Gold Records, XL Recordings, Def Jam Records, and Domino. Also artists such as Eminem, Kanye West, Taylor Swift, Justin Bieber, One Direction, Reggie Snow, Ed Sheeran, Radiohead and Beyoncé, and a particularly outstanding case study on the band London Grammar.

There appeared to be some good response to the nature of distribution of newspapers and magazines. Many candidates focussed on how traditional print versions were in decline, but there remained a place for the print formats. The most ill-conceived responses argued that magazines, like newspapers were simply being replaced by online versions. There was plenty to like about the way in which distribution was key to any subscription service on line and how magazines incentivised the audience to subscribe to online and print copies, thus forming a symbiotic relationship, for example NME. Popular magazines included: Kerrang!, Vice, Cosmopolitan, Men's Health, GQ, Empire, Edition, Vogue, Grazia. There was plenty of reference to <http://www.clashmusic.com/> as an example of newer online publications that were succeeding. Most able candidates not only explored the need for print publications to go online but examined successfully marketing strategies and the global outlook of the top publishers across national boundaries, provided by digital platforms. Case studies for news included: The Guardian, The Times, The Sun and an excellent case study using The Huffington Post. Many candidates who produced good responses argued that distribution of traditional print newspapers relied upon successful marketing strategies and online technologies particularly Twitter as a source of instant gratification on mobile and convergent and interactive technologies.

Radio included the study of BBC, Wire FM, Heart, Kent FM and a comparison between local radio on Jersey. The ability to distribute the product focused on the type of radio show and how this was promoted to the audience. The most dynamic responses examined how the radio stations would brand the show and use marketing and cross media promotion to increase the success of the station. For commercial independent radio stations this was important in order to guarantee the necessary advertising; and for free to air broadcast such as BBC radio the need to sustain a wide audience base. The appeal and distribution of the radio show was dependent, most candidates argued, on how well the station marketed itself alongside the need to incorporate digital online media and audience participation.

There appeared to be an increase in the number of candidates who responded to the area of video games. Popular examples included: Rockstar, Grand Theft Auto, Red Dead Redemption, Sims, Wii, Assassin's Creed, Call of Duty and EA Fifa. Good candidate responses examined how the distribution of the game was reliant upon its marketing and ability to distribute its own products amongst gaming fans, either through traditional game stores or games consoles, for example Activision and the use of PS3 or the Xbox . The best responses were able to argue that major gaming companies would tie in synergistic value to the game through soundtrack or movie tie-ins. There were also some good accounts of how small gaming apps such as Candy Crush Saga and Angry Birds offered opportunities for independent developers to distribute the product amongst a digital audience through the Apple store. The most basic responses would include a description of the game which determined that its popularity was due to audience demand rather than distribution strategies.

G324 Advanced Portfolio in Media

General Comments

Once again, moderators were privileged to see some highly impressive and exciting work, both in relation to the understanding exhibited and in terms of candidates' highly creative use of a range of sophisticated technology. Many candidates are clearly destined for successful careers in the creative industries.

Administration and presentation of work for moderation

After many years of delivering this component most centres are fully familiar with the requirements of both the specifications and the submission of work for moderation. Most centres' presentation of work was excellent, with the majority of MS1s and CCS160s being received on or before the deadline, but it was extremely surprising to have so many issues with the administration procedures of a significant minority of centres this session. There were a significant number of clerical errors, many of which could have been avoided by the use of the interactive coversheet. Some centres used old coversheets; others did not include candidate numbers or indicate group membership on the coversheets. Many continue to handwrite their sheets, which is acceptable but which sometimes caused difficulties for the moderator in deciphering blog and email addresses when a cursive script was used; some addresses were entered incorrectly which required moderators to contact teaching staff or do an internet search to find the correct blog.

Some centres sent work via couriers that needed moderators to be in and ready to sign. This method of dispatch is not really appropriate; others sent the work by Royal Mail but with insufficient postage. Quite a sizeable minority were late sending work.

In terms of the format of submissions, there were a couple of instances of work being submitted in a paper-based format, which is not allowable under this digital Specification. Some work was submitted on pen-drives and external hard drives which are not acceptable formats for submission. There was also an increase in the number of centres that sent their video work on data DVD or via Google Docs or using another format that required them to be downloaded; this tended to be inconvenient at best – but it is also inappropriate to expect moderators to download any material onto their computers. Most centres used blog hubs to present candidates' work, which is excellent practice; not only does a blog hub greatly aid the moderation process in terms of making all work easily accessible from the same place but it is a real benefit to centres in terms of monitoring candidates' progress throughout the component and negating the need for teachers to maintain a list of individual blog addresses. The best hubs also indicated candidates who worked together throughout the component, being clearly grouped on the hub and including candidate *numbers* as well as candidate names. Access to blogs was generally problem-free, although in a few cases centres had used password-protection for the entire hub which made it impossible to moderate without contacting the centre. In several cases, candidates had locked or removed material from their blogs prior to moderation. The use of websites, created using services such as Wix and Weebly, was also common this session. Some of the exemplar material inspired this approach so the increase in this form of presentation is understandable. It does create some benefits to moderation, mostly because candidates appear to have put more thought into organising access to finished products. However, the loss of chronological ordering is a concern as many web pages appear to be constructed late in the process, eroding the sense of the process and the documentation of idea development. To be fair, though, this is also true of those candidates who use a blogging platform but who choose a template which does not provide access to tags, categories or a dated archive. Whatever platform is chosen, it is essential that candidates label work for each element (Research and planning, Construction and

Evaluation), so that moderators are not hunting for the work. Centres have a choice of blogging platform: Blogger is the most popular (and the most comfortable to moderate), closely followed by Wordpress. Candidates who used Tumblr were less successful in evidencing everything they needed to for higher marks. Centre VLEs were a little more user friendly than in previous years.

Centre comments on the best coursework coversheets included detailed, bespoke comments which made clear reference to assessment criteria with clear exemplification from student work; this is excellent practice which made it easy for the moderator to establish how the marking criteria had been applied (and generally led to more accurate marking by the centre). Some comments, though, were less helpful, being either very brief or just copied and pasted from the level criteria without explanation of exactly how the candidates' work met the selected criteria. As with last year, in a few cases, comments on coversheets did not seem to match the quality of the work seen (for example, work being described by the centre as being 'minimal' and yet being given a level 3 mark); such marking usually seemed to indicate that external standardisation materials had not been accessed. Again, with group submissions there was a small number of centres which just entered comments on the coversheet of one candidate in the group and then on the other group members' work referred the moderator to the one completed sheet (or just duplicated comments and marks which made it equally difficult to discern individual contributions). This is extremely unhelpful as it doesn't include any reference to individual contributions to the group work.

In terms of assessment, a significant number of centres had clearly been accessing exemplar material and, whilst adjustments seemed as likely as ever, it was usually by a smaller margin and often a result of slight over-generosity in a number of elements. The construction element remained the most common area of over-rewarding. Work in the lower mark ranges tended to be there because candidates had not completed all of the work, rather than their productions being of a very low standard. However, quite a few centres seemed to have over marked at the top of the mark range, giving marks in the 90s for work which was solid Level 4 but no more.

It was pleasing to see a range of presentational tools and platforms being used by candidates to present their work. Most video work was hosted on either YouTube or Vimeo, which made access straightforward (although videos were sometimes uploaded at very low resolution which did not present the candidates' work at its best; likewise some soundtracks were quite low quality, possibly due to centres using YouTube converter to acquire the track). Many candidates also used Prezi for showcasing research/ planning and evaluation answers. This was quite effective as a research/ planning tool, although sometimes less so as a method of evaluation, with some presentations being quite superficial. Other presentation packages used included Pinterest, Animoto, PowToon, Scribd, Slideshare and Pixlr. These were often used effectively by candidates, where they were deployed appropriately, although sometimes it seemed they had been used for the sake of doing so rather than as an integral part of the blogging process. Voki was used by quite a few candidates; this is a less effective platform, considering the limitations of the Vokis themselves – some candidates submitted posts which included up to 10 Vokis, which tended to be quite unwieldy and did not seem to add anything to the process of research or planning. In some cases, particularly where Slideshare or Storyboard That! were used, work was sometimes quite superficial – it is suggested that a slightly more considered approach be used in order to make sure that the platforms used for presentation are appropriate to the work being undertaken and allow for sufficient sophistication of expression and coverage.

Research and planning

Detailed and effective research and planning is the key to successful constructions, evaluations, and the best presentation of Research and Planning was in the form of chronologically organised blogs. Some centres had created websites organised by element, but these tended to present research and planning after the fact – a description of what had been done rather than an actual plan – and didn't record the process of revisions/redrafts/mistakes. These tended to be

over marked. In a few cases it was very pleasing to see where teachers had used the comments sections of blog posts to engage in constructive dialogue with students – it provided valuable insight into how well the centre supported its candidates.

There was evidence of some detailed analysis of existing media texts relevant to the main task production but this level of research was lacking in a significant number of centres' work with regard to the ancillary texts. In the best research there was a clear balance between analysing how meaning is created in existing media and establishing the relevant technical codes and conventions of the selected genre. The latter is extremely important for candidates in providing a focus for the planning and construction phases of their work to ensure their productions compare favourably with professional media texts.

Best practice indicated detailed research into a potential target audience but this was notably absent from a large number of centres' work; not only is this important in terms of the requirements of the assessment criteria but it is also conventional practice of media organisations to ensure that the texts produced are appropriate for, appeal to, and sustain the interest of the selected audience.

Where detailed research into both existing media and a potential target audience was conducted it was clear to see how this influenced candidates' planning and construction, resulting in productions which demonstrated excellent understanding of generic codes and conventions and were entirely appropriate for the target audience. In some cases blogs were not balanced, with either too much research or general theory compared to planning (for example, regurgitation of Goodwin without application) or a lack of research which provided little foundation for planning, leading to production work which lacked verisimilitude. In some cases, centres appeared to have been over-prescriptive in their approach (for example, all candidates researching the same music videos), which led to blogs lacking a sense of independence. Detailed textual analysis is vital, but candidates should be analysing the form in which they are working, not just the genre; this is the best way to gain a clear understanding of how to construct their own text. Some centres still submitted research in PowerPoint form burned to discs that included numerous links to the internet – it was unclear why the work wasn't just on the internet in the first place. There were some good examples of early video production work to practice skills and inform research, for example, at one centre they made music genre documentaries as a research task and at other centres there were early lip-synching and 'sweding' tasks.

Planning of main task productions was generally thorough, although storyboards continue to be a weak area for some centres as these tended to be extremely brief or even clearly completed after the production had been filmed or edited. Some blogs seemed to be fulfilling a 'tick sheet' of criteria but candidates showed little development of the basic activity; for example, there were often location shots with no comment on them or evidence of understanding why location shots were needed, or a generic risk assessment would be included without any individualised thinking through of real potential issues with their production plans.

Planning of ancillary texts, however, continues to be an area that needs addressing by a large number of centres. Not only is it important that all texts are planned thoroughly but it is also important that this planning is taken into account when allocating marks. It is not acceptable to base the mark for research and planning purely on candidates' work for the main task.

A number of centres submitted group blogs and, in some cases, this led to problems with the allocation of marks for Research and Planning. The specification clearly requires each individual candidate to conduct research and planning, yet in some cases research and planning on a group blog appeared to have been posted by only one or two candidates in a group. Where group blogs are produced the centre must ensure that comments on the coursework coversheets refer in some detail to individual candidates' contributions to the group work throughout all stages of the component. This is also true of the Construction and Evaluation components. In the best cases, tags were used well to highlight individual work (which was

usually very detailed) and where group posts had been made, the individual contribution of each group member was clear (for example, comments on storyboards, reflections of shooting sessions etc.).

Construction work

Moving image remained the dominant medium of choice, with the music and film promotion briefs continue to be the most popular with centres, followed by short films and TV documentary extracts. Fewer centres allowed free choice in tasks, although when they did it tended to impact negatively on success. The vast majority of centres submitted appropriate work for the selected briefs, but a small number of centres do need to revisit the Specification to ensure they accurately identify the requirements particularly with regard to the ancillary texts. For example the music promotion brief requires the production of materials for a new album, not a single or EP; and a magazine advertisement to promote the digipak, not a poster or an advertisement for a tour.

The most common type of music video submitted consisted of narrative and performance. The best work used a great variety of shots; for example, using numerous camera set ups to film the performance aspect of the video, which enabled appropriate pace to be created in the edit. However some work would have benefitted from greater consideration of the filming of the performance aspect. It was also clear in some work that more focused research into the codes and conventions of music videos of the genre of music candidates had selected for their production would have greatly helped in ensuring their completed production was appropriate for the genre and audience expectations. Some music videos were seen which were close to professional in standard, with candidates clearly having taken a substantial – and appropriate - amount of time during planning and rehearsal. This was particularly the case with performance videos, which were often very strong, although this depended upon careful organisation and effective editing as well as care taken with lighting, location and mise-en-scene. Some videos had very strong concepts at their core, which made them eminently re-watchable. Less successful music videos tended to demonstrate issues which have been outlined in previous reports: over-long takes, wobbly shots (tripods are essential!), poor synching, editing which did not match the rhythm of the song, content which did not match generic expectation, repetitive structure or a lack of thought in terms of mise-en-scene, weak lighting etc. Perversely, as more centres are using DSLR cameras for their whole videos, which should mean work can look far more sophisticated and controlled, frequently it actually results in issues of focus, stability – and sound and this has meant that the quality of work has suffered. Low light has also presented some issues, particularly with centres focusing on the horror genre. Candidates have obviously struggled to control light and this has impacted on the resolution of the image. In general, these issues had been reflected in the comments and marking, although some centres overmarked such work. Using phones for filming should be avoided. Whilst there was some outstanding original, creative and aesthetically pleasing work for this brief, there was sometimes a lack of originality: with music videos, there is a range of influences to be seen but many replicate Arctic Monkeys narrative-based videos and Florence and the Machine's abstract style. Several moderators commented they had seen too many videos of candidates dancing in the woods with animal masks on. In terms of choice of track, centres should consider using the radio edit to create work rather more suitable for public examination.

The digipak was the most common ancillary text produced by candidates following this brief and it was concerning that so many productions showed little understanding of the genre; and, again, this is clearly due to inappropriate research being conducted. The Digipak is a specific genre of text with its own defining codes and conventions, such as the minimum number of panels and the orientation of panels; and is also not the same dimensions of a CD Jewel case which is what a number of centres submitted. Some centres, though, have clearly worked hard to develop this aspect of their submission and there were some excellent examples of the genre, which showed detailed thought at the planning stage as to how the text would work as a whole when folded.

One centre seen asked candidates to actually make up the digipak and then filmed it or photographed it to show how it would work when fully assembled which was an excellent idea as candidates could show their creativity and technical production skills to excellent effect.

Film trailers produced tended to be for the thriller or horror genres, although there were also Urban Teen Dramas as well as less successful Romantic Comedies. The strongest productions clearly showed excellent understanding of the genre in terms of creating appropriate pace and also hinting at the exposition of narrative. It was disappointing to see so many trailers that just followed the narrative order of the film. A great variety of shots used also greatly assisted in the editing process to produce effective pace; limited variety tended to lead to overlong and pedestrian trailers. Careful consideration of the use of the diegetic dialogue would also improve many productions. Use of intertitles was quite effective, although closer attention to spelling would have helped in some work. The use of the American rating card at the beginning of trailers was inappropriate. It is easy enough to use the BBFC rating card and also for candidates to create their own production company and logo rather than using those of existing organisations. Trailers were generally less successful than music videos. Many city-based centres produced 'urban' or gang related film work, but this was often very clichéd, almost on verge of stereotype or parody at times.

There were some very effective and creative short films seen by moderators but there was a significant number that would have benefitted from greater attention to detail when planning the narrative, as some appeared to be extended openings of films rather than a complete narrative. A large number of centres allowed candidates to double or even triple the recommended durations and such pieces were usually much weaker than they would have been had they been more rigorous in the editing process, cutting them down to the required length. A particularly effective psychological thriller was seen, which utilised a range of camera techniques to build tension and develop intrigue alongside a minimalist soundtrack, demonstrating an exceptional level of confidence from the director. However, in many cases candidates seemed to misunderstand what it was they were creating.

Documentary productions generally demonstrated effective understanding of the genre but many would have benefitted from use of more interviews and especially the use of cutaways. Centres undertaking this brief should also note the required production is an extract from a TV documentary not a complete 5 minute documentary. Some centres submitted 'mockumentaries' which should be avoided in future submissions as these tended to be extremely weak and showed little regard for the codes and conventions of the documentary genre; many also tended to be somewhat self-indulgent, lacking the levels of humour or insight which the genre requires. In some cases, documentaries relied too much on huge amounts of archive material (for example, one piece focused on the rise of "Let's Play"-type videos on YouTube for which half the 6-minute running time consisted of clips downloaded from the internet), whilst others simply strung together a series of talking heads with little structure or focus. Often, research into the form focused on documentary films (such as *Supersize Me*) rather than TV documentaries, demonstrating a lack of understanding of the brief. The best pieces had a clear focus, such as aging, body-image, perceptions of Islam some candidates explored some personal and meaningful issues such as Kosovo.) and explored these in a thoughtful and structured way, clearly inspired by the conventions of products such as *Dispatches* and aimed at a defined target audience. Weaker offerings lacked structure, relying on long takes (for example, a piece on wrestling which involved long uncut sections from a fight shot from one angle) or, as discussed above, on found footage.

Print products were generally effectively realised. The majority of centres had used either Photoshop or InDesign, with outcomes being appropriately strong, although it appeared that some were still using Publisher (or even Word or PowerPoint!), with results that looked understandably amateurish. The majority of print products matched industry conventions in terms of forms, conventions and content, which demonstrated that research had been used well; although in some cases candidates had not really followed the form of the product (for example,

the dimensions of digipaks were sometimes quite strange with quite a few being seen which only had two panels). A few regional magazines were seen and some were very good; however, although in general submissions for this brief demonstrated effective design skills, they did not always accurately reflect the conventions of such products and it appeared that research had focused more on the broader range of commercial magazines rather than the specifics of the brief. Some double-page spreads demonstrated more limited design skills, with at least one offering a single block of text rather than the conventional columns. There continued to be some fairly weak local newspapers. There were some excellent examples of film posters and magazine covers produced which combined effective photography with appropriate text. However some centres do need to pay closer attention to the choice of fonts, font size and layout of text. Again more focused research would have helped in this respect, as would more thorough planning. Magazine covers sometimes used found images from existing films, which is not allowed under this Specification; the best covers created images from 'new' films, set up by the candidates themselves or sometimes taken on the film sets of classmates. Some candidates who used *Little White Lies* as a model for the magazine cover were disadvantaged since this magazine is not really indicative of the codes and conventions of commercial products and did not allow candidates to demonstrate a full range of print production skills outlined in the assessment objectives. Few effective TV Listings magazine pages were seen; some candidates simply copied the bulk of the content from existing images. Similarly, adverts for documentaries were generally less effective; those using the Channel 4 model tended to be particularly limited in scope. The best print work was supported by detailed research into the chosen forms. In most cases, print work was accurately appraised by centres. As noted above, it was very disappointing to see so many candidates using found images in the production of their ancillary texts. Centres are reminded of the requirement for print material to be original, produced by the candidates themselves. The use of subsidiary photographs on magazine front covers and websites, for example, of professional music artists or existing film posters or stills from films is not permitted and where candidates do use such images this must be reflected in the centre's comments and the marks allocated. The poster ancillaries for the local newspaper and regional magazine briefs were rarely successful.

There was a small amount of radio work, some of which was excellent with well-balanced voice, FX and music, with a real sense of space; well-written scripts, demonstrating an understanding of the conventions and a sense of drama; and some good performances (really vital in radio drama).

The few websites were again generally less successful, implying that research and planning of these had not been effectively undertaken. Wix was used most frequently – sometimes with great success (when candidates had taken control of the platform and produced highly individual tailored work); in many cases, however, there was an over-reliance on Wix templates and/or pages lacked content or depth (for example, contact pages which were simply forms, home pages which simply contained links to other pages). Quite often, there was not a clear link between the site and the main product (for example, a site promoting an issue of a magazine which did not include either the cover of that issue (or any issue) or highlight the contents of the magazine itself).

There were a few submission to the games brief and these were proficient. It remains surprising that this is not undertaken by more candidates.

A substantial number of group ancillaries did not have input from entire group; many of the strongest group productions had individually-produced ancillaries.

Evaluations

Evaluations were the most disappointing aspect of this session, as it would seem a large number of centres had not responded to issues raised in previous centre reports or Principal Moderator's

reports. There seemed to be an increase in the number of responses which were just essays posted directly onto blogs, Weebly, Google Docs, Scribd, PowerPoint or Prezi. This is not good use of the chosen form of ICT and is not in the spirit of the Specification. Some did have illustration, using still images, but were still just illustrated essays. Candidates appear to have been given the task of producing essay responses to the four set questions in order to minimise the time required to produce work. Inevitably this has an impact on their achievement; whilst centres were able to assess work produced accurately, it was clear from other elements that candidates could have achieved more highly - essay-based responses have a limiting factor on candidates' marks, as this method doesn't show even a proficient level of skill in the use of digital technology or ICT; or in the choice of form to present the evaluation. On the other hand, many moderators noted, 'many used Voki, speaking avatars that last only a few minutes, so in some cases they had several of these tiny videos reading out a few sections of an essay at a time. It was pointless'.

The best centres, though, have fully embraced the digital aspect of this component, encouraging candidates to use different presentation methods for each of the four evaluation responses, which is excellent practice; there were some extremely creative and detailed responses seen by moderators. The use of video, though, continues to be a weakness in much work, as far too often moderators saw videos of candidates filming themselves simply reading out a written response to an evaluation question with no other illustrative content; talking heads should be avoided. It would be very simple for candidates to use their recording as a voiceover simply illustrated with stills or clips from their production work to illustrate points being made.

It seemed a trend for some centres to be relying on one form for all 4 responses; however, centres are advised to consider giving candidates a list of different presentation methods which they could choose from to present their evaluation responses, so making candidates aware of the breadth of creative technology available to them. Centres should then advise candidates to maximise the creative potential of each method, such as uploading video, audio and images to Prezi, for example.

The specification requires individual candidates to respond to all four evaluation questions. In some cases where group evaluations were submitted each candidate in a group had provided a response to only one question. This does not meet the requirements and, as such, each candidate had a substantially incomplete evaluation, which limited their mark to low level 1 for this aspect of their portfolio. Where group evaluations are submitted, the centre must ensure that each candidate in the group contributes to each of the four responses and their contributions are clearly signposted in the assessment comments on the coversheet. As has been said in previous sessions, group filmed evaluations often don't make it clear who is who; captioning would help moderation greatly. One moderator said they saw 'creative evaluations where students were being interviewed or doing it in the style of 'Big Brother''.

There is clearly a close relationship between the quality of research and the quality of evaluations so, where a candidate has not completed research effectively, they seem to struggle with the evaluation component.

Questions 1 and 2 were generally answered most effectively, with some excellent analysis and comparison being evident in many responses. Video and Prezi were quite often used for these, with the very best candidates exploring all three products created in depth, offering reflection linked to work done during research and planning and comparing this with the final pieces, using the platform to integrate audio and video as well as image and text. Some exhaustive examples were offered which were fully deserving of the top-level marks given. Some candidates chose to submit answers to Q2 as audio only, which was not a suitable format in which to evaluate visual products. The best question 3 answers balanced primary research, often "vox-pops" or interviews, with detailed and cogent responses from candidates clearly analysing the results and considering their implications. Some very successful answers explored the entire process of production, with candidates reflecting on how they had used feedback during as well as after

completion of their work. Again, links were made with both research and planning as well as the three production tasks. The weakest answers simply presented audience response without any real commentary, either in terms of raw focus-group videos or information garnered from sources such as SurveyMonkey; in these cases it was impossible to see what had been learned. It was particularly frustrating to see raw graphs and quotations from focus groups presented with no context or discussion, since this suggested a misunderstanding of the question on a fundamental level. Question 4 was again often the least detailed answer, with a number of candidates simply presenting a list of technologies used, with little commentary or reflection. The best answers linked clearly to research, planning and production, with detailed reflection and consideration.

Conclusion

Finally, it is worth reiterating that there was, once again, a substantial amount of outstanding production work produced for this unit, demonstrating superb control of professional level software combined with extremely high levels of creativity. We saw the work of some powerful and independent creative voices as well as superb production teams coordinating complex plans. This work was underpinned by sophisticated understanding of critical theories, industrial processes and audiences. Centres and candidates recognise the enormous value of this and cherish the learning it engenders.

G325 Critical Perspectives in Media

General Comments

In general, the performance of candidates was in keeping with the previous year, with question 1b eliciting relatively strong responses, centres appearing to have prepared candidates well to utilise theories of narrative in the analysis of one of their own productions.

The use of contemporary media examples and, where applicable, recently developed critical theory or media appears to be increasing with each session, with many candidates able to demonstrate personal engagement with their own mediated citizenship through theoretical approaches encountered on their course.

Avoidable shortcomings in otherwise proficient answers remain – these are described below.

Exam technique is apparently the subject of increasing preparatory attention, with many candidates answering section B first, in order to minimise the loss of marks if time management is an impediment. At the same time, less candidates offered brief or incomplete responses than has been the case in the past.

Comments on Individual Questions

1a Stronger responses devoted equal time to AS and A2 productions (and other media production work if applicable) and clearly signposted progress over time throughout the answer. The distinction between general research and planning, production techniques and / or use of audience feedback and the strategic adoption or subversion of media conventions was the key distinguishing feature of level 4 answers. Top level answers also featured a range of specific textual examples at the 'micro' level rather than broad genre traits or the more obvious end of the scale of audience expectations. The strongest answers drew conclusions from carefully-chosen examples from real media texts and explained how these informed decisions made. Many candidates chose to point out the value of real media texts but failed to explain examples in any detail. Most candidates provided evidence of the progression from AS to Advanced but tended to be restricted to an acknowledgement that progression had taken place in for the majority, bolted onto the end of the response without any further elaboration.

1b Most candidates wrote about a Year 13 production and were able to relate a range of mainstream theorists' work to the practical piece. Many candidates systematically applied the classic narrative theories very well to one of their texts – Propp, Todorov, Barthes, Levi Strauss, Bordwell and Thompson. Where candidates attempted to relate genre or representation to the answer, some managed this by locating the text in question at the intersection between overlapping theoretical ideas (eg Mulvey, whose formative essay fuses the male gaze with narrative pleasure), whilst weaker answers appeared to be answering another question. A key point of distinction, eternally recurring, is between answers which deal with the theoretical concept as a production technique, using first person or accounts of collective decisions and those which adopt a critical vantage point on the text as site of theoretical analysis. To restate, 1a is about the candidates' decision making and progress, 1b is about the finished work, to be analysed in the same way candidates would deconstruct other media texts during their studies.

Section B: Collective identity, contemporary media regulation, media in the online age and postmodern media were the most popular themes. We media and democracy was more popular this session but global media remains a minority choice. For all themes, level 4 answers were contemporary in flavour – but note applying classic media theories to current examples is a perfectly valid approach.

Contemporary media regulation was the subject of far more current case studies than in the past, this was very pleasing – Leveson, copyright law, social media test cases and the use of ‘big data’ rubbing shoulders with Jamie Bulger and the (in)famous *Straw Dogs* edit. Stronger responses discussed the difficulties in regulating the internet and were able to incorporate ideas of freedom of speech, hegemony, we media and self-regulation into their argument with clear connections made to the difficulties faced by the BBFC, OFCOM, the PCC and ASA as a result.

Global media was chosen by a very small number of candidates, with the strongest of these carefully weighing up the arguments and utilising contrasting examples to support arguments. Some of the most personally engaged work is in response to this topic, in particular from centres outside of the UK.

Media and collective identity was by far the most popular topic with youth, gender and British Muslims dominating answers. The best answers were able to discuss and apply concepts such as mediation, stereotyping, gatekeeping, construction, masculinity and femininity. A number of candidates referred to hegemony but a few found it difficult to articulate the theory and so their argument became convoluted and difficult to follow. For youth, *Quadrophenia* was the most popular historical example and *Fish Tank* the contemporary example. Weaker candidates tended to describe scenes and state that this is a negative representation, stronger candidates were able to discuss the nuances of the films, offering a far more complex discussion of media construction of collective identity. Whilst some candidates over-relied on two contrasting or historically distanced texts, others were trying to work with too many and subsequently the scramble to include all of the texts studied meant that academic theory was overlooked and arguments were not fully explored, so there is a balance to strike for this topic.

Postmodern media was once again theoretically well judged by many candidates, with Lyotard, Baudrillard and Jameson often well handled, but the emerging canon of applicable texts gathers more pace, led by *Family Guy*, *Tarantino* and *Lady Gaga*, but joined this time by *Black Mirror*. At times candidates were at pains to demonstrate their knowledge of theorists, but often at the expense of applying these theories to detailed case studies. Overall, and pleasingly since at first glance this option might appear the most challenging, examiners reported again that candidates nearly always discussed a good range of cross media texts, and incorporated this into discussion of theories and theorists.

For **media in the online age**, the use of academic theory (e.g. Gauntlett) and critical voice to assess the various debates about winners and losers / societal issues was markedly more evident, with less candidates taking the opportunity to tell examiners about the benefits of MP3 and, in the words of one candidate ‘the good thing about websites’.

We Media and democracy answers were well blended with aspects of the online age theme, an approach teachers have been encouraged to take through this report and at the annual OCR conference. The strongest responses offered debate around conflicting theories as to whether the web can be democratic or not given the way in which it is used for different purposes by citizens and those ‘in control’. Strong responses developed this by using case studies to focus an argument exploring contrasting theories (eg Shirky and Morozov) regarding whether the web is utopian or dystopian and that ‘we media’ is carefully controlled by those in control to ensure we feel it is democratic when perhaps it is not.

General advice for section B is consistent with previous sessions – answers should be balanced, academically informed, current and forward thinking and, wherever possible, a sense of candidates’ reflecting on their own media culture should emerge in their writing.

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