

GCSE

Media Studies

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J526**

OCR Report to Centres June 2016

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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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B321 Individual Media Portfolio

General Comments

There was a pleasing increase this year in the number of centres which demonstrated good practice in this controlled assessment unit, enabling their candidates to access the assessment criteria through well-structured courses. Work overall was of a very good standard. There were many examples of creative approaches taken by centres, with the majority of centres including good evidence of research and planning, together with original images in the Production Exercise.

The majority of the work sampled by moderators demonstrated the candidates' high level of engagement 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. This year there were many more centres giving their candidates a degree 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 to 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. They are also reminded that the element of comparison between the two existing texts is essential for candidates to achieve the higher levels.

Whilst the topics are set by the exam board and must be adhered to, centres are able to devise their own tasks for the comparative analytical assignment and for the production exercise. Centres are also able to use the exemplar tasks suggested in the specification, at the end of this report, or in the OCR GCSE Media Studies textbook. Popular and successful topics this year were Advertising, Popular Music and Film Genres. An increasing number of candidates had studied Video Games, with varying results, as some candidates tended to offer character studies or explain character skills, without analysing the ways in which Media Language had constructed representations for this topic.

Most centres ensured that the portfolio as a whole presented a coherent unit, with the same area of representation focused on in both the Analytical Assignment and in the Production Exercise. This approach often produced impressive work, and facilitated the candidates' writing of the Evaluative Commentaries. However, there were also a number of centres where different representational areas were covered successfully in the different sections of the portfolio.

The sections of the portfolio

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

- Analytical Assignment
- Production Exercise
- Evaluative Commentary, followed by evidence of research and planning material.

Evidence of research and planning

It was pleasing to see that the majority of centres had heeded moderators' advice and included good evidence of research and planning this year.

The best centres had clearly guided their candidates to produce some in-depth research into similar media texts and detailed, annotated analyses of those texts. This work helped to demonstrate how candidates had used existing texts to inspire their own production work. There were still a small number of centres which included all class notes and pages reproduced from the internet, sometimes without any acknowledgement of the source. This kind of material should not be included in the submission to the moderator.

Assessment

Marking was mostly very sound, with few adjustments made to the centres' marks. Where problems did arise, it tended to be because:

- Analytical Assignments lacked detailed comparison and yet were placed in the higher levels
- Analytical Assignments lacked detailed analysis of the techniques used to construct representations
- Evaluative Commentaries offered accounts of the production process, but there was little focus on or analysis of the representations they had constructed
- Evaluative Commentaries lacked evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the finished production.

A small number of excellent centres had significantly under-marked their candidates' work. Centres are strongly advised to look at exemplar work on the Professional Development section of the website at <http://cpdhub.ocr.org.uk>.

Organisation and the recording of marks

The majority of centres submitted portfolios that were clearly organised and presented, with distinct labelling of each section of the portfolio. There were a few centres that sent work that was disorganised, with cover sheets that contained errors or were not filled in at all. This held up the moderation process and made it difficult to see how the marks had been arrived at.

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. Centres are reminded that they must select **one** topic only for this unit from the list of options on pages 9-11 of the online specification.

Centres are reminded again 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). It would also be appreciated work were presented in A4 format, rather than A3.

Teacher comments and annotations

The majority of centres included detailed and thorough teacher summative comments on the cover sheets, making the reasons for the allocation of marks clear, referring to the assessment criteria. Detailed annotations on the work itself are essential in order to demonstrate how the marks have been arrived at. Where work was presented electronically, there were often no annotations and no names of candidates on the work. This made it very difficult to agree the marks.

If work is presented electronically, centres are again reminded that it is essential that hard copies of the cover sheets, with detailed summative comments, are sent to the moderator.

Centres are asked to check that the work has been annotated by the teacher, is clearly labelled and that it can be easily accessed.

Centres are also reminded that the comments on the cover sheets are to support the moderation process and are not to be directly aimed at the candidates.

Use of original images

Best practice involved the use of original images for the production exercise, and there was work of an exceptionally high standard in this area this year. As stated in the specification, the use of original images is strongly encouraged, as it enables candidates to demonstrate their creativity, originality and technical skills. Fewer centres this year relied entirely on found images, which was very pleasing.

The Analytical Assignment

This element of the unit was generally approached well, particularly where candidates had a degree of autonomy over the texts used. The candidates' enthusiasm and engagement were clearly evident in these centres, and their understanding of Media Language and Representation was particularly well demonstrated.

The variety of texts selected this year was again impressive, ranging from an investigation into the representations of gender in Lego advertisements to a comparison between representations of social class in *Anuvahood* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*.

Best practice could be seen in those centres where:

- the task demanded a clear focus
- examples had been discussed and analysed in class
- candidates were well grounded in the ways in which media language constructs representation
- candidates had a good grasp of media terminology
- candidates were then asked to select their own texts.

Effective approaches also included those that offered a historical perspective, comparing past representations with contemporary ones. These approaches are effective, because texts from the past often offer explicit traditional or alternative representations of gender, race and class. Advertising and popular music are particularly fruitful topics in this respect. One centre considered the representation of gender in superhero films, which proved to be an accessible task as the texts tend to operate on largely stereotypical lines.

Where common texts are used, it is important that candidates choose their own examples to analyse. For candidates in the higher bands, some independence of thought and personal insight should be evidenced.

There was generally very good use of media terminology, with fewer examples of centres where candidates appeared not to have been taught the correct technical terms.

The Production Exercise

Moderators enjoyed seeing the wide range of creative approaches to this section of the portfolios. Yet, again, there were some innovative, creative Production Exercises, where candidates demonstrated an excellent understanding of representation. There were some very impressive examples of original photography, enabling candidates to demonstrate a strong sense of engagement, creativity and individuality.

In a few cases, the set task did not facilitate candidates' understanding of representation. For example, where print adverts were produced without a human representation, candidates found it difficult to write about representation in their Evaluative Commentaries. Centres are reminded that the purpose of the Production Exercise is to demonstrate the candidates' understanding of both Media Language and Representation.

There were some excellent examples of magazine advertisements where the centre had asked candidates to produce two texts aimed at the opposite gender of the stereotypical one. There were also many examples of excellent film posters, DVD covers, CD covers and digipaks, with impressive use of mise-en-scène.

Where found images were used with little or no manipulation, the production exercises were less successful in demonstrating creativity and understanding of representation. They were also less successful in demonstrating candidates' presentational skills.

Careful, detailed annotation of drafts and of the final outcome of magazine advertisements, film posters, DVD cases and CD covers was a feature in the most successful centres.

The Evaluative Commentary

This year there was a general improvement in the Evaluative Commentaries, with particularly successful centres ensuring that their candidates had reflected on how they had used both Media Language and Representation in their Production Exercises.

However, there were still a number of centres where the concept of Representation was not covered at all in this element of the portfolio. Two of the assessment criteria for the Evaluative Commentary make specific reference to Representation, so it is essential that candidates address this point in order to achieve the higher levels.

The quality of reflection varied considerably, with some very thoughtful evaluations while other commentaries contained very little reflection. Audience feedback was used very successfully by many candidates to support their reflections on the strengths and weaknesses of their finished productions. Candidates should be guided away from merely offering lengthy descriptive accounts of the production process, which left them little space to discuss decisions and revisions or to evaluate the process and the finished production. Centres are reminded that a 'sound sense of reflection' is required in the evaluation in order for candidates to achieve a Level 3 or above.

Moderators found that whilst PowerPoint presentations offered well illustrated evaluations, the essay form with embedded screengrabs, images and captions seemed to work best for the majority of candidates, as it allowed them to analyse and reflect on their productions in more depth.

Evidence of research and planning

The majority of centres are now including hard evidence of research, planning and drafting, which is to be welcomed. The majority of candidates annotated and analysed existing texts in the same genre as their production, and this process helped to inform the production work. It was pleasing to see the autonomy given to candidates here, as they found their own examples to analyse. However, in a few cases there was a great deal of research which did not always correlate with the application of that research to the production itself.

There were a small number of centres where little or no evidence of research or planning was offered. This did not serve candidates well, no matter how impressive their final production was. Best practice was seen where original and rejected images, together with the stages of manipulation, were presented and commented on. This gave real insight into the process.

Conclusion

There were many centres it was a privilege to moderate: well selected tasks, analytical and creative responses of a high standard and clear engagement from the candidates, which made the moderation enjoyable.

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 2016

Topic 1: Documentaries

- Compare the representation of masculinity in the sports documentaries *Dog Town v Z Boys* and *Jump London*. Produce a DVD case for a new sport documentary with a specific representation of masculinity.
- Compare the representation of age in *Barely Legal Drivers* and *Children on the Front Line*. Produce a magazine advertisement promoting a new documentary that represents teenagers positively.

Topic 2: Film

- Compare the representation of women in two science fiction films by analysing three key scenes, choosing from: *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*, *Ex Machina* and *The Matrix*. Produce two posters for a new science fiction film with a prominent female character.
- Compare the representations of gender in *Skyfall* & *Goldfinger*. Produce a poster for a new Bond film with an anti-stereotypical representation of females.
- Compare the representation of females in two horror films: *The Woman in Black* and *Scream*. Produce a DVD cover for a new horror film with a positive representation of a female protagonist.
- Compare the representations of Britishness in the films *Notting Hill* and *The Holiday*. Produce a poster for a new romcom with a specific representation of Britishness.
- Compare the representation of gender in two Tim Burton films: *Sleepy Hollow* and *Edward Scissorhands*. Produce two film posters for a new gothic horror film with a specific representation of gender.

Topic 3: Popular Music

- Compare the representation of gender in *Run this Town* by Jay-Z ft. Rhianna and Kanye West and Pink's *Stupid Girl*. Produce a CD front and back cover featuring a new female artist.

- 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 women in Beyoncé's *Run the World (Girls)* and Wiley's *Heatwave*. Produce a digipak featuring a new female artist.

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 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 6: Soap Opera

- Compare the ways in which disability is represented in two contrasting soap operas: *Hollyoaks* and *EastEnders*. Produce a digital storyboard for the opening sequence of a new soap opera with a positive representation of disability.
- 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 7: Sport

- Compare the representations of a sports personality of your choosing in print, website and television reports. Create the cover of a new sports magazine and an interview with a new sports star.
- 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 8: News

- Compare the representations of war and the soldiers taking part in it, showing how far they have changed over time and how far they have stayed the same. Produce either: two newspaper front pages for different audiences, offering different representations or: produce two news bulletins from two different radio stations, covering the same story but with different representations.
- 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.

Topic 9: Advertising

- Compare how representations of gender are used in Coca-Cola advertising. Produce a magazine and a billboard advertisement for a new soft drink with an anti-stereotypical representation of gender.
- Compare the representation of women in a series of cleaning adverts from the 1950s to today. Produce a billboard advertisement for a new domestic product aimed at males.
- Compare the representations of gender in 1960s beauty advertisements with representations of gender in twenty-first century beauty advertisements. Produce a radio, internet or print-based advertising campaign for a new beauty product of your choice.

Topic 10: Video games

- Compare the representations of women in two video games, choosing from: *Tomb Raider*, *Assassins' Creed* and *Mario Brothers*. Design a magazine advertisement for a new video game featuring a prominent female video game character.
- Compare the representations of gender in *Halo* and *Mirror's Edge*. Design a video game cover and a magazine advertisement for a new video game with a character that challenges stereotypes.

B322 Textual Analysis and Media Studies Topic (Moving Image)

General Comments:

The extract for the 2016 examination was from the film *Captain Phillips*. The extract starts after 32 minutes 51 seconds with the line 'This guy's coming on his own' and ends at 35 minutes 42 seconds after this sequence of events: Captain Phillips shoots a flare at the pirates, they fire back and he dives onto the deck. This extract proved accessible to candidates, who discussed generic conventions, media language elements and representations with a range of appropriate references to the extract.

Candidates appeared to be prepared well for the examination. The overwhelming majority attempted all four questions with effective use of the time available. Candidates maintained the improvement in answers to question 3 and the editing bullet point for question 2 that were noted last year. Use of terminology was a particular strength this year, especially in questions 1 and 2 and more candidates than in previous years used theory in the service of analysis rather than – as in previous years – in place of analysis.

Two key strategies to avoid running out of time are, firstly, to eschew an introductory paragraph rephrasing the question, so launching straight into analysis and exemplification for each answer, and, secondly, to limit the length of answers to questions 1 and 2 and devote more time to question 3.

Candidates running out of space for their answers should be advised not to continue their answers in the blank space at the bottom of the page but to use an additional answer sheet. They need to ensure they clearly flag this at the end of the original answer – a simple '(continues)' suffices – and they should avoid leaving any blank lines at the end of the answer if they are continuing onto another sheet.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1

This question was answered well with increasing use of terminology meaning that many candidates gained level 4 marks. Most candidates could identify two conventions within the extract. Common examples were: a race against time, heroes versus villains, good versus evil, conflict expressed through violence, a chase, jeopardy and peril, a resourceful hero, and an exotic location. Tom Hanks might be dismayed, however, by the number of candidates who commented that he was rather old and overweight for an action/adventure hero.

Weaker candidates typically concentrated at length on only one convention or cited elements – such as 'protagonist' and 'antagonist' – that are typical of all films (and failed to add 'heroic' or 'villainous' to make these generic). Very few answers were simply descriptive, suggesting that candidates are well prepared for this question.

Question No. 2

An effective procedure used by many better answers to this question was to identify a media language technique using the correct terminology and giving a precise identification of where this occurred in the extract then to add concise analysis of what this connotes without any unnecessary reference to generic conventions or supposed effects on the audience. Answers do not need to be lengthy to achieve high marks – those gaining level 4 marks typically did not require additional answer sheets for this question.

Weaker answers often made generalised comments with no specific example (such as ‘there are lots of close ups’), confused camerawork and editing, offered vague effect on the audience (such as ‘making the audience tense’ or ‘raising the audience’s adrenaline level’), or offered generic conventions in place of connotations.

Only two techniques were required for each bullet point, though answers that gave more than two often gained an advantage if a later effective example proved superior to a more weakly made earlier one.

Candidates were generally able to give examples of soundtrack with connotations. Better answers were specific about the elements of soundtrack being analysed and the meaning created, weaker answers simply referred to ‘diegetic’ or ‘non-diegetic soundtrack’ or commented on an effect on the audience. Common elements identified included: the enhanced sound of the gunshots, the use of the alarm as a sound bridge, and the changing tone and pace in the music as the action escalated. Weaker answers did not distinguish between soundtrack and an example of sound, such as music, and some referred in a vague manner to the ‘non-diegetic soundtrack’ without specifying whether or not this referred to the music.

Editing was still often the weakest part of the answer, with many answers struggling to give connotations for continuity editing, eyeline matches, or match on action. Many candidates picked up on the cross-cutting, but fewer established connotative effect, with the better answers linking the multiple perspectives to increasing tension or danger. Many good responses noted the increasing pace of editing at named parts of the extract (such as when the fighting started) and linked this to a sense of urgency, chaos, or danger. Some weaker answers commented on sound, reported non-existent slow motion and jump cuts (the latter usually to erroneously describe cross-cutting), or assumed that a particular element was computer generated imagery and then failed to provide a connotative effect.

Mise-en-scène was usually accessible for candidates. Many noted the effect of the differing costumes, the isolating location, the technological differences between the two vessels, and the use of guns. Better answers gave interesting connotations for the bright, natural lighting – often in terms of naturalism or as an ironic counterpart to the events taking place – but weaker answers struggled with this.

Camerawork, as usual, was often the best-answered bullet point. Better answers picked specific examples; weaker answers discussed, for example, the handheld camera ‘throughout the extract’. Very few answers could not identify a camerawork technique. Most common were examples of: handheld camera, point of view, fast pans, low and high angles, close ups, and aerial shots. Most responses gave connotative effects; a few answers simply described the shots.

Question No. 3

This question proved slightly more difficult this year if candidates chose to explore the full range of suggested social groups that were being represented. Most candidates could attempt an analysis of representation in relation to gender and race (and some also wrote about age fairly convincingly). The specific groups suggested in the question – Africans, Americans and Pirates – required candidates to think on their feet and demonstrate critical autonomy, so while better answers produced level 4 sophisticated analysis, weaker answers struggled with the stereotypes for these groups. However, many successfully noted that Africans are stereotyped as poor, Americans as technologically superior, and pirates are often romantically stereotyped as colourful characters with historical costumes, wooden legs and eye patches.

There were fewer candidates this year who discussed generic conventions (e.g. construction of heroes and villains) rather than representations and fewer very short answers, though many candidates wrote much less for question 3 than for question 2. Many weaker answers, however, failed to move beyond characterisation and were limited to level 2 marks.

Question No. 4(a)

This question proved slightly more difficult this year as candidates were asked to explain the scheduling of two programmes – better answers made succinct relevant points about each of time, day and channel to ensure that all three were covered for both programmes. Many answers could explain how the programmes fitted the ethos for their channels and the timing of the transmission, often in terms of the watershed or prime time, but fewer gave an explanation of the day in terms of scheduling practices, weaker answers relying instead on assertions about audience habits.

Better answers explained contemporary scheduling; some weaker answers struggled to explain very old examples of scheduling (from the 1990s, for example). There were fewer examples of self-penalising answers explaining multiple scheduling decisions. Many weaker answers discussed programmes that are scheduled 'everyday' or 'every weekday' and usually failed to give a convincing answer in relation to the day. This was a common issue for candidates who had chosen *The Simpsons* as one programme for this answer.

Texts that worked well:

The Big Bang Theory (for 'Quite Big Thursday' new episodes)

Have I Got News for You

A League of Their Own

Russell Howard's Good News

QI

Ant and Dec's Saturday Night Takeaway

Room 101

Benidorm

8 out of 10 Cats Does Countdown

New Girl

Texts that did not work well:

The Simpsons

Knowing Me Knowing You

Spaced

Friends

Question No. 4(b)

This question seemed slightly more accessible this year as candidates had only to cover the pleasures of one programme, which typically enabled more detailed exemplification. Better answers addressed three or more pleasures (often including comedy) giving exemplification for each. Weaker answers listed pleasures without detailed exemplification, only listed different comedy pleasures (comedy or humour could only count as one pleasure), or claimed 'intertextuality' or 'exaggeration' without any further explanation as pleasures. Very few answers this year repeated aspects of question 4a in this question.

Texts that worked well:

QI

The Big Bang Theory

Outnumbered

Miranda

Benidorm

The Inbetweeners

Panel shows often work well where contrasting pleasures are required but some candidates who chose a panel show as their one programme appeared to struggle to give enough detail for this question.

B323 Textual Analysis and Media Topic (Print)

General Comments:

The extract for the 2016 examination was from the magazine *Countryfile*. This extract represented a change to the previous use of women's general interest magazines but proved accessible to candidates, who discussed generic conventions, media language elements and representations with a range of appropriate references to the extract. Many could use Media Studies terminology effectively.

Candidates appeared to be prepared well for the examination. The overwhelming majority attempted all four questions with effective use of the time available.

Better candidates typically eschewed an introductory paragraph rephrasing the question and launched straight into their answers, which is an effective strategy in paper such as this where time is very limited.

Candidates running out of space for their answers should be advised not to continue their answers in the blank space at the bottom of the page but to use an additional answer sheet. They need to ensure they clearly flag this at the end of the original answer – a simple 'continues' would suffice – and they should avoid leaving any blank lines at the end of the answer if they are continuing onto another sheet.

Comments on Individual Questions:

Question No. 1

This question was answered well with the change in sub-genre appearing to help candidates – there were few examples of elements specific to the subgenre being cited as conventions of lifestyle magazines as a whole. Most candidates referred to conventions such as: the direct address, the personal editor's letter, the dominance of the celebrity cover model on the front page, and the hybridity of contents demonstrated by the contents pages. More candidates seemed to use terminology effectively this year.

Question No. 2

An effective procedure used by many better answers to this question was to identify a media language technique, using the correct terminology and giving a precise identification of where this occurred in the extract, then to concisely identify what this connotes without any unnecessary reference to generic conventions or supposed effects on the audience. Answers do not need to be lengthy to achieve high marks – those gaining level 4 marks typically did not require additional answer sheets for this question.

Only two examples of techniques were required for each bullet point, but answers that gave more than two examples often gained an advantage if a later effective example proved superior to a more weakly made earlier one.

Most candidates could attempt to analyse connotations for layout, though some penalised themselves by only analysing the front cover when the very orderly layout of the contents pages offered more scope for analysis.

Typography was again the element that proved most difficult for some candidates, with a sizeable minority of candidates unable to distinguish correctly between serif and sans-serif fonts or making generalised comments about the typography on a page or the whole extract without giving specific examples. Many better answers discussed the bold sans serif font used for 'COUNTRYFILE' and suggested connotations such as confidence and assertiveness. Many discussed the tonal implications of the mix of serif and san-serif fonts on a page giving specific examples.

Most candidates linked the colour palette of the magazine to connotations of nature or relaxation or winter and this element was generally well covered.

Language was again one of the more successful elements of the four. Many candidates identified and exemplified instances of direct address, rhetorical questions, imperatives and alliteration, though fewer could effectively link these to connotations, often relying on effects on the audience.

Question No. 3

This question may have appeared to be slightly less accessible this year due to the nature of the extract, but most candidates were able to give good accounts of the stereotyping and anti-stereotyping of gender roles (women represented as both shoppers and farmers, the 'country's favourite farmer' and ploughmen being male), the stereotyping of the countryside as a place of refuge, the stereotypically white representation of people living in the country and the stereotypical representation of that life as traditional and characterised by close-knit communities. The extract seemed to aid candidates in achieving critical distance, so responses appeared to be more focused on representations than in previous years.

Question No. 4(a)

This question proved slightly more difficult this year as candidates were asked to explain the scheduling of two programmes – better answers made succinct relevant points about each of time, day and channel to ensure that all three were covered for both programmes. Many answers could explain how the programmes fitted the ethos for their channels and the timing of the transmission, often in terms of the watershed or prime time, but fewer gave an explanation of the day in terms of scheduling practices, weaker answers relying instead on assertions about audience habits.

Better answers explained contemporary scheduling; some weaker answers struggled to explain very old examples of scheduling (from the 1990s, for example). There were fewer examples of self-penalising answers explaining multiple scheduling decisions. Many weaker answers discussed programmes that are scheduled 'everyday' or 'every weekday' and usually failed to give a convincing answer in relation to the day. This was a common issue for candidates who had chosen *The Simpsons* as one programme for this answer.

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Benidorm

8 out of 10 Cats Does Countdown

New Girl

Texts that did not work well:

The Simpsons

Knowing Me Knowing You

Spaced

Friends

Question No. 4(b)

This question seemed slightly more accessible this year as candidates had only to cover the pleasures of one programme, which typically enabled more detailed exemplification. Better answers addressed three or more pleasures (often including comedy) giving exemplification for each. Weaker answers listed pleasures without detailed exemplification, only listed different comedy pleasures (comedy or humour could only count as one pleasure), or claimed 'intertextuality' or 'exaggeration' without any further explanation as pleasures. Very few answers this year repeated aspects of question 4a in this question.

Texts that worked well:

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The Big Bang Theory

Outnumbered

Miranda

Benidorm

The Inbetweeners

Panel shows often work well where contrasting pleasures are required but some candidates who chose a panel show as their one programme appeared to struggle to give enough detail for this question.

B324 Production Portfolio in Media Studies

General Comments:

Unit B324 represents 30% of the GCSE Media Studies qualification. This Unit offers candidates the opportunity to demonstrate their skills in Research and Planning, Production, and Evaluation as well as their understanding of the Key Media Concepts of **Audience, Institution, Media Language** and **Genre**. The B324 Unit brings together various elements first seen in the other GCSE Media Studies Units (B321, and B322/B323). It is expected that Centres will use the best resources/technology available and choose tasks for which they have the expertise to deliver and which also appeal to their candidates (Ref Spec P15, also P25 4.2.1e).

The twelve Set Briefs in the Specification were successful in offering a range of choices (Print, Video, Audio, Websites and Cross Media) for most Centres. However 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 is important that for Unit B324 Centres follow one of the Set Briefs as described in the Specification (ref Spec P16-17). The Set Briefs offered in this Unit are not 'exemplar topics' like those available in Unit B321 and must be followed exactly as set out in the Specification.

Portfolio Evidence

The Controlled Assessment work submitted for this unit was of a generally competent standard overall. 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 and an Appendix (which brought discipline to their approach, as well as helping the process of moderation).

Candidates achieved higher marks when they considered all of the subject matter and supported their answers with analysis and justifications. When candidates did not achieve higher marks, it was usually because they were either descriptive or did not complete the work submitted. In some instances CC160 Centre Authentication Forms and CCS339 Forms were missing and the Centres had to be contacted. On occasion some candidate work was unavailable or lost. These Centres were reminded to keep work in a secure location and make relevant copies (e.g. especially of the Research and Planning stage).

Most Centres were well organised with Cover Sheets completed accurately, with appropriate comments. However there were some arithmetical errors. One of the biggest issues was generic teacher comments without any personalisation regarding elements of the candidate's work, such as the candidate's input to the group during the Production. There were some examples where teacher comments were missing entirely on the Controlled Assessment Cover Sheet.

The organisation of candidate work from the majority of Centres was a strength, including presenting portfolios in the correct order (Research and Planning, Production and Evaluation). However some Centres need to ensure that candidates separate the presentation of Research and Planning from the Evaluation in their candidate portfolios (ref Spec P17-18). 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).

Some Centres submitted an additional Controlled Assessment proforma sheet including justifications that showed how marks were credited by the Centre. Another contingency evident was backing up all work onto a DVD disk (Research and Planning, Production and Evaluation).

Brief Selection

Some Centres attempted a variety of briefs which seemed to have an effect on the overall marks awarded and the evidence submitted for the Research and Planning and Evaluation in particular. Teachers 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).

Some Centres had made judgements appropriately, applying the Assessment Criteria as intended. However others had increased the marks submitted, particularly in the Production element with little justification. For these, 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 Specification. See the OCR CPD Hub: <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.

The sections of the portfolio

Centres are reminded that there are three distinct sections required for the portfolio and these should be clearly separated. The portfolio needs to be presented in the following order for each candidate:

- Research and Planning (plus an optional Appendix)
- Production
- Evaluation

The Appendix can contain items such as drafts, research sources, and shared materials. Sources of information (particularly websites) were at times inconsistently referenced within the portfolio submission.

Good practice was in evidence where teachers ensured each folder submitted included an index with contents and page numbers as well as the Appendix.

All Centres were reminded of the changes in Specification from the 2014 entry by the Notice to Centres (November 2015). In particular Section 4.2.2 (P.26) makes clear what teachers can, or must not do in terms of assisting candidates (for example the ban on using templates).

Research and Planning

There was generally competent evidence of Research and Planning this year. In most Centres, there appeared to be a sense of independent Research and Planning taking place with a good sense of ownership of work conducted.

There was a range of Research and Planning tasks completed by Centres. There was successful research into specific genres which underpinned candidates' understanding of the areas that they were focusing on. Media Language terminology and ideas were applied throughout the candidate portfolios. Centres set tasks that were well structured to ensure that candidates used this terminology appropriately. Some candidates successfully utilised focus groups when exploring their concept. Institution was varied and inconsistent in submissions.

There was ample evidence of detailed research into the target audience (e.g. questionnaires) with results and examples from similar genres. On occasion this was presented orally or on camera. However there were still examples of pages and pages of questionnaires being submitted in the middle of the folders. These should be attached with an Appendix section.

There was also evidence of Production Logs which showed time management during the various stages of the Production. Some candidates produced detailed storyboards which were hand drawn clearly linking to the Production process. There was clear evidence of script writing, shot listing and mind mapping.

The analysis of similar media texts was an area of considerable strength for the majority of Centres with clear analytical skills demonstrated and detailed annotations evidenced. Summative paragraphs helped explain how the candidates intended to use their planning to shape the Production and describe the 'creative journey' that they were embarking on.

Costumes and props was also 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 health and safety, or evidence of appropriate risk assessments. Location Agreements, Risk Assessments, and Recces should be included in this instance.

Most Centres had made use of sensible age appropriate research materials for their candidates. However there are still some Centres where candidates were allowed to engage with certain materials that were beyond the maturity of candidates at this level..

Some Centres submitted Research and Planning PowerPoints with evidence of mood boards, codes and conventions, settings and location information. The PowerPoint work showed evidence of enthusiasm on the part of the candidates, particularly within the analysis of similar media products. Candidates also researched Media institutions within their PowerPoints but there were no sources of information referenced (e.g. websites).

Production

The Production was of variable quality across the board and largely depended on the equipment and resources available to the Centre. Some submitted Productions on DVD discs which were clearly labelled.

The vast majority of candidates worked as groups, although there were a number of Centres, mainly working on Magazines, where candidates worked individually.

Some Centres encouraged their cohort to create a range of products (such as a New Magazine, Print Advertising, Computer/Video Game Cover and Opening Sequence from a Film). The great majority of Centres had encouraged candidates to make good use of codes and conventions. A range of techniques were also displayed including framing shots, photo manipulation and mise-en-scene which showed an excellent understanding of media language.

Candidates seemed to engage with the majority of tasks set. There were some very creative and thoughtful Productions that looked near professional. Candidates with low marks for their Research and Planning or Evaluation components sometimes produced some interesting and engaging Productions. There were many instances where Centres had encouraged and facilitated candidates in developing relevant technical skills. Candidates had clearly taken satisfaction as they had responded to the Set Briefs in a variety of creative ways.

Candidates who produced footage/original images in external locations benefited massively. However some lacked original photography within the New Magazine Production and these featured poor image manipulation. 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).

Some Centres need to review aspects of content submitted within the Production work. Some included inappropriate content for GCSE level assessments within the Video Briefs: Music Video and Opening Sequences from a Film.

Centres should also monitor the use of language throughout the Productions and potentially use bleeping or silences for inappropriate language. This would be strongly preferred for the target audience. Some Video Productions also featured problems with sound levels.

In some instances Centres had to be reminded about health and safety and the need for in-depth risk assessments when filming in dangerous locations and using weapons as props. These were reminded that it is best to avoid using such locations and props if filming cannot be demonstrated to be safe.

OCR offers advice to Media and Film teachers on the above in the notice to centres on 'inappropriate materials'.

<http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/139798-notice-to-centres-inappropriate-materials.pdf>

For more information on the Production Briefs see Section 2.

Evaluation

The Evaluation aspect of the unit was generally approached well. Best practice within this section included candidates monitoring the decision-making process and revisions made, noting how earlier research into audience and comparative texts influenced the Production, the use of genre forms and conventions, evidence of post-production audience feedback and interpretation, and understanding whether the Production had met the brief.

The Evaluations showed reference to the monitoring of decisions using some media terminology. In the best cases, the Evaluation focused on the production process, the apparent codes and conventions, and identified the strengths/weaknesses of the final product. Word and PowerPoint Evaluations submitted by candidates used sub-headings effectively.

Some Centres used a Director's Commentary during the Evaluation. This enabled the candidates to successfully evaluate their Productions and was presented as MP4 files.

For some Centres there were still some examples where Evaluations were more descriptive of the process than truly evaluative and objective, looking critically at the finished Productions. Some Centres presented PowerPoint Evaluations which lacked detail. They were brief in most cases and they did not refer to the Assessment Criteria necessary. Audience feedback was also notably lacking. In some instances candidates titled the final section the Planning and Evaluative Commentary (B321) rather than the Evaluation. Some Centres did not submit the Evaluation.

Authentication and Group Work

Most Centres provided good quality summative comments and annotations on the candidate work and on the Controlled Assessment Cover Sheets to describe how marks had been awarded. Clear teacher comments/candidate descriptions provide essential background information in the process of assessment, as well as making it easier for moderators to verify the Centre's submitted marks (particularly within group work)

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 copied from the Assessment Criteria and did not advance the moderation process at all. On the whole, there were detailed teacher annotations and assessment decisions during the Research and Planning and Evaluation stages.

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. Teachers need to use the Controlled Assessment Cover Sheet (CCS339) boxes to help differentiate an individual's contributions to the moderator (ref Spec P41). If individual contributions are not outlined, it can make it more difficult for a moderator to support Centre assessment decisions.

Evidence of Research and Planning, as well as the Evaluation should be individual to each candidate. Centres should instruct candidates clearly about the individuality of their portfolios, and the need to identify their sources (especially websites).

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. 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 CD player or made available in MP3 format, and Video should be playable on a DVD player or if supplied on a DVD-Rom it should be in a standard video file such as *.mpg or *.mov.

This also applies to portfolio work as well as the Production if submitting work electronically. The variety of word processor packages and various versions of Microsoft PowerPoint and Word software require Centres to check that their material can be accessed on other computers than their own before submitting.

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.

Some Centres continue to submit work via USB memory sticks. These are not an acceptable way of submitting work, as 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

There have been some 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 learn 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 is given.

Summary

There was a good range of creative work and an improvement in the overall standard seen for this unit. 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 (Research and Planning, Production, and Evaluation).

Best Practice

- Cover sheets are accurately filled in, with marks, briefs, texts and summative comments that relate to the individual candidate and support the marks awarded
- Work is presented in the correct order: Research and Planning (incorporating a Production Log with a possible Appendix of materials); the Production; and the Evaluation
- Work is clearly organised, with the final Production clearly identifiable from drafts (e.g. Contents page with page numbers)
- Teacher annotations clearly show how marks have been awarded
- Similar media texts analysed using media language and possible target audience explored
- Evidence of detailed research into the target audience (e.g. questionnaires) with results presented orally or on camera
- Audio Director's Commentary used during the Evaluation stage (especially effective for a Video Brief)
- Evaluations show reference to the monitoring of decisions and revisions to the Production using media terminology

Comments on Individual Briefs:

All the Set Briefs were attempted by candidates this summer. Set Brief 2: A New Magazine appeared to be the most popular brief. The Magazine popularity was followed by Set Brief 3: Print Advertising, Set Brief 7: Opening Sequence from a Film, Set Brief 6: Extract from a New TV Programme, Set Brief 5: Music Video, and Set Brief 12: Music Promotional Package.

There was a clear range of work with examples of excellent work including:

Set Brief 2- New Magazine

Print magazine extracts where candidates had researched and provided individual material for an identified audience, and used DTP software to create an appropriate layout. There was good use of original photography and image manipulation.

Set Brief 3- Print Advertising

Print advertising campaigns where candidates had demonstrated original photographic flair, manipulated the images using the appropriate software, and laid out the advertisements using the relevant codes and conventions. There was excellent evidence of similar media texts analysed during the Research and Planning stage, and detailed draft sketches of print advertisements (e.g. hand drawn and digital) with annotations.

Set Brief 5- Music Video

Music videos showed good attention to detail, enthusiasm of codes and conventions, and suitable choices and creative selection of mise-en-scene including locations, props, costumes, actors, colour and lighting.

Set Brief 6- Extract from a new TV programme

A variety of approaches to the television productions which included - TV documentary and wildlife drama. 'Previously' section adopted by Centres fitted with the selected genre.

Set Brief 7- Opening Sequence from a Film

Some film openings showed creativity and flair on the part of candidates, and were presented in a variety of genres. There was inventive use of camerawork, editing techniques and mise en scene. There were some original narratives created with good use of characterisation and enigma. Specific genre codes and conventions were displayed. There was also a good use of camera angles and movement with excellent narration. Some Production work had received feedback from Local Film Festivals.

Set Brief 12- Music Promotional Package

The Cross Media Set Brief also gave candidates the opportunity to bring together a number of media as part of a coherent promotion package, including examples of CD front and back covers, album cover, magazine insert/articles, websites, gig/tour posters and video adverts. In many instances, there were original and creative adverts created for the campaign.

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