

## A LEVEL

*Moderators' report*

# ***MEDIA STUDIES***

**H409**

For first teaching in 2017

## **H409/03/04 Summer 2019 series**

Version 1

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## Introduction

Our Moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on centres' assessment of moderated work, based on what has been observed by our moderation team. These reports include a general commentary of accuracy of internal assessment judgements; identify good practice in relation to evidence collation and presentation and comments on the quality of centre assessment decisions against individual Learning Objectives. This report also highlights areas where requirements have been misinterpreted and provides guidance to centre assessors on requirements for accessing higher mark bands. Where appropriate, the report will also signpost to other sources of information that centre assessors will find helpful.

OCR completes moderation of centre-assessed work in order to quality assure the internal assessment judgements made by assessors within a centre. Where OCR cannot confirm the centre's marks, we may adjust them in order to align them to the national standard. Any adjustments to centre marks are detailed on the Moderation Adjustments report, which can be downloaded from Interchange when results are issued. Centres should also refer to their individual centre report provided after moderation has been completed. In combination, these centre-specific documents and this overall report should help to support centres' internal assessment and moderation practice for future series.

## General overview

Making Media is a centre-assessed NEA component that targets AO3: 'Create cross-media products for an intended audience, by applying knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework of media to communicate meaning.'

The NEA gives a choice of four set briefs: Television and online; Radio and online; Magazines and online and Music Video and online. Centres/candidates may choose any of the four briefs but it is advisable that the centre's resources are taken into consideration when choosing.

There are three assessment elements to each brief: Product 1 (the Television, Radio, Magazine or Music Video production); Product 2 (the accompanying website) and finally the Digital Convergence element (which shows the candidate's understanding of convergence in a practical application, constructing two products that work together in synergy, with clear branding and making use of a range of digital media).

The two products each carry 25 marks; the digital convergence carries 10 marks.

The candidate's work has to be submitted with their Statement of Intent, a document written before production and designed to outline the ways in which the candidate proposed to use the four areas of the media theoretical framework to communicate meaning and meet the requirements of their chosen brief. Although this element carries no marks, if it is not submitted then 10 marks have to be deducted.

To do well, candidates needed to fulfil both the specific list of requirements of the brief **and** all the production detail, to have ensured that there was clear digital convergence apparent between the two products - and to have the technical skill to be able to demonstrate their understanding of the media theoretical framework. It is a truly synoptic element.

The strongest work had clearly been supported by focused research, detailed planning, attention to detail and a strong, sustained central concept based solidly on the requirements and details of the brief, as reflected in focused, unambiguous Statements of Intent. Such careful planning led to outcomes which demonstrated the verisimilitude required for the work to be marked in the higher levels; candidates clearly understanding the two forms they were working in. Such work showed higher levels of polish and, although the level of "finish" is perhaps not as central to the overall marking as it was for the legacy specification, the wording of the level 5 marking criteria still implies a certain level of quality ("sophisticated"; "highly developed"; "highly appropriate"; "accomplished" , etc.).

Most candidates managed to explore the cross-media aspects of the briefs very well, with some excellent links being made between products. Unfortunately, a number of candidates produced very unbalanced pieces, with some excellent products being paired with lacklustre websites (or occasionally vice versa). Considering that the products are each worth the same number of marks and that there is an obvious effect on the mark for digital convergence, it was to be hoped that a comparable amount of time would be spent developing both. Websites in particular seemed to suffer here, with some seemingly created in a short amount of time and being overly reliant on platform-provided templates with limited extra content from candidates.

The logging of unassessed participants also varied. Some candidates scrupulously noted down what everyone they worked with had done and how they were directed, sometimes in bespoke documentation. When mentioned, unassessed participants were generally just named but in many cases this section had not been completed – a significant and worrying omission which suggested that some centres had not fully understood the reforms which have taken place in the assessment of Media Studies since the new subject orders were introduced before the launch of the new specification.

## Administration

Generally, administration was good, with the vast majority of centres uploading marks by the deadline. Several centres entered work for H409/03 (Repository) but sent work by post; in such cases centres should have entered candidates for H409/04.

Many different approaches were taken to submitting work and supporting materials. Some centres followed the legacy specification model of using blog-hubs to administer candidate submissions, which aided the moderation process and was a highly efficient process to moderate. Of those centres which uploaded work via the OCR Repository there was a great range of submission formats, with some centres uploading very well-managed, logically-labelled folders which were easy to navigate, while others had simply bundled files together with little sense of order and/or with unclear folder titles. If the Repository is to be used, it is helpful for work to be organised according to content (e.g. coversheets/ Statements of Intent in one .zip folder, final work or links in a second, and then any supporting material in a third). One or two centres used Google Drive, which was sometimes confusing to navigate. Some music video files were huge, meaning that moderating some centres required many hours of download time for the moderator (up to 7 hours in one case and overnight in another, for example).

Some centres sent all material in hard copy and, in general, these samples were not well organised. Moderators sometimes had to deal with several folders which included large bundles of paper, sometimes crushed or folded, with little sense of structure. If this approach is to be followed, it is suggested that centres spend time collating materials into folders/ portfolios – this was the approach taken by the most organised centres.

Some centres carefully password protected their candidates' work – and then sent either their own personal – or worse still their candidates' personal – login details. This meant that moderators were put in the unacceptable position of potentially being able to change candidates' work accidentally. If work is password protected then it needs to be a moderator login, provided for access to the final published work only.

The most efficient means of submission - by far - remains the password protected blog. This can house the candidate's Statement of Intent, essential research and planning, product 1 and a link to the website. The coversheets and a document with the centre's blog hub can easily be uploaded to the Repository, along with any marksheets. Weebly and Blogger are popular blog formats to house the work; Wix is the most popular format for the creation of websites.

Coursework coversheets (CCSs) were completed to a variable standard. There were still some clerical errors to be seen but most administration material was in good order. Many CCSs did not include reference to unassessed participants, despite this being a requirement of submission. Several centres failed to submit research/ planning despite this also being a requirement. Some did not indicate which two pages of the websites had been assessed (where more than two had been created). Many did not specify which website templates had been used, despite this being a requirement.

There were a few issues accessing material submitted via optical media or USB drive. Although these had usually been encrypted, the passwords had sometimes not been sent to the moderator (as required by OCR) and this meant that moderation was held up until the passwords were acquired. Some centres did not submit work in generally recognised formats (e.g. jpeg) but submitted work in its raw state, that required the originating software to be able to view (e.g. Photoshop files). Acceptable formats are listed on p51 of the specification. Centres are asked to familiarise themselves with all the instructions relating to submission of sampled materials to support the moderation process.

Given the complexity of some website addresses, if a central online hub is not provided, a Word file or PDF submitted via USB and including live links is an effective means of supporting the moderation.

There were a couple of instances of material not being accessible (for example, incorrect website addresses or video material that had been removed by YouTube). A number of candidates submitted the link for editing a website rather than that for the live site. Centres are asked to make sure that all online material is working before the sample is submitted and remains available during the moderation process.

### **Application of assessment criteria**

As was to be expected with a new specification there was some variety and inconsistency in marking by centres. This was particularly evident where candidates did not meet all of the requirements of their chosen brief. Centres are advised to go through the brief with candidates in some detail, drawing attention to all the requirements of the production detail (this is allowed, see p47 of the specification) and then making sure they refer to this when assessing completed work.

Marking of music videos tended to be more accurate, perhaps because this has been a feature of A Level Media coursework for many years under the legacy specification and so centres are more attuned to the codes and conventions of the genre. Marking of print products was the main area where there was often over-generous marking. This was mainly due to either failure to fulfil all requirements of the brief; inconsistencies in the quality of production work across both covers and contents; or failure to adhere to the codes and conventions of the genre. Marking often appeared to be based on the initial impact of a product, rather than looking closely at its content and construction. There were issues in parity of quality where centres had done more than one brief; this occasionally led to invalid orders of merit.

The digital convergence element also proved to be an area that was frequently over-marked. For a mark in the highest band, candidates are required to make sure there is an excellent level of convergence and synergy across both products. This was often not present, with the convergence being at best good and in a number of cases, limited or basic.

The best coversheets included clear, bespoke, candidate-specific commentaries that referenced assessment criteria and cited examples from student work. This was particularly helpful where candidates had produced projects that took a counter-typical approach to the briefs (for example, music videos that subverted generic conventions of dance while still adhering to the requirements of the brief). Less helpful CCSs lacked depth or detail - such an approach did not really help when identifying why certain marks had been given; this was particularly evident with regard to digital convergence.

It seemed more prevalent this year that comments on CCSs did not match the quality of the work seen.

A number of centres inaccurately described work as excellent/sophisticated, or at times as addressing 'all the requirements of the brief and elements of the production detail'. This was a real issue in a number of submissions; although this was the first year of the new qualification, this misinterpretation did lead to a number of centres over-rewarding candidates as a result, particularly at the top of the order of merit. Marks in the lower levels were usually more accurate.

One or two centres produced CCSs that only contained one or two lines per section, which was not helpful when it came to understanding why marks had been given. A number of CCSs were handwritten and in some cases the comments were difficult to decipher. CCSs were seen where the marking criteria were reproduced verbatim, without any qualifying information; this was not helpful, particularly when work did not match the centre's judgement, as it was impossible to see why these decisions had been made.

## Statements of Intent

Statements of Intent varied in quality. Some were incredibly detailed, going into great depth about how and why particular effects would be created and how these ideas linked to ideas explored elsewhere in the course (for example, theorists or particular products). The very best made clear links between the two main products and explained how digital convergence would connect the two. These also tended to go through the brief in depth, demonstrating how every requirement and detail was to be addressed.

Many statements were unbalanced, with a great deal of detail about the offline product but very little about the online, suggesting that these candidates saw a hierarchical relationship between the two. Some candidates submitted incomplete statements. Although not always the case, such candidates sometimes produced websites which were nowhere near the standard of their other product.

The weakest statements tended to repeat the brief without explaining how the requirements and production details were to be achieved while others had clearly been based on a centre-devised model leading to virtually identical documents.

Although the statement is not assessed, it is an essential element of the assessment since it can clarify a candidate's thinking, particularly if an unconventional approach is to be taken either to the codes and conventions of the form or the representations being explored. Several statements were seen with only one of the two media products being described and some candidates submitted no statement at all, thereby incurring a ten-mark penalty.

## Brief 1: Television and Online

Candidates were required to imagine they worked for an independent media production company, tasked with producing a three-minute opening sequence of a pilot for a new music magazine show for Channel 4 (to be broadcast pre-watershed between 8-8.30pm on Mondays), and the working website for the pilot show. The target audience was specified as a culturally sophisticated, 16–25 age group, class AB demographic. The opening sequence had to introduce the concept of the show, including at least two different features that would appear in the programme (e.g. interviews, reviews, documentary features, performance), provide an audience hook in a pre-title sequence, and include the title sequence. The web pages (a homepage and one linked page) had to promote the new music magazine show to its target audience and enable fans to interact with the show. The production detail to be included in the television work was specified as: a range of camera shots as appropriate to a music magazine show; editing of footage and sound; a soundtrack, to include voice (either as voiceover or diegetic voices, e.g. presenters, artists, interviewees, critics, the public), sound effects and appropriately edited music; at least two different settings; at least two characters representing at least two different social groups; graphics/titles to include the title of the programme and the names of key presenters. The production detail to be included in the website was specified as: a minimum of two original images (with at least one different original image on each of the two pages) that promote and reinforce the brand identity of the music magazine show (e.g. representations of the presenters, regular critics, featured artists, fans, social settings, venues); appropriate conventions of website design, including an original title and logo for the music magazine show and a menu bar; text introducing the main features of the music magazine show; working links from the homepage to the other page; a range of appropriate media language techniques (typography, images, fonts, backgrounds, logos, etc.) as appropriate to the purpose of the website; and audio or audio-visual content appropriate to the music magazine show, some of which had to be original. There had to be a clear sense of branding across the two elements of the cross-media production.

There were significantly fewer Television submissions than either Magazine or Music Video. Some were done with real confidence and understanding of the codes and conventions, delivering on all the requirements and production details. Many had a wide variety of content delivered in the three-minute

duration, with considered representation of the necessary social groups and with convincing and stylish title sequences. At this upper end, there was a good understanding of the structural codes and conventions and the needs of the target audience were met through content and mode of address. Here moderators saw the obvious technical ability which is necessary to be able to communicate all of the elements of the brief: controlled camerawork and lighting, animated title sequences, strong editing of both visuals and sound. Well-rehearsed performances were key to the successful outcomes (but the performers needed to retain a real and vital sense of enjoyment): this brief worked best when the appropriate presenter and performer casting had taken place; in one centre, candidates relied on the same two presenters; all the finished sequences were very different but all had the same confident performers in front of camera. Casting is clearly something it is important to consider. Using a running banner at the bottom of the screen, with web address, Twitter and Instagram details, etc., was an effective way of demonstrating understanding of digital convergence, as was having the presenters refer to the web and social media addresses and encouraging the audience to interact via them. Presenters were able to refer to the extra content on the websites (which candidates had actually produced and uploaded onto their sites).

However, at the lower end there was usually a lack of awareness of appropriate mise-en-scene, framing and composition; setting was generally the least considered aspect – most of the weakest productions were clearly in a school setting and a significant number of sequences were filmed in front of whiteboards, for example.

Discussion of all website and digital convergence components can be found after discussion of Brief 4.

## **Brief 2: Radio and Online**

Candidates were required to imagine they worked for an independent media production company, tasked with producing a three-minute opening sequence of a pilot for a new music magazine show for BBC Radio 1 (to be broadcast on Fridays between 7 and 7.30pm), together with the working website for the pilot show. The target audience was specified as a culturally sophisticated, 16–25 age group, class AB demographic. The opening sequence had to introduce the concept of the show including at least two different features that would appear in the programme (e.g. interviews, reviews, documentary features, performance) and provide an audience hook. The web pages (a homepage and one linked page) had to promote the new music magazine show to its target audience and enable fans to interact with the show. The production detail to be included in the radio work was specified as: soundtrack, which should include a range of voices (either as voiceover or diegetic voices, e.g. presenters, artists, interviewees, critics, the public), sound effects and appropriately edited music; editing of the opening sequence appropriate to the conventions of a radio music magazine show; the name of the radio show, presenters and participants; use of voiceover or dialogue to give a clear outline of the concept of the music magazine show; at least two characters representing at least two different social groups. The production detail to be included in the website was specified as: a minimum of two original images (with at least one different original image on each of the two pages) that promote and reinforce the brand identity of the pilot music magazine show (e.g. representations of the presenters, regular critics, featured artists, fans, social settings, venues); appropriate conventions of website design, including an original title and logo for the music magazine show and a menu bar; text introducing the main features of the music magazine show; working links from the homepage to the other page; a range of appropriate media language techniques (typography, images, fonts, backgrounds, logos, etc.) as appropriate to the purpose of the website; original audio or audio-visual content appropriate to the music magazine show. There had to be a clear sense of branding across the two elements of the cross-media production.

More radio work was seen than in previous Specifications, perhaps due to the influence of the Radio 1 Breakfast Show exam topic. Many of these submissions were very good and adhered to the

expectations of the form. Effort had been made to duplicate or conform to the conventions of Radio 1 with some excellent use made of stings, bedding and presentation as well as appropriate idents. The best pieces included a range of content and emphasised the positioning of the show in the schedules, the specific needs of the target audience and the sense that this was a new product.

Generally, most pieces met the main requirements of the brief. However, some radio submissions were more like documentaries than music magazine programmes and others did not seem to fit a Radio 1 housestyle. Work that was not so successful usually involved a lack of the required production detail, but often showed missing key elements or weak technical skills that meant the codes and conventions were not demonstrated well. Weaker work tended to demonstrate one or more of the following:

- A lack of introduction to the concept of the show
- Voices recorded either using poor quality microphones or the computer's built-in microphone, resulting in distorted or low-level vocal tracks
- Bed levels overpowering the vocal track (or conversely no bedding used at all)
- Voices recorded at different levels
- 'Phone-ins' where the phoned-in voice was clearly being recorded in the same room as the presenter
- Shows with little or no editing
- No candidate-created stings or jingles
- A lack of sound effects or consideration of acoustic space.
- Pieces where long segments of dialogue focused on the same feature rather than covering a range of content
- Where music was used, not fading this out after a few seconds (some pieces were heard which had more than 30 seconds of music; one ran for over two minutes of the three-minute piece)
- Pieces which sounded obviously scripted (and thus not particularly natural and so unsuited to the task)
- Representation was, perhaps, a challenge for many. Moderators were not sure that having presenters trying to 'put on an accent' was the answer to creating a range of representations.

Discussion of all website and digital convergence components can be found after discussion of Brief 4.

### **Brief 3: Magazines and Online**

This was the most popular brief and some accomplished work was seen, demonstrating a breadth of relevant understanding.

Candidates were required to imagine they worked for an independent media production company, tasked with producing the front cover and one contents page for each of the first two editions of a new *fashion* magazine, that was being launched by the publisher Bauer, together with the working website for the magazine. Bauer would be selling the magazines in retailers. The target audience was specified as a culturally sophisticated, 16–25 age group, class AB demographic. Contents pages could be either single or double page spread. The two front covers and contents pages had to feature a diverse range of fashion issues and styles appropriate to its target audience. The web pages (a homepage and one linked page) had to promote the new magazine to its target audience and enable fans to interact with the content. The production detail to be included in the magazine work was specified as: at least four different images using original photography across the covers and contents; a different setting for each cover; at least two models representing at least two different social groups; a call to action pointing readers to the website. The production detail to be included in the website was specified as: a minimum

of two original images (with at least one different original image on each of the two pages) that promote and reinforce the brand identity of the magazine (e.g. use of models, locations and clothing to create a strong sense of style); appropriate conventions of website design, including an original title and logo for the magazine and a menu bar; text introducing the main features of the online website; working links from the homepage to the other page; a range of appropriate media language techniques (typography, images, fonts, backgrounds, logos, etc.) as appropriate to the purpose of the website; original audio or audio-visual content appropriate to the online website. There had to be a clear sense of branding across the two elements of the cross-media production.

Some excellent examples were seen where candidates had achieved everything required by the brief, including the full range of production detail, with some well-considered and appropriate photography being used and an overall design aesthetic being carried across both editions of the magazine, including the contents pages, and to the websites.

The stronger magazines chose their fonts with discrimination (not relying on standard body-text fonts to create sell lines or the masthead) and showed control in terms of size and leading. The best work used a variety of images on the contents, with page numbers on the images anchoring them to the written contents, and appropriately laid out and sized text. The most challenging work showed features of more 'cutting edge' fashion periodicals (e.g. *Dazed and Confused*). Unexpectedly a few candidates used actual magazine content pages from web sources, which was absolutely not acceptable. It may be acceptable to use actual magazine layouts as 'place-holder' style guides, but these must be fully replaced by the candidate's own text and graphics.

Technical expertise in page design was generally very good, although the main software of choice (Photoshop) is not always as good at handling text as desktop publishing programmes (such as InDesign).

Although research and planning are not formally assessed, it was clear that where candidates had conducted focused research into the codes and conventions, such as assessing the conventional size for text on a contents page, this did result in much more appropriate work which compared favourably with professional productions. Such magazines had clearly been inspired by existing examples from Bauer and captured a sense of verisimilitude. Most magazines understood the requirement to appeal to an AB audience and there were some inventive approaches to this. Many of the magazines constructed representations really well, with subtle but thoughtful differences around nationality, class, aspiration as well as ethnicity and gender. Some of the most interesting work questioned issues of normative gender stereotypes.

Where candidates had produced appropriate images, content and branding for their magazine, they were able to use their material effectively in the construction of a website consistent with their print product.

In general, the less successful magazines tended to miss key elements from the brief (including the production detail), did not adhere to the codes and conventions of the form or did not meet the conventional expectations of the genre. Some examples were:

- Magazines which were more lifestyle than fashion (including, for example, cover features on cars or sports stars with no fashion context or a fashion element which seemed to have been 'shoehorned' in)
- A lack of consideration of the need for two models from two different social groups. A central focus of these briefs is the construction of representations and this has to be carefully considered
- Failure to place the models in different settings on the cover, even when the backgrounds had been Photoshopped, or in inappropriate settings: mise-en-scene too often featured school fields / classrooms/ uniform

- Magazines where the front cover image was either a medium close up or a close up of a model's face and so had no focus on fashion. Where candidates' photographs did not specifically address an AB demographic this could have been achieved in the cover-lines and contents, for example focusing on high end designer fashion
- Lack of reference to the website, or failure to draw attention to this either on the cover or the contents page (some sort of call to action was essential); as a result not only did this mean they did not meet all the requirements of the brief, but it also limited their mark for digital convergence as it meant at best that there were *'inconsistent links between the two cross-media products'* which is Level 2 assessment criteria
- Contents pages which duplicated text, stories or imagery/ models across both issues
- Regarding codes and conventions, weaker magazines tended not to have linked the cover-lines to the contents page, included little or no copy other than titles in the contents page, or did not consider the leading/ typeface for the cover-lines or created small mastheads which lacked impact
- One or two magazines did not include the price (or a barcode) on the cover, despite the brief stating that the product was to be sold by retailers
- Several sets of magazines did not refer to the fact that these were supposed to be the first two editions – this was a requirement of the brief. In some cases, magazines were given a heritage of several years while others did not mention this element at all. At least one centre submitted sets of magazines from the same month, demonstrating a lack of industrial understanding/ attention to detail
- Magazines where excellent front covers were not matched by the quality of the contents pages; for example, no sub-headings, limited use of images, little/ no copy, no use of columns or use of a wide variety of fonts, inconsistent column structure, too much white space, very little in terms of actual written contents, font sizes which were overly large in order to fill the space. All of these demonstrated a lack of understanding of the codes and conventions
- Perhaps the most significant problems came from candidates who seemed to be following the approach of the legacy specification which was less prescriptive than H409; such candidates produced excellent pieces that were either simply not mainstream enough to support the industry context or did not fully work as fashion magazines, so despite demonstrating solid technical skills, such work did not fit the requirements of the brief and so was not able to access the top-level marks such work might previously have garnered.

Discussion of all website and digital convergence components can be found after discussion of Brief 4.

#### **Brief 4: Music Video and Online**

Candidates were required to imagine they worked for an independent media production company tasked with producing a three-minute music video for a fictional *dance* band/artist signed to Universal Music, and the working website for the band/artist. The target audience was specified as a culturally sophisticated, 16–25 age group, class AB demographic. For this brief candidates were allowed to use found material as they could use an existing song for the music video. The music video had to feature a narrative appropriate to a music video (e.g. a performance montage, a linear narrative illustrating or commenting on the song, or a mix of performance montage and other narrative elements). Content had to be suitable for broadcast on streaming sites such as YouTube and to be age appropriate. The production detail had to include: a range of camera shots and editing appropriate to the genre; at least two different settings; at least two characters representing at least two different social groups; and graphics/titles to include the name of the track and the name of the band/artist. The web pages (a homepage and one linked page) had to promote the band/artist to its target audience and enable fans to interact with the content. The production detail to be included in the website was specified as: a minimum of two original images (with at least one different original image on each of the two pages) that promote and reinforce the brand identity of the band/artist; text introducing the band/artist; working links

from the homepage to the other page; a range of appropriate media language techniques (typography, images, fonts, backgrounds, logos, etc.) as appropriate to the purpose of the website; original audio or audio-visual content appropriate to the band/artist's webpage. There had to be a clear sense of branding across the two elements of the cross-media production.

This was the second most popular brief and it generated some genuinely creative work. The best products demonstrated that candidates had understood the specific requirements of the brief relating to genre, representation and industrial context and clearly researched this before planning their own pieces. There were some very creative and accomplished productions seen which, through strong technical skills, demonstrated a fundamental understanding of the relevant codes and conventions. The best work emphasised the performance aspect, filming the artist performing the track a number of times in different locations with different mise-en-scene and utilising a variety of camera shots and movement; which was then effectively edited with accurate lip-synching throughout. A key characteristic of dance music tracks is a consistent rhythm and beat that lends itself perfectly to editing to the beat in music videos. The best work demonstrated that well; however, this technique was not seen in a number of music videos submitted. Location work was generally effective; hardly any pieces were seen which were shot within schools (or if these were, then the mise-en-scene/ composition disguised it well) and some effective material was shot at night, demonstrating that candidates seemed to have access to high quality equipment – some video work was of close to professional quality.

Most videos included some element of performance, although some were conceptual or narrative pieces. Some videos demonstrated very well-performed lip-synching, although this was more often a weaker element. Most videos took into account the requirement that there be two social groups featured (some quite inventive approaches were seen to address this) and costumes/ settings often addressed an AB audience. Most videos featured a range of shots and camera movement.

In general, less successful music either missed key elements from the brief or did not adhere to the codes and conventions of the form. Some examples were:

- Tracks that did not fit the dance genre. Although this is a very broad field, some songs chosen could not be regarded as dance, with a number of pop/ballad tracks, for example (e.g. a low-tempo piano track by Lorde with no drums or bass; several indie rock pieces and at least one 1980s classic which, good though it was, was clearly not 'dance')
- Failure to mention the name of the band/ artist/ track at the start or end of the video
- Editing which did not match the pace/ BPM of the track (particularly important for the genre)
- Concepts which lacked a clear through-line (for example, pieces which were effectively just environmental studies where candidates had gone into the countryside or down to the beach and simply filmed footage with little or no consideration of structure/ theme)
- Mise-en-scene featuring school fields / classrooms/ uniform. In several centres, it was hard to see that two social groups were represented
- Pieces where performance footage was used in a perfunctory manner or where lip-synch was not fully effective
- Videos where some sort of simplistic narrative, e.g. a chase or use of a candidate's holiday footage (a huge number of airplane windows were filmed through this session!), was imposed with little or no consideration of the content/ mood/ tone of the track
- Camerawork/ camera movement which did not demonstrate the level of skill, finish or excellence required for Level 5 marks to be secured – although this is less important than it was for the legacy specification, the criteria relating to this uses the descriptors 'sophisticated' and 'accomplished'; where shots are out of focus or the camera-operator is reflected in glass, it is difficult to agree that these are appropriate terms to use

- Lots of videos this year which shot actors from behind walking away from camera, sometimes holding hands, sometimes not. This is not a convention but seems to be very popular and should be avoided
- Vertical mobile phone footage should be avoided at all costs
- Lots of shots of people talking but we can't hear what they are saying; again, not conventional
- Representation is a named criteria for this specification but lots of work was submitted featuring young people in 'normal' clothing, making no attempt to follow conventions and create messages via the costume

Centres are reminded of safety issues (risk assessments are vital, see specification p47) and the appropriateness of both recorded material and of the chosen song lyrics for examination purposes (see specification p30). Unfortunately, responses to the music video brief had examples of both potentially dangerous behaviour and lyrics/filmed activities that were deemed inappropriate.

## Online Products

Websites were the second product for each of the four briefs and were weighted with the same number of marks as the first product (the television, radio, magazine and music video pieces respectively). However, across all four briefs, the websites were the most problematic element of the assessment since the content/ quality was so variable. Websites were often either exceptionally detailed, demonstrating a great deal of commitment from candidates, or were lacking in content and seemingly created in a short amount of time; some were seen which included very little content, consisting of an animated background – clearly a template – and a couple of images.

However, some superb examples were seen, with many going beyond the specifics of the brief in terms of the amount of material included, both in terms of the visuals and the copy. Such examples made it evident that candidates had considered real-world examples of websites and had applied this knowledge effectively. They had also clearly appreciated that the website is worth the same number of marks as the analogue product (as well as perhaps noting the descriptors used in the Level 5 assessment criteria) and had, as such, put in an equivalent amount of time in creating it. The best sites exhibited effective, bespoke photography and copy, often capturing a tone appropriate to the needs of the intended audience, with a degree of sophistication being clear (as well as a wide range of representations). It was always clear from such sites which two pages were to be assessed (as noted above, this is something centres are advised to include on the CCS where candidates have produced more than the required two pages). The very best sites transcended the templates from which they were derived, including original backgrounds and layout elements that showed a degree of creativity. Top end work ensured that traffic was driven between the website and the television programme, radio programme, magazine or music video with well designed consistent branding.

The specification (and the rubric) makes clear that: "where NEA briefs require a 'working website'", candidates are not required to create websites through programming languages such as HTML and can use web design software or templates. However, candidates must be responsible for the design of the website and all content (such as text, images and audio-visual material) must be original. Candidates must acknowledge any software or templates they have used on the cover sheet' (p30). Websites were produced using a range of tools. Some centres used web design software (such as DreamWeaver). This sometimes produced excellent work - but also some of the weakest, due to the technical demands of the software. Most candidates used online CSS web-templates (e.g. Wix). This gave candidates a wider range of audio-visual features and a more contemporary and professional looking finish but, if mishandled, could be generic and not clearly linked to the house style/branding of the other product. It can be an idea for candidates to have to work from a 'blank' template (Wix lets you do this) or insist nothing is left from a template. However, as might have been expected, weaker websites relied heavily

on the templates provided in Wix without personalising them. Some candidates included pages that had not been completed and were thus left with the default content from Wix templates. Generally the linked pages tended to be less successful than homepages, often lacking technical sophistication and, in many cases, lacking in content or being divorced from the larger project and so failing to take in the relationship between the other product and concepts like the target audience and representation.

Websites for the magazine brief generally successfully replicated the style and content of the magazine. The best work extended the range of images and issues indicated by the magazine and added creative audio-visual material including 'make-overs', video 'lookbooks' and interviews with 'designers'. Good examples of embedded audio-visual content for the music videos, television or radio briefs usually consisted of variations of behind the scenes footage. Websites for the Music Video brief tended to draw heavily on the video style and content rather than promoting the (fictional) artist's identity. Some of the 'Wix' sites used a generic music promo template which included identical tour venues and dates which were inappropriate for an artist producing a video with relatively modest production values. Some music video websites in particular had been built around the song rather than the artist, which did not really meet the requirements of the brief. Candidates would be well advised to look for examples of work commissioned by a genuine independent production company for up-and-coming artists (such as <https://www.youtube.com/user/RadarMusicVideos>).

Links between the two products needed to be stronger than just placing the product on the website and listing social media in order to be marked as Level 4 or Level 5; there could be examples of tweets, or Instagram posts, a newsletter, examples of merchandise for the brand, or discussion of other products available to buy such as tracks, tour books, subscriptions , etc.

Many candidates appeared to approach the website like an ancillary text from the legacy specification, not a second product worth the same marks as the magazine, radio production, television production or music video; as such it often was sparse and needed more content. In general, less successful websites either demonstrated a lack of attention to detail or missed key elements of the brief/ codes and conventions of the form. Some examples included:

- Sites which did not include a viable/ visible menu bar
- Sites where the linked page (or in a couple of cases the homepage) was virtually blank or included text but no image
- Sites with two uneven pages: i.e. one strong page and one page that looked and felt as though it had been put together quickly
- Sites that did not have any linked pages – just two separate webpages
- Sites where it was difficult to find the second (linked) page or where candidates had only created a single scrolling page with internal links; although this is how some websites operate, it did not meet the precise requirements of the brief
- Sites that did not include embedded audio/ video, or where the embedded material was not original. Either candidates had completely omitted this from their design or they had included links to YouTube videos rather than producing some of their own content
- Sites which extended beyond the sides of a standard monitor screen
- Use of template backdrops/ failure to edit template materials rather than using bespoke imagery/ text
- Sites where the linked page was not specified and candidates had produced a number of pages; as only one linked page can be assessed, it was often the case that the first linked page the moderator looked at did not contain much content, the candidate having spread all content over a number of pages. This adversely impacted on the marks that can be given
- Sites which gave no indication of the relevant media industry context (Bauer for the magazine; BBC Radio 1 for the radio; Channel 4 for the television and Universal for the music video)

- Images used on websites were often not of an appropriate size and were not always anchored by text
- Banners did not always have the magazine masthead on them.

## Digital Convergence

This element was common to all four set briefs and was often explored both directly and indirectly and was generally quite successful. The digital convergence between the two products was addressed fairly well by most candidates. Sometimes there were fine examples of coherent branding and synergy effectively engaging and giving sustained and insightful meaning for the audience. This was often far more successfully realised in the print brief, though there were some good examples for the music video and television briefs too.

However, a number of centres seemed to give full marks for all examples of digital convergence, regardless of how well they demonstrated coherence, synergy and meaning. This appeared to be the least understood aspect of the briefs for a number of centres and so it proved to be an area which had a tendency to be over-marked. For a mark in the highest band candidates are required to make sure there is an excellent level of convergence and synergy across both products. This was clearly lacking in a lot of work, where the convergence was at best good and in a number of cases, limited or basic.

Where the convergence was well-considered it was effective; the use of imagery/ logo/ models/ colours/ themes across products clearly demonstrated that the overall branding had been considered - there had to be an emphasis on mutual promotion: promoting one product across the other form; thus, products were often overt in using the 'call to action' to direct readers/ listeners/ viewers to content on the website (for example, a shout-out on the radio or television show, a link at the end of the video or copy on the cover/ contents pages of the magazines), while the websites were very effective in their use of cross-media links (for example, featuring the front page of the current edition/ embedding the video/ radio show) and highlighting specific content in the partner product). There was also some very effective consideration of how to interact with the target audience (for example, bespoke contact forms, subscriptions, exclusive offers, social media feeds , etc.).

However, in many cases the convergent nature of the work did not seem to develop further than shared fonts and colour schemes and there were a number of examples where there was a real lack of convergence, such as:

- Analogue products which did not mention the website at all (most prevalent in music videos, where even a caption at the end would have worked)
- Websites which did not link directly to the other product (mostly magazines, although one or two music videos sites did not include the video) or included little/ no imagery taken from the partner product
- Logos on websites which did not match those on the partner product
- Models/ actors on the website who were not used in the partner product
- Features on the website which were not mentioned in the partner product (mostly in magazine submissions)
- The submission of only one of the two required products that make up the cross-media production; in such cases candidates can only be credited against the marking criteria for the one product supplied and cannot be credited any marks in marking criteria 2. As the brief says on p8: 'If a learner only produces one of the two required products that make up the cross-media production then they must only be credited against the marking criteria for the product supplied and cannot be credited any marks in marking criteria 2: application of knowledge and understanding of the digitally convergent nature of contemporary media to create meaning.' Some centres seemed not to realise that.

## Most common causes of candidates not passing

The two main barriers to candidates reaching a pass level were: (a) not addressing all the requirements of the chosen brief, together with the stipulated production detail; and (b) not demonstrating sufficient understanding of the relevant aspects of the theoretical framework. Both (a) and (b) require sufficient technical skills to be able to both fulfil the brief and successfully demonstrate the range of understanding.

Candidates who did not follow the brief as set were less likely to pass, or at least their final mark was negatively impacted on.

Candidates who do not seem to have practised using the technology earlier in the course were significantly disadvantaged.

It was noticeable that the best candidates had undertaken individual research into a wide range of contemporary exemplars while less successful candidates produced limited research on one or two centre-prescribed exemplars.

Lower-achieving candidates usually had underdeveloped and poorly thought through Statements of Intent. The SOI is a vital stage in planning how to address all the elements of the set brief, including the ways in which the candidate can demonstrate all the necessary knowledge and understanding and how they can construct the relevant representations. Submissions that do not include the SOI automatically incur a 10-mark penalty.

## Common misconceptions

A main misconception is to approach H409 03/04 like the legacy G324 specification, which had rather more generic briefs. These four briefs are specific in the required detail - without addressing the precise demands of the brief candidates cannot reach the higher levels, no matter how creative or technically skilled they may be. Some candidates seem to have not understood the need to produce the tasks as set, perhaps not understanding that these were absolute requirements; for example, in the magazine brief, some candidates produced feature pages rather than contents pages, which demonstrated a fundamental misunderstanding of the brief.

In the case of the magazine brief, some centres misunderstood Product 1 and Product 2, thinking that Product 1 was the first magazine, product 2 the second magazine and the Digital Convergence mark was for the website.

## Avoiding potential malpractice

Candidates should generate all their own original content; work should have no 'found' material. Page 30 of the specification says 'learners must be responsible for the design of the website and all content (such as text, images and audio-visual material) must be original'; the rubric on the front cover of the brief, notes: 'You must use original footage, images and/or text within your production.'

Candidates should not use images or text created or written by others in order to bulk out their own work, however innocent in intent – centres can usefully discuss notions of copyright/plagiarism before candidates even see the brief.

## Helpful resources

<https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-and-a-level/media-studies-h009-h409-from-2017/>

## Additional comments

Centres can aid moderation greatly by thoughtful administration and presentation of work.

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