



ASSESSMENT and  
QUALIFICATIONS  
ALLIANCE

**General Certificate of Education**

**Media Studies**

**MEST2      Investigating Media**

**Report on the Examination**

*2009 examination - June series*

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## **General**

Although available to enter as a unit in January, no candidates were entered for MEST2 in January this year. Although there are some similarities between MEST2 and the legacy Specification Production module MED3, the fact remains that the differences far outweigh the similarities and the workload is also far more considerable. It was never going to be the case that candidates could manage the amount that is required of them in what amounted to a term.

The number of centres entering candidates for MEST 2 this summer was 575 and the number of candidates was 11699. Judging by the amount of communication between centres and their Coursework Advisers, there was some uneasiness initially, both about the demands of the unit and also the technical challenges that it threw up. Advice has been available on the AQA website, ([http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/media\\_trb\\_new.php](http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/media_trb_new.php)) and the Teachers Resource Bank is being added to all the time, which means that centres would do well to have a look on a regular basis to see exactly what is new. As is the case with any new Specification, what may seem to work perfectly on paper and in discussion with the examining team does not always work so well in practical terms with students.

However, despite a few teething problems, most centres seem to have coped remarkably well and with very good humour to a unit that does present a considerable challenge. Centres have been quick to point out problems and the occasional error and the Board has responded as quickly as is humanly possible when these matters have been brought to our attention. This is the point in the year when it is very important to stress that a new specification is necessarily an organic beast and that the Senior team will be monitoring and assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the unit and will make amendments accordingly. It is also the moment to point out that it is helpful that should centres have observations to make based on the experience of the past year that they let us know – either through writing directly to the Media Studies Office in Guildford or through their coursework advisers.

## **Administration**

There were quite a few administrative problems this year. Many centres seemed to be unaware of the fact that the coursework deadlines have remained the same as with the legacy specification. Some centres seemed to treat these deadlines in a very cavalier fashion which made life quite difficult for the moderators. If there is a problem with the submission of work then the centre should contact the Guildford office in the first instance – not just simply sit on the work until contacted by the board. The onus is on the centre. The procedure remains the same – if the candidature is 20 or below then the centre should send all candidates immediately to the moderator whilst if there are more than 20 candidates then the centre should send the marks to be received by the moderator by the published deadline and then wait until contacted by the moderator with information about which candidates should be included in the sample.

Each candidate's folder should have a CRF form which has been signed by both a teacher and the candidate. There should also be a CDS form which authenticates the work and also confirms that internal standardisation has taken place. Many centres omitted these from their samples which resulted in a lot of extra work for moderators – and indeed centres when contacted later on in the process. Many

centres presented and submitted the work in a clear and helpful manner. Folders were properly labelled, the work was easy to identify and there were often helpful notes included, above and beyond the comments on the CRF form. It can get very complicated and particularly where work has been done in a group this constructive labelling aided the process.

There were some centres however where the moderator spent a considerable amount of time simply trying to match work to individual students. We cannot stress enough how important it is to label all work with the name of the candidate, candidate number and centre number and above all to place the work of each student in a folder or rigid plastic cover. Where all e-media and moving image work is on a DVD then that too should be labelled clearly and the names of the candidates indicated in the order that the work has been copied. Where candidates have worked in groups it would be very helpful if the title of the project and the names and candidate numbers of the members of the group were provided and that the labelling on CDs/DVDs or memory sticks made it easy to match practical work with all members of the groups. This is particularly important where discs etc. contain work from multiple candidates and/or groups. Print work should also be labelled properly and where drafts etc have also been submitted then it should be made clear which work is the final copy.

Several e-media tasks were impossible to access – centres are reminded that there is an entire section in the TRBs devoted to the submission of coursework:

<http://store.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/pdf/AQA-2570-W-TRB-OGMEST2SA.PDF>

The following points should also be noted:

- print work should be submitted as hard copy
- all DVDs submitted should be playable on a domestic DVD player
- e-media work should be submitted on a DVD, CD or memory stick and should be a working artefact, not simply submitted as a print out or a raw data file.

Some web-sites were submitted as URLs where they had been uploaded to the internet and, similarly, some moving image works was submitted as a YouTube link. These are perfectly acceptable methods of submission of work but, it should be noted, not necessarily expected.

It is important that work should show evidence of having been marked. All comments made by the teacher are helpful to the moderating process – the more evidence we are given the easier it is to understand why a mark has been given.

## **Research and Planning**

The TRB advice is that candidates should submit:

- a representative sample of their research along with a summary of their findings
- a full list/bibliography of resources accessed
- their rationales
- mock-ups and storyboards/shooting scripts.

Whilst many centres did indeed send a representative 5-6 pages of work in each candidate's folder which gave an indication of why the marks were given there were centres who submitted far too much research work. It is not necessary to submit all of the research work that the candidate has done over the year. The teacher can

reward this but needs only send in a sample of the research and planning to explain how and why they have reached a mark for that candidate.

Some centres submitted research work which was to all extent and purpose the same for each candidate. Candidates in some centres worked to a research framework which was clearly provided by the teacher and was based on identical websites and publications.

Some research did not seem to bear any relationship with the final product. It was hard to understand why research into the rom-com genre was attached to a trailer for a British indie horror film.

Each Brief was written to allow each student room to manoeuvre in whatever way they saw fit. In each Brief there were a variety of keywords (BBC3, Lottery funded etc) which suggested areas that might be worth researching but equally, at the end of the day, each Brief was also sufficiently open with the intention of allowing all students room to formulate their own *individualised* approach to the tasks.

It is also important to note that the Production task should emerge from the research that candidates have performed over the period of the year. This can be both explicit and/or implicit. Centres are reminded of the 4<sup>th</sup> item in the mark scheme:

- *The productions are clearly/largely/etc fit for purpose in the light of the candidate's research* and should be assessed accordingly.

### **Briefs/Tasks**

Some centres seemed to be unaware of the Briefs. These were sent out to all centres that expressed an interest in the specification in September 2008 and when centres entered candidates for MEST2 this summer.

There will be slight revisions to the Briefs this year simply to clear up and clarify any ambiguities that might have arisen over the year.

There were many instances where the Briefs were only very loosely worked to. Some centres seemed to see them as a "general topic area" and produced work that did not follow the guidance set up in the scenario or tasks chosen.

The instructions were frequently not followed. The number of pages requested in both print and web was sometimes ignored, and the nature of a feature was interpreted quite oddly at times. Several centres sent full page adverts and front pages as a 'feature'. There were instances where it was difficult to see any difference between the two features both in terms of style and content. Some centres submitted websites that were not active and some persisted in sending print outs that followed the generic codes and conventions but were really only artefacts designed on Publisher and left simply as that.

Some of the moving image work was clearly not a trailer and equally not a sequence from a lifestyle or factually based TV or indeed radio programme. A public service advertisement does not fit any of the Briefs this year.

Centres are reminded that the Briefs have to be followed – the challenge is the way in which candidates respond both to the scenario and then to the two tasks. Moderators are not working to a template of expectations and it was surprising (alas) how fundamentally conservative and unchallenging much of the work was.

It is a familiar refrain, but the fact that all three of the Briefs basically talked about a teenage audience should not then necessarily imply that all the products should then be about teenagers. Nor are all teenagers the same. There seemed to be a sense that if the creator was a teenager then what appealed to them would appeal to everyone else. This is not necessarily the case.

Target audience has always been a problem – but it has to be said that just because most horror films are aimed at teenagers this does not mean that all teenagers and only teenagers watch horror films. Simple demographics are not terribly useful either. Much more valuable would be a sense of lifestyle, media purchasing habits, gender, purchasing power, locale etc.

Each Brief was written to allow each student room to manoeuvre in what ever way they saw fit. In each Brief there were a variety of keywords (BBC3, Lottery funded etc) which suggested areas that might be worth researching but equally, at the end of the day, each Brief was also sufficiently open with the intention of allowing all students room to formulate their own *individualised* approach to the tasks.

It is important that teachers do not over play their role as Producer in the Production scenario. Candidates should be given (as much as is possible) a much freer rein when tackling MEST 2. Whilst we can understand and sympathise with the logistical problems attached to running a production course it is important that candidates are shown ALL three Briefs and are allowed to choose which ever one they want. This may well pose a few problems in terms of classroom management but the heavy hand of the teacher was seen rather too frequently in the work submitted by some centres – i.e. it was obvious that in some centres they had *all* been told to make a gangster Guy Ritchie trailer and there was very little room for manoeuvre.

## **Productions**

If the above part of the report seems somewhat negative it is very important at this juncture to establish the fact that there was evidence of some extremely good work achieved by many candidates this summer. In fact there were times when the moderating experience was really enjoyable. Some candidates had obviously worked extremely hard over the year, thought long and carefully about the nature of the tasks and attempted to be original and lively as well as technically proficient.

One caveat - several centres allowed group work across both tasks. Group work suits the broadcast task rather well but made moderating the print/e-media work very difficult as often multiple candidates contributed to only three print or web pages. This was the amount of work expected for productions completed by one candidate. Please be reminded that where one task is completed by a group of candidates then the second task should always be an individual piece of work.

## **Broadcast**

Some very good work was presented but there were times when weaker candidates did not consider the form of their work fully – some trailers and lifestyle sequences were little more than montages of images shot around school and then edited together. It is always advisable (wherever possible) to avoid using school/college as a location. Better candidates had considered the codes and conventions of the form and attempted to work these into their productions.

There were some predictable technical issues. Poor lighting in (usually horror) trailers made some sequences very difficult to see. Often there were problems with sound (which sometimes begs the question of whether dialogue is really necessary), and shaky hand held shots - and not always due to a *Cloverfield* influence. Looking at the quality of the moving image, it appeared one centre had allowed broadcast work to be completed on low quality video cameras – probably mobile phone cameras as the work was very pixelated. Very few examples of radio work were submitted and those that were tended to be sometimes little more than a radio show with a couple of Public Service adverts included.

## **Print**

Some candidates replicated house styles effectively but some print work missed even some basic magazine layout codes, e.g. the use of columns. A common problem was the choice of inappropriately large font which made the work look very amateur. There were many items which were white-space heavy. Sometimes it was quite difficult to differentiate the two articles which seemed very similar in both style and content.

Some work relied on found images and a worryingly large number on ‘snapshots’ which at times were only tentatively related to the work provided. There were several instances where mobile phone cameras were employed to take photos with a subsequent loss of picture quality. One centre (fortunately a fairly small one) had held a photo shoot using the same people and these images were shared across a number of candidates so that their work was visually very similar.

As with e-media, part of the assessment is based on the way candidates used the chosen software to create their products. Whilst it is not necessary to use ‘industry standard’ software which may be difficult for candidates to use, there is an expectation that they would design and create layouts themselves. Some candidates did, however, leave elements of publisher templates on their submitted pieces – giving the game away.

Despite that – and despite the fact that there were a few centres who had misread the Brief and felt that the task was an exercise where English Language was the primary assessment objective – there were some excellent instances of work which was of a very high standard.

## **E-Media**

Some creative approaches were taken to the task and some real engagement with the platform was evidenced. Weaker candidates seem to see the e-media as little more than another print production. Better candidates considered audience engagement via interactivity (even where technologically this couldn’t be fully realised). Several centres used programmes that did not allow students to engage fully with the platform – e.g. word or PowerPoint and so the websites were limited. Other centres used software that candidates had difficulties getting to grips with (eg Dreamweaver) and this too limited the creativity of the work completed.

There were a few uses of ‘drag and drop’ web building services submitted. The use of such facilities tends to be self-penalising to an extent as they tend to reduce the candidate’s creative input. Some candidates were obviously very proficient and ambitious with their websites and embedded videos and many other interactive

aspects into their web pages. There were other centres where the only interactive aspect of the website was the link to page 2 and thence to page 3. Obviously many centres found this area of the course a real challenge and hopefully centres will have found that the challenge is actually demanding but ultimately fulfilling. We look forward to more e-media artefacts next year.

## **Evaluation**

Rather too many evaluations became simply a description of the process that the candidate had been through over the year, rather than a genuine evaluation of the successes and weaknesses of the production process. Better evaluations managed to consider the audience and how it had been targeted by the tasks submitted. These evaluations also discussed how the productions had actually fulfilled (or not) the requirements of the Briefs and better still some actually challenged the Briefs and took a rather more independent line in terms of the final product and the reasons for going down that particular path.

Many centres did not manage to discuss (no matter how briefly) the third platform and how that might have been tackled and why it was not.

A first year of any specification is always going to be quite tricky. Centres, examiners and moderators are all used to the legacy way of doing things and change can often be rather threatening. Whilst there have been teething problems, the overall sense is that the new MEST2 unit is a challenging one, but also one that most of the candidates seemed to have enjoyed and responded to really well.

## **Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.