



General Certificate of Education

Media Studies

MEST4 Media: Research and Production

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General

There were 7419 entries for MEST4, the A2 coursework unit for GCE Media Studies. Since this was the first time that candidates had submitted work for this unit there were some teething problems, a few misinterpretations of the specification and a sense that some candidates had probably not done themselves justice with the Linked Production, having concentrated more thoroughly on their Critical Investigation. That said, there was still plentiful evidence of engaged and interesting work from the majority of candidates.

MEST4 is considerably different from the previous A2 coursework unit. Firstly, there is not such an emphasis on the creation of an hypothesis which the candidates should then challenge. It is much more a response to a media issue or debate, or indeed what we liked to call a problematic. It was envisaged that over the period of the two year A level course there would be certain topic areas that intrigued, mystified or stimulated candidates and that the Critical Investigation would allow them to explore this topic area and share their findings in a 2000 word essay (the options also exist for candidates to submit their findings in other media forms such as podcasts, radio documentaries etc).

The major change from the old specification is that candidates should then submit a Linked Production which would allow them to clarify, exemplify or indeed challenge their findings. The production was introduced partly in response to the request of many centres who told us that most candidates sitting the old specification tended to be very disappointed that there was no practical work in the second year of the course. It was however, also felt by AQA that the MED5 unit tended to favour those candidates who were particularly academic and articulate and penalised those candidates who had much to say but lacked the vocabulary to say it. It also felt somewhat incongruous for a Media Studies examination to rely too heavily on the printed word. There was also plenty of evidence to suggest that the very best of learning and exploring the media takes place through the practical process.

The introduction of a Linked Production piece was greeted very warmly by the majority of centres – with the caveat that resources might be stretched because of the expectations of MEST2. However, it needs to be pointed out that A2 candidates will have had the valuable experience of creating two productions at AS which should mean that the production they elect to produce at A2 would be less of a struggle. Candidates are also expected to work in a much more individual and independent manner at A2 so hopefully the process was not quite as arduous for centres as once thought.

Administration

It would seem that the experience of managing MEST2 last year has made the administration of MEST4 a little easier for centres. Certainly there was definite evidence that all paperwork was completed successfully and that the vast majority of centres managed to get the work to their moderators well within the relevant deadlines. A few important administrative points need to be made:

- Please ensure that all 2000 word essays have been properly labelled student by candidate and stapled or tied together so that moderators have easy and secure access. Nothing is worse than when a moderator opens a packet and a bundle of unattached and unnamed papers fall to the floor
- It is most helpful if the cover sheet has been attached to the coursework rather than delivered in a separate folder

- Please annotate all work remembering that the more comments that are made (both on the work and on the cover sheet) the easier it is for the moderator to understand why the marks you have given have been awarded
- If centres have engaged in a dialogue with their Coursework Adviser then it is particularly helpful to print off the correspondence and send that along with the work
- Many centres did not contact their Coursework Advisers this year and some that did failed to include the Approval Form in their sample. Coursework Approval Forms **will not be mandatory from 2011 sessions onwards** but Coursework Advisers will still be available for help and advice. If centres do utilise this service they should then do as requested above
- Centres are advised that a great deal of very helpful information is available about this, and all other units, on the AQA Media Studies website. This is updated on a regular basis
- Linked productions should be fully realised artefacts. Magazine pages should be printed, websites should be fully functional, broadcast material should be playable on most domestic machines
- Please note that Quicktime files do not play on domestic DVD players and behave very strangely on PCs. Quicktime is to be avoided
- Please label all production work as thoroughly as possible
- DVDs and CDs must be labelled
- It is best if each individual's broadcast or e-media work is stored on a separate disk rather than storing all a centre's work on one disk. Where a centre's work is stored on one disk, please place the work in candidate number order and again label as carefully as possible
- Please do not submit production planning materials etc
- There is no call for an evaluation of the Production.

Critical Investigation

There were some really interesting, well researched and stimulating Critical Investigations submitted this year. Centres are reminded however that the topic areas and the problematics should be chosen by each student on an individual basis. MEST4 is a synoptic unit and individual research and critical autonomy are essential components of this unit. There may well be isolated instances where two candidates in a cohort may want to look at similar areas – and if this is the case it is not too difficult to ensure that they adopt a different path through the problem - but the spirit of the unit mitigates against the idea that a cohort should all answer the same fundamental question and simply refer to different texts. The mark scheme makes it very difficult for centres who adopt this system to reward candidates fully.

To achieve synopticity, candidates work should really utilise all the five Key Concepts, refer to the wider contexts of production and consumption and broadly ask the question 'why'. The question 'how' is considered more of an AS signifier. Many candidates benefitted from taking a problematic and then attempting to answer 'how and why' it was so. Questions that ask 'to what

extent' or 'what effect' tended to hinder candidates and to be honest were probably unanswerable.

The notion of a media audience still seems to cause a few problems. It is difficult for candidates to appreciate the finer niceties of a media audience which is after all very rarely a convenient block, but they do need to realise that the nature of a teenage audience goes beyond simply what they and their friends consume. The experience of being a teenager in this country differs throughout the country.

Candidates should also be prepared to challenge where they feel appropriate. There was a sense in many investigations that candidates were trying to please their stereotypical notion of what an examiner/moderator wanted them to say – there is too much violence in computer games was a popular comment – it may well not be the case that examiners think that. Candidates should be reminded that it is the argument and debate, with focused reference to specific media texts that gain marks.

Several topic areas seemed particularly popular this year – namely celebrity culture, the size-zero debate, the popularity of the vampire genre and violence and its effects on an audience. It is to be hoped that candidates feel freer over the coming years to spread their wings a bit more and tackle some less obvious areas.

It must also be noted that particular advice has been given through Coursework Advisers, in standardisation meetings and also on the website about the necessity of avoiding a MEST4 topic area which is simply in essence a repeat of the MEST3 case study. Thus the topic area – An investigation of the representation of women in women's magazines – is an inappropriate Investigation and belongs firmly in MEST3. However, there are issues attached to the representation of women in women's magazines that can be explored in the Critical Investigation – and as long as the question/problematic allows a candidates to utilise all the five Key Concepts, refer to the wider contexts of production and consumption and broadly ask the question 'why'. Thus a question asking why women are still represented in such a stereotypical way in women's magazines which accompanies print articles about feminism and equal rights etc is starting to point in the right direction.

It is important that candidates supply a bibliography. Many omitted to do this and those that did hardly did themselves justice. Candidates are reminded to keep a full record of all primary and secondary texts consulted over the year and not be shy about supplying it. Candidates are also recommended to consult texts which are not purely on the internet. That said, there were some tremendously well researched and insightful essays this year.

Linked Productions

Again, moderators saw many really first class pieces of production work this summer. This is particularly true of moving image work. Some of the examples seen were of an extremely high standard and were ambitious and fundamentally entertaining. Indeed one of the great pleasures of moderating this unit is the opportunity to watch some first rate video work.

However, it must also be noted that there was a prevailing sense that much of the production work seen tended to look as though it was very much an add-on, completed fairly hurriedly sometime late in the spring term. This may have something to do with the fact that the production is worth fewer marks than the Critical Investigation, it may be to do with the fact that the research and 2000 word essay was more time consuming than first thought and it may also have to do with the fact that candidates have a tendency to leave things to the last minute. Unfortunately a lot of work was seen that was really no better than weak work seen in MEST2.

This is particularly true of the print productions that were seen and which tended to be very similar to many of the print productions seen at AS.

The A2 Linked Production is meant to encourage the ambitious candidate who has learnt about the various platforms and processes in the previous year and now wishes to build upon that experience over the space of Year 13 and produce something that can stand in its own right but also enhances, explains or challenges the research that has been outlined in the Investigation. The production does not necessarily come after the Critical Investigation. The two strands could be worked at simultaneously – or indeed a candidate may wish to start with the production piece which may then in turn stimulate the Critical Investigation.

Similarly, many centres stuck very firmly to the advice in the specification about expectations. The specification states that moving image and audio work is not expected to be more than 5 minutes long. It then states that print or e-media work should be at least 3 pages long. The majority of candidates/centres stuck to this advice absolutely. The advice in the specification is there because centres always want to know what is expected. This advice refers to minimum expectations. It is our hope that candidates in future will be more ambitious and enterprising with their linked productions.

Final thoughts

There does seem to be a slightly negative edge to the above report. The first year of any unit is always going to be fraught with worries and concerns. Despite all the provisos above, the unit seems to be working well. Candidates seem to have enjoyed the process and the results will hopefully please many of them.

The experience of the last two years has been a learning one for all of us. Please ensure that you look regularly at the Media Studies pages of the AQA website, particularly the 'Notice Board' and 'Key Materials' pages for regular updates and information about all units.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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