

Media Studies

Advanced GCE A2 7860

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3860

Report on the Units

January 2009

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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 syllabus 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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Chief Examiner's Report

In the final full year of the legacy specification, entries for the AS units are largely confined to re-sits, which tends to have a skewing effect on performance; this is commented upon in the reports on the units, which are briefer than usual as they have a summative rather than formative function on this occasion.

The last major session for the A2 units will be in June, so comments here are more substantial with the aim that centres will take the advice given and apply it for the summer. In particular, there is a range of advice for the coursework designed to help improve performance.

Centres will doubtless be concentrating on the demands of the new specification but it is important that candidates are fully supported so that they can achieve their best in the final session in the summer.

Centres should note that the A2 units will be available in 2010 for the final sessions, though we anticipate a very small entry; AS units will cease this summer.

2730 Foundation Production

There were 364 entries from 121 centres, for this unit. A large proportion were re- entered candidates whose work had clearly been re-assessed. Centres are reminded that this summer's session will be the final assessment session for this unit.

The administration was reasonably well delivered, although there were a significant number of centres who did not submit the Centre Authentication Form (CCS160) with the centre's work. Contacting centres for this mandatory form involves extra work for the moderating team.

Print work was most popular. In a small number of cases, planning material, in particular, the evidence to support the choice of images was missing. For the magazine task, some centres are still disadvantaging candidates by using inappropriate software to produce magazines. Dedicated DTP software such as PagePlus is inexpensive and produces professional results when compared to MS Publisher which is best suited to newsletters and flyers.

Video work was also present, although not in any large numbers. This work was reasonably well presented.

There were very few entries using radio or web design

Overall the work submitted was well presented and the marks awarded illustrated the outcomes achieved. However, a small number of centres marks were adjusted, which enabled that work to be brought into line with national standards.

2731 Textual Analysis

There were around 1,400 candidates.

There was plenty of evidence which indicated that the candidates were fully engaged by the extract used in Question 1, which led resulted in some very full and detailed analytical responses.

There were more examples of candidates who had run out of time than in previous sessions and although the majority of candidates answered both questions many were unable to provide a detailed response to Question 2.

The extract chosen, 'King Kong', Dir. Peter Jackson, 2005, provided ample opportunity for students to discuss the five technical aspects of moving image language for discussion.

The overall performance of candidates was generally consistent with previous sessions. Many candidates performed well, with ample opportunity for candidates to comment on the construction of meaning in the extract, through an analysis of the technical codes. It was felt by examiners that the extract provided sufficient differentiation for all candidates. It was evident that candidates generally share an excellent understanding of the task for Section A.

It was pleasing to note that few candidates wasted time with excessive and unnecessary reference to various theories. There were a number of candidates that focused too closely on the degree to which they felt the extract adhered to the conventions of the Action/Adventure genre. Too often this compromised the level of close, detailed analysis of the technical codes utilised in the sequence. Centres are also encouraged to prepare candidates to begin their analysis of the extract immediately as a number again began their responses with generalised introductions that failed to address the requirements of the question. As such, little credit was awarded in these cases.

Most candidates produced balanced analyses that covered each of the five technical aspects in a way that demonstrated a command of the moving image language. There were some highly sophisticated and detailed responses. Most candidates discussed the ambiguity in characterisation. More able candidates did so proficiently through close analysis of the construction of the middle section of the sequence as the men prepare to capture Kong. The responses that received lower marks tended to be characterised by a descriptive approach with some identification of technical codes but little in terms of the analysis of the significance of their usage. Some candidates restricted the detail of their analysis by trying to cover the entire sequence. This usually resulted in superficial analysis and an over emphasis on Cinematography at the expense of the other technical aspects. It is not necessary for candidates to analyse the entire sequence in detail to be awarded a top level mark.

In common with previous sessions, Camera Shot, Angle, Movement and Position was well covered. The vast majority of candidates used technical terminology accurately and with confidence in this area and it was pleasing to note that most identified specific examples of techniques used in the extract rather than adopting a more generic approach. Nearly all identified the low and high angle shots that signified the superiority of Kong and the vulnerability of the humans respectively. There was also some excellent analysis of the various camera movement in the extract, including the tracking shots of Ann Darrow and Jack Driscoll in the first part of the sequence and the crane shot that emphasises the gulf between danger and safety. More able candidates used their identification of establishing long shots to discuss significant aspects of the mise-en-scene. Less confident candidates merely identified these techniques and explained that they were used to allow the audience to familiarise themselves with the setting. Analysis of editing was varied in quality. Nearly all candidates discussed the use of slow motion in the build up to the attack on Kong and most discussed the purpose and significance of this in terms of Ann Darrow's growing realisation of the trap that has been set. Many also linked this to

the change in the non-diegetic music and analysed the combination of the slow motion editing and eerie score. Confident candidates also linked the slow motion with the close ups of the weapons and the bottle of chloroform. Some combined this with the discussion of the arc shot around Darrow and commented on the 'dream-like' qualities that the combination of technical codes created. Beyond the slow motion sequence, weaker candidates tend to discuss little beyond the controlling of the pace of the sequence through the frequency of the cuts and there is still misuse of the term 'jump cut' to describe simple cuts. Better responses commented on the use of reaction shots, match on action and the use of parallel action at the beginning of the sequence that creates a clear link for the audience between the characters on the two sides of the chasm. Many candidates commented on continuity editing but this was not always developed beyond observing that this was utilised to create a seamless flow to the sequence.

Sound was generally well covered by most candidates. The overwhelming majority commented on the different pieces of non-diegetic music used and the intended effect of each piece on the audience. Discussion of diegetic sound was also done well with candidates identifying the amplification of significant sounds and commenting on the qualities of Kong's roar and the way in which this contributed to constructing the beast as fearsome and powerful. As in previous sessions there was analysis of dialogue and the function of this, for example, in the use of commands by Carl Denham to establish his position of authority. There was some confusion over external diegetic sounds that were identified wrongly as being non-diegetic.

Computer Generated Imagery was clearly extensively used in the sequence and nearly all candidates identified this as the method used to create Kong. Other special effects were also analysed effectively by most candidates and there was discussion of the use of stunt work, pyrotechnics and chromakey to create a sense of jeopardy, spectacle and excitement for the audience.

Mise-en-Scene was well analysed. Many candidates chose to begin their responses with analysis of this aspect and this ensures that it isn't a brief afterthought at the end of the essay. There was some highly sophisticated analysis of the settings employed in the sequence. This was achieved through close deconstruction of the set design, colour palette and lighting. Some candidates were able to discuss the relationship between the characters and the setting and commented that the characters were out of place on the deserted island. Most candidates were able to discuss the time period that the film was set in by analysing the costumes and props that grounded the film in a decade from the past. There was also analysis of the inadequacies of the weaponry and boats used by the human characters when compared with the extraordinary power of King Kong.

Advice for Candidates for Section A

- Make useful detailed notes on the extract.
- Use moving image language terms accurately.
- Select appropriate examples from the extract to discuss – you do not have to cover the whole extract or every example.
- Analyse why / how these aspects are used to create meaning for the spectator.
- Refer closely to the set extract – no generalised analysis of action adventure films.
- Cover all five aspects – do not miss one out.
- Avoid just describing what happens — analyse and interpret.

Overall Performance for Question 2

There was some evidence of very good teaching and preparation with some candidates well prepared to address issues on representation using appropriately compared texts. There were still a number of candidates who found it difficult to offer comparisons between texts and some

Report on the Units taken in January 2009

responses were often pre-prepared and 'shoe-horned' best fits, without actually addressing the question. Examiners felt this to be particularly true of the Gender and Sitcom question. There are still a small number of candidates who are sidetracked by unnecessary theory. For example, discussing the narrative structure of sitcoms without linking this either to the focus on gender or to the set question.

A significant number of candidates, for whatever reason, failed to provide enough detail in their responses to Question 2 and this affected the mark awarded as a key requirement here is for textual detail to exemplify points made. There were few wholly inappropriate pairings of texts.

Question 2a Consumerism and Lifestyle magazines

This question was generally addressed well. The vast majority of candidates identified their texts at the beginning of the answer and exemplified points made through reference to textual detail from one issue of the magazine. Many candidates accurately identified the target audience for each magazine early in their essay and this was well advised. A range of magazines were referenced. The most successful pairings seemed to consist of magazines that target slightly different demographic segments. Comparisons of Men's Health and Cosmopolitan were successful as candidates were able to link the representation of lifestyle and ideals to the gender of the target audience. Other successful pairings included Company/Cosmo and FHM for the same reason. Weaker responses tended to be generalised pieces of textual analysis that failed to focus on the topic of consumerism or on the specific question.

Question 2b Celebrity and the Tabloid Press

This was the second most popular topic (after Sitcom) and provided the full range of marks. Confident candidates were able to address the focus on negativity by addressing factors such as age, beauty, nationality or popularity. This enabled candidates to argue that a celebrity's representation was affected by one (or more) of these factors. For example, a comparison of the representation of Madonna and Guy Ritchie in two tabloids focused on her negative portrayal being linked to her nationality in contrast to Guy Ritchie's. Other celebrities covered successfully included Amy Winehouse and Britney Spears.

Weaker candidates answers were focusing on really recent publications, including some from the day of the exam. Some simply discussed the trials and tribulations of the celebrity or failed to move beyond a running commentary of celebrity's lives.

Q2c Music Culture and Radio

There were hardly any responses to the question on Music Culture and Radio.

Q2d Gender and Television Sitcom

This was by far the most popular topic for Section B responses and the quality of response was diverse. Less able candidates appeared to struggle to consistently address the required focus on appearance and its role in representing gender. Some merely offered comparisons of the appearance of the characters in the two sitcoms studied with little explicit analysis of the function of this in constructing a particular representation of gender. Many also interpreted appearance narrowly and focused solely on costume. More confident candidates took a broader approach and considered the physical characteristics of the characters and their actions. Some also discussed the use of gendered settings and the appearance of the characters within them. Too many candidates wrote responses that addressed a previous question about stereotypes. This was fine where this was discussed through reference to appearance but often this was ignored. Popular texts studied included Absolutely Fabulous and Men Behaving Badly, Royale Family and My Family, Peep Show and Two pints of lager, Fawlty Towers and The Office, Vicar of Dibley and Father Ted.

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Q2e Conflict and Competition in Video Computer Games

The question was generally well answered by candidates who had been prepared well by the centre. There were few cases of candidates answering the question despite not having not been prepared for it.

The candidates on the whole were able to address the issue of conflict and competition. The question on player identification was generally explicitly answered although this was not always the case. Descriptive answers tended to recount key elements of the games and the achievements required for progression within each game. The level of appropriate vocabulary for 2e responses has increased with each session - many candidates utilise appropriate terminology within their analysis.

The question set enabled candidates to usefully explore a number of facets within their pairings. For example, candidates were able to analyse areas such as narrative structure to make the point that within Grand Theft Auto IV, gamers are provided with the opportunity to avoid conflict by using the game's free-roaming facility but that some level of conflict is inevitable when the players seeks to complete the missions. In addition, candidates also discussed the use of back-stories and cut scenes and the way in which these positioned the player. Avatars, mise-en-scene and sound were also analysed effectively.

Popular texts included Grand Theft Auto IV, King Kong, Tomb Raider, Guitar Hero and Manhunt.

Advice for Teachers for Section B

- Choose a topic that plays to your centre strengths and resources.
- Select texts that engage and interest candidates, appropriate to their ability.
- Teach the basics of textual analysis and the concept of representation.
- Give plenty of examination practice and prepare candidates in examination technique and how to answer unseen questions.

2732 Case Study: Audiences and Institutions

This is the last major session for this unit and there were around 3000 candidates, all presumably re-sitters. A very small entry is expected for the summer.

Performance overall was generally weaker than in previous sessions. As previously, most candidates tackled section A. there were a number of rubric errors, which was a sign of lack of preparedness. Generally question 2b answers were more substantial than in earlier sessions, though often the main essay ended up shorter. Very few candidates did enough to justify a top band mark for the essay question.

Section A

1a Almost all candidates picked up full marks

1b Some candidates extracted the wrong information for particular statistics, though most scored at least 6 of the 8 available marks

1c Many candidates failed to understand the question and missed the point

2a was generally well answered

2b many candidates failed to move beyond the passage and others were very limited in their examples. The best responses really engaged with the issues.

Question 3 was the more popular of the two essays and though some points overlapped with 2b, there were many good answers, using Web 2.0. Relatively few candidates referred to specific examples of videos or other texts online and too many interpreted creativity as meaning interactivity and gave very narrow responses.

Question 4 tended to be better answered, with reference to the games industry in particular. Many responses focussed on Apple as a case study, with varying degrees of success.

Section B

1a Candidates generally found three examples

1b a surprising number of candidates took this to be a repeat of 1a and instead of sectors, referred to more company names.

1c was generally well answered

2a most candidates were able to identify some sensible reasons for the location of the industry

2b was a relatively predictable question, but surprisingly few candidates had a developed case study to use for it. Often, candidates limited themselves with some vague assertions about possible links between companies.

3. Some very effective responses here, with good case studies used to demonstrate globalisation, ranging from the BBC to News Corp and a range of strategies adopted by such players in the media market.

4. Was generally poorly answered, often apparently without any preparation from candidates, offering a 'commonsense' approach, which rarely worked to address the issues in anything more than a very superficial way.

For the final session in the summer, centres entering candidates are advised to ensure that they prepare case studies with specific examples and that they balance their time so that they write a substantial essay where 45 marks are available.

2733 Advanced Production

This was the eleventh session for this unit and there were 1933 candidates.

As always, moving image work was the most popular option, consisting largely of music videos but with some animations, short films, film trailers and TV documentaries. There was comparatively little submitted in the way of print-based work, web sites, cross media packages or radio. When Centres submitted print work there was occasionally a concern that the briefs undertaken did not offer an appropriate increase in challenge from the set 2730 briefs of the legacy specification. Centres are advised to read the guidance to teachers thoroughly when selecting possible briefs – for example, City guides are problematic particularly in relation to the institutional context and should be avoided.

Most centres followed appropriate administrative procedures but there were a few merit order issues; some inappropriate briefs, a number of non-functioning DVDs of the work!) and still some missing Centre Authentication form (CCS160 is a QCA requirement). There were also a number of clerical errors. A few centres still did not include candidate names/numbers, group membership or assessment comments on their cover sheets

Some centres were still sending MS1s over a month after the 10 January MS1 deadline and others took over two weeks to respond to the sample request; this jeopardised their candidates getting their results on time.

Assignments

The majority of tasks submitted were appropriate for the unit. Centres that submitted work in one medium were generally better able to support candidates and to assess accurately.

In preparing for the new A2 Specification, several centres encouraged their candidates to construct blogs with URLs as they go along, as suggested last session. Candidates can use this as part of their planning evidence - it's a convenient way of keeping evidence of the research, planning and construction processes and helps them in structuring their final evaluation. Such blogs can include location shots, working links to other videos by the same artist, storyboards, risk assessments etc and can provide an indication of time management. Some candidates created animatics by filming their storyboards to edit to their soundtrack using the software that they would later use to edit the final music video; this is a practice that helps with both with editing practice and pace of the final videos. Candidates then added their animatics to their dvd or blog.

Video - Video has remained the most popular medium since the start of the Specification and, once again, the submissions were dominated by the production of music videos. These were at their best when students offered a balance of narrative and performance. Weaker music videos looked a lot like short films indiscriminately set to a piece of music.

Film - There were some short films and film trailers. The latter were often problematical as so few demonstrated an understanding of how trailers work – preferring instead to tell the entire narrative in a few minutes, resulting in artefacts that appeared more like short films. On the other hand, the candidates producing short films created some effective narratives but frequently did not to address fully the industrial context in the Critical Evaluation

Television - As noted in previous sessions, the benefits of choosing real material as the basis for a production is apparent in television documentaries. One Centre submitted documentaries which explored local issues, giving candidates the opportunity to interview local officials, conduct vox pops and construct thoughtful cutaway sequences. Another Centre submitted local news

packages which again gave students a fantastic opportunity to put into practice the theory they had covered for unit 2735.

Print - There was little print work but the work that was submitted consisted mainly of magazines and showed some understanding of form, style and audience.

ICT/New Media - A handful of websites showed understanding of the appropriate codes and conventions, but there were still problems with gaining working URLs from centres – this is a requirement of this Spec (and the new Spec!) and if this cannot be done by centres this brief must not be submitted. Web work was often overmarked.

Radio - Once again there was very little radio work this session.

Cross Media - Some groups included a complete pop video as part of a cross-media package with CD covers, tour posters and magazine double page spread but with little radio promotion, though. Others submitted more limited packages – in such cases, group sizes need to be considered carefully to ensure there is sufficient work for each group member.

Critical Evaluations

The Critical Evaluation component was often handled well by candidates who understood the requirements of the component. Centres need to ensure candidates write not only about the process of planning, research and production, but also encourage both the application of theory when analysing their work AND the importance of placing their product within an institutional context, comparing it to real media output and gaining real audience feedback in order to evaluate their work. Candidates lost vital marks by writing a personal evaluation of strengths and weaknesses of their work. Some candidates' evaluations were overmarked by at least a level, when they failed to use the appropriate medium specific terminology or to have much discussion of theory or real media contexts. Some candidates are still not writing about their AS brief in the introduction to their Critical Evaluation.

Assessment

Most centres ensured that work was annotated and that coversheets were detailed and supportive of the moderation process. In the moderation of large Centres and varied teaching teams, it was pleasing to see several Centres providing evidence of cross-marking and internal moderation. This was often indicated on the work itself or on the assessment sheet. This is to be encouraged.

Most Centres' marks were quite accurate although there was some evidence of an inconsistent approach in awarding planning marks, with some centres still apparently failing to include reference to the teacher's observation of the planning process and other centres giving level 4 marks with no supporting evidence. (A lack of supporting material was a real problem from a number of centres. Some centres submitted no storyboards at all and again the lack of evidence of original images continues). Teacher observation and physical evidence of planning are equally important in assessing this element.

Administration and presentation of work for moderation

Centres were generally efficient in sending work for moderation, but a few still missed the deadline for sending mark sheets or waited too long before responding to sample requests. Many centres did not notify the Board that candidates had been withdrawn or were absent and this required 'chasing'.

Centres were generally far more efficient in sending the mandatory Authentication Forms this session but a few still do not seem to realise the significance of this form – if it is not sent, then candidate marks will be reduced to Zero. This is a QCA instruction. It was also difficult to identify where centres are operating as a consortium – centres need to make this clear when sending initial paperwork/coursework to the moderator.

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Centres are requested that work sent on DVD must be checked before posting. Some Centres included DVDs that played and others did not; some even said 'blank' when inserted in the DVD player/ computer drive. Centres providing all the DVD entries on a Master DVD aided moderation especially when this had individual chapters and were labelled with candidate number and surname. One or two Centres submitted DVDs which were unlabelled and the work on them did not include any kind of identifying titles, which turned moderation into an investigative process!

Centres are reminded once again of the importance of making and retaining copies of all work submitted for moderation. OCR is required to keep samples of candidates' coursework for awarding, archiving and training purposes and so cannot guarantee that all work submitted will be returned following moderation.

Advice to teachers

- Centres should create tasks that make optimum use of their skills and resources.
- No AS briefs or variations of AS briefs may be used at A2
- Ensure risk assessments are carried out in order to encourage safe working practices; work closely with candidates to ensure no inappropriate material is filmed, photographed, written or recorded.
- Critical Evaluations should include:
 - a systematic account of the stages of planning and production
 - detailed reference to relevant real generic examples, indicating evidence of independent research
 - detailed reference to the relevant areas of institutional context and clear understanding of where the candidate's own production would sit within this
 - detailed reference to audience feedback and use of theoretical framework in which to place the production.
- Use the wording of the assessment criteria when writing cover sheets as this keeps the assessment within the appropriate level.
- When giving differing marks to group members make clear the reasons for the differentiation
- Keep to the deadline for sending mark sheets and, where there are 10 or fewer candidates, send all work with the MS1 by the deadline, including the Centre Authentication Form.
- Websites must have a working URL – a disc is not an acceptable alternative.
- Moving image work may only be submitted on DVD or VHS – not CD-R, mini DV etc
- Keep files slim and manageable and don't include print outs of all the secondary research or all finished questionnaires. Put the cover sheets on top, followed by the artefact, then the evaluation. Put all appendices and drafts at the back of the file.
- All work should be ready to send when the sample request arrives from the moderator so that the centre can respond promptly.

2734 Critical Research Study

General Issues

There were around 5000 candidates this session. There were many more instances than in recent sessions of notes being borderline/ suspected malpractice. Some candidates had very detailed essay plans in their notes that were virtually copied out word for word in their answers and others had used short hand code which was then transferred directly to their essay answer – these practices clearly infringe the rubric and lay candidates open to the malpractice procedure and possible resulting penalties, including loss of marks.

Teachers need to make candidates fully aware of the required purpose, style, content and format of the notes as laid down clearly in the specification and the Instructions for Teachers [2734/IT], and the potential to fall foul of the malpractice process if these instructions are not followed. Supervising teachers and tutors must be fully aware that in countersigning the Critical Research Study Sheet [2734/CV] they are confirming not only that the candidate's research has been undertaken independently and on an individual basis, but also that the notes do not breach any of the rules about style, format and content..

A significant number of candidates misinterpreted the questions in one of the following ways:

- 1 Some wrote only one response, covering aspects of question 1 and question 2.
- 2 Some wrote about primary research methods & findings in question 1 and about secondary research methods & findings in question 2

Neither of these approaches is advisable as candidates tend not to reflect upon and evaluate their methods and sources. Also, it is difficult for candidates to develop an argument as they discuss their findings separately in relation to each source. Some very able candidates who had clearly undertaken a substantial amount of research and had a good understanding of their topics did not achieve to their full potential as they did not meet the all the criteria in the mark scheme.

Question 1

Most candidates used an appropriate range of methods, the internet being the main source (and, in an increasing number of cases, the only source) of secondary research for many. Most candidates demonstrated the ability to identify a range of different sites. A significant number seemed to have accessed books solely through sections made available on Google books or Amazon's 'look inside' feature.

Primary research is still dominated by questionnaires and focus groups. Many of these were clearly justified and explained, although they were not always appropriate to the topic focus. The sample size was often very small (as few as 10 for a questionnaire in many cases). Some innovative approaches to primary research were taken - one candidate used a local debating society to debate issues surrounding crime and the media and another conducted a survey about women in film in Leicester Square in order to question film fans as they left the cinema. Many candidates had interviewed appropriate experts for example local police officers (for crime & the media) or sports editors on local newspapers.

Many candidates did not appear to have analysed media texts, even when undertaking a representational study. Others analysed only one film or one episode of a TV drama which does not provide the widest scope for discussion or comparison. A small number of candidates had simply watched short clips of texts on YouTube.

Some candidates explained and evaluated research methods in very general terms, without citing specific sources. It is important that responses to question 1 demonstrate appropriate

research, therefore specific details are required. Occasional responses were written in the future tense.

Question 2

Most candidates were able to discuss their topic in an engaged manner and to demonstrate some understanding of relevant issues. Many candidates presented their findings in a list-like manner, progressing through each source and stating what they had discovered. This led to a rather disjointed response, often quite descriptive. The best responses developed an argument using research findings as supporting evidence, rather than presenting the findings first.

Topic 1 Advertising

A popular topic once again. Some candidates focused on appropriate case studies (Coca-Cola and Dove were popular this session) or explored ideological perspectives such as the representation of family values in food advertising. One candidate successfully researched the development and success of the Think campaign over time, comparing this with commercial campaigns. Many candidates again focused on the size zero debate. Disappointingly a lot of candidates once again discussed magazines in general rather than the advertising contained within them.

Topic 2 Children & the Media

Less popular than in previous sessions. Most candidates focused on the effects of violence upon children with very variable degrees of success. The most successful candidates used psychological studies as part of a much wider debate and considered specific types of media text. Less successful responses tended to take a much broader approach by considering film, video games, TV programmes etc. and quoting psychological studies as 'proof' of the effects of the media on all children. Some candidates considered the beneficial (pro-social and educational) effects of the media on children and one interesting response researched the changing representation of children in horror films.

Topic 3 Community Radio

None seen

Topic 4 Crime & the Media

A very popular topic. Many candidates researched knife crime – some very successfully considering representations of race in relation to knife crime within broadcast news and/ or the press. However, some responses focused solely on knife crime with very little consideration of its representation in the media. A significant number also considered crime representations in video games. A smaller number considered fictional representations of crime for example in film (particularly the gangster genre) or in TV drama.

Topic 5 Politics & the Media

Very few responses seen. Not all candidates focused on politics but on broader issues relating to race or religion. One very engaged response questioned the impact of Fox News on the outcome of the 2000 US elections, having interviewed family friends who were resident in the US at the time.

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Topic 6 Sport & the Media

Still a fairly popular topic. Many candidates researched the financial impact of media involvement in sport, particularly football. Some of these studies were tightly focused and well supported however many were very broad and lacking a real investigation into the relationship between sport and the media.

Topic 7 Television Drama

A substantial number of responses seen. Most candidates chose a sub-genre to research such as soap opera or crime drama. Many focused on the representation of reality within their chosen texts, the best of these clearly defined the concept of realism and argued accordingly but many candidates did not pin the concept down, leading to a very generalised discussion.

Topic 8 Women & Film

The most popular topic. A lot of candidates explored opportunities for women within the film industry and it was pleasing to see different roles such as producers being studied in addition to directors and actresses. Many candidates considered the representation of women within a genre, the most popular being action, horror and science fiction. Some original focus topics included: the representation of female sexuality in American film over time, considering the impact of the Hays Code and the changing representation of women within the gangster genre comparing both British and American films.

Topic 9 World Cinema

More candidates attempting this topic. Most undertook a case study of a national cinema, Bollywood being a popular choice, while some focused on a particular director. There were some interesting focus topics considering for example Spanish cinema before, during and after the Franco period. These tended to give candidates scope to develop an argument rather than simply describing the state of an industry or the films that have emerged from a particular country. One very successful response investigated the representation of women in Japanese cinema, comparing films from the 1950s with more recent texts and integrating the changing nature of Japanese society into the discussion.

2735 Media Issues and Debates

There were around 1200 candidates this session. Candidates were required to answer two questions from three separate sections in two hours. Generally, candidates were well prepared, and illustrated their answers with an interesting variety of case studies. The more successful candidates chose to explore questions by using between three and four case studies in depth. Weaker candidates either failed to make adequate use of case studies, or referred superficially to a large number of texts. Though there are still some centres where texts and case studies are dated, many centres seem to have taken the exam board's advice and used recent or current case studies. These clearly have more relevance given the white-knuckle pace of change in the digital world, and all examiners have commented that students who engage best with the questions are those for whom the case studies seem fresh, interesting and relevant to today's society. Historically important texts and landmark events of cultural significance provide important illustrations for media students, but blending the current, recent and blue-remembered texts into a media course in a suitable balance is the ideal.

Some, though not all examiners noted a pleasing reduction in the reliance on learnt answers. Candidates generally engaged with the set questions, not with the ones they wish had been set.

Section A Broadcasting

Music programmes on tv

Candidates were invited to consider the strengths of television, compared with other media, in delivering music to audiences, or to discuss how well the range of musical tastes is catered for on television in the UK.

The X Factor, Later with Jools Holland, Orange Unsigned Act, and Nokia Green Room were the most popular case studies. Weaker candidates relied heavily on programme descriptions; stronger candidates analysed the strengths of various music-delivering media, the internet in particular, as compared with television, or considered the diversity of music programmes (or lack of them) on mainstream television and the role of genre-channels in providing for niche audiences. One examiner commented that very few candidates looked at the differences in range of programmes available on free-to-air TV as opposed to pay TV – and there is a big difference in the range available

Broadcast news and current affairs

The factors that determine programme content, and the issue of trust were the two themes of the questions in this topic.

This continues to be a popular topic, particularly since the disappearance of the 'soap' option from this section. Some centres focus on very outdated news events, such as the death of Diana. It is difficult to see how a reliance on outdated material can help students to explore the function, role and products of today's broadcast news media. How can there be a scarcity of material for study? It is renewed on a daily, even hourly basis. And that, surely, is one of the points to be studied.

Candidates who had engaged well with this topic used a range of recent case studies – the coverage of the US elections, and the Matthews abduction were high on the list. Many centres have now gone beyond the Galtung and Ruge theories, and are helping students to engage with research and theory that is more pertinent to the digital world.

Some strange choices of programme are worthy of comment. For example, one centre had encouraged its students to use 'Loose Women' as a current affairs programme. One would expect even the low-brow current affairs programmes to engage in some level of research of important current events and to provide informed insights to its audience. It may be harsh,

though not very wide of the mark, to suggest that Loose Women consists almost entirely of casual gossip elevated to an unmerited status in an ad-hoc fashion by has-been semi-celebrities. Any arguments to include it in the current affairs genre would be flimsy, though the breaking down and blurring of genres generally is symptomatic of the modern media and would be appropriate material for the topic on 'postmodernism' in the new specifications.

Contemporary British Broadcasting
Very few candidates attempted this topic.

Section B Film

Contemporary British Cinema

The success of the UK film industry, and the difficulty of competing against the US market were the themes of the questions. This was the most popular section by far. Most candidates chose the first of the two questions. A good range of films was used as case studies, from *Atonement* and *Shaun of the Dead* to *Ghosts*, *This Is England* and *Bullet Boy*. One examiner commented that there was widespread awareness of the success of *Slumdog Millionaire*, but added darkly that it would be interesting to see how 'British' some candidates would feel the film was by the time of the summer exam season.

Another commented that a lot of extraneous textual analysis was embedded in what were obviously pre-prepared answers which hampered candidates' ability to respond to the question set. If centres are advising candidates to replicate pre-prepared answers, then centres should be aware that this 'one size fits all' approach will inevitably come unstuck when applied to the actual questions set.

The Concept of genre in film

Candidates were invited to consider genre as imitation, or to discuss particular genres' ability to adapt. A fairly popular section; horror, rom-coms and science fiction were the most popular genres, though an increasing focus on hybridity, and an understanding of the causes and effects of this concept, are now quite common.

Censorship and film

Most candidates chose the question which asked for a discussion of the issue of the protection of vulnerable film viewers; very few chose to consider which films had been awarded the wrong classification, in their opinion, in recent years. As one examiner noted, given the uproar over the classification of *The Dark Knight* as a '12' last summer, there were fruitful grounds for a well informed contemporary response to this question.

Many candidates rely on 'classic' case studies, and that may account for the preference of the first of the two questions. The role of the BBFC is generally understood by most candidates, as is a limited range of effects theories.

Section C Print

The Magazine Industry

Questions asked how well the magazine industry had responded to developments in electronic media, and how magazines managed to create a close relationship with readers. Candidates from one centre had used 'emonkey' as a case study to illustrate how sections of the industry had embraced change. The second question was generally not answered well; successful candidates explored the range of strategies used by magazines to engage with niche audiences; weaker candidates explained why they liked certain magazines.

Report on the Units taken in January 2009

Local newspapers

Many candidates struggled with the question that asked how far local newspapers followed the same news values as the nationals. Aware of the Galtung and Ruge theories, many candidates struggled to explain how the same values applied to local and national products. The frequency of publication, and its consequent effect on news selection and treatment, had not been considered by many. Nor had the difference between 'regional' and 'local'. It is a topic that could be explored in some depth, but seems to have been given a very superficial treatment by many.

The second question, addressing the decline in the local newspaper industry, was often more confidently addressed. More able candidates reinforced their analyses with data and research.. Weaker candidates often relied on a fighting-talk style of argument that lacked sincerity and evidence in equal measure.

Freedom, regulation and control in the British press

Many candidates engaged well with this topic, using a variety of case studies, ranging from established causes celebres and landmark legal cases, to very recent scandals and disputes. Max Moseley figured highly. Examiners can only guess at the class discussions that illuminated this complex case that has had important implications for privacy and reporting. Many candidates discussed the role of the PCC and articulated the pros and cons of its self regulatory role admirably. The best candidates were also able to demonstrate a knowledge and an understanding, to various levels, of statutes that limit press reporting.

The best candidates in recent examination sessions, this one included, have demonstrated a sophisticated and well informed understanding of the issues.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE Media Studies (3860 7860)
January 2009 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
2730	Raw	120	99	89	79	70	61	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2731	Raw	90	68	61	54	47	40	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2732	Raw	90	66	59	52	45	39	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2733	Raw	120	99	89	79	69	60	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2734	Raw	90	70	63	56	49	42	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2735	Raw	90	70	62	55	48	41	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3860	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7860	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3860	5.6	30.1	66.2	92.0	99.5	100	754
7860	13.8	44.6	73.8	95.4	100	100	72

826 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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