GCE

Media Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H540**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H140**

OCR Report to Centres

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Advanced GCE Media Studies (H540)

Advanced Subsidiary GCE Media Studies (H140)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

G321 Foundation Portfolio in Media

General Issues

Most centres sent their work on time, though as in previous series, there were some late submissions. Centres with ten or fewer candidates are reminded that they should not wait for a sample request and should send all their work to the moderator by the deadline. Most centres are now putting work online, which has drastically reduced the size of packaging. Despite requests in all previous reports, there are still some centres submitting online work with no central blog hub - this forces moderators to type individual URLs manually for each candidate. Often these URLs have been handwritten and contain errors, making the process unnecessarily lengthy. Centres should note that if all work is online, there is no need to send a DVD as well.

Candidate record forms were mostly completed in detail, but there were still some examples where teachers simply copied directly from the criteria, and lacked any personalised comments about the individual candidate's work. Centres are asked to send hard copies of the candidate record forms to ease the moderation process and to use the online version to avoid potential clerical errors, of which there are unfortunately still far too many.

The best centres using online submissions not only set up a blog hub containing the name and candidate numbers of those in the sample, but also ensured each blog featured the completed construction (e.g. film opening or magazine pages) at the top followed by clearly signposted responses to evaluation questions. There were a number of poorly organised blogs that made it necessary to search for the final construction work and/or spend time working out which evaluation question was being addressed. Indeed, many candidates failed to label the evaluation questions so it was not always clear what they were answering. Some centres are using formats which require every file to be opened individually; this practice is discouraged as it makes the moderation process unnecessarily cumbersome.

Centres are reminded that they are responsible for ensuring that nothing is added to online blogs after the May deadline date. Any material added after the deadline will not be considered for assessment. A few centres sent work in non-universal formats, such as Publisher and Photoshop. All work should be supplied in universal formats such as JPEG or PDF. There is still a problem with resubmissions in that the majority of the candidates appear to have done little to improve their marks since the first sitting**.** Where candidates make a new product, this must be accompanied by new research and planning and evaluation evidence.

Across all elements, centres are reminded that it is expected that differentiation will take place within groups, particularly in the marking.

Research and Planning

The best centres encouraged an equal measure of research and planning and advised candidates to see this as an ongoing process, representing the journey of the project. In some cases, there was an imbalance, with lots of research and little planning, or vice versa. The best work is comprehensive and shows strong evidence of candidates reflecting on the process of the production in their blogs.

Hard copy research and planning tended to lack the sense of a journey - candidates tended not capture the essence of their development as successfully as those using an online platform and evidence was often the product of retrospective work rather than the actual process. Some research tended to be very teacher-led and therefore did not always link to final products. There was still a lack of research into titles in particular and in some cases an absence of effective research into codes and conventions which impacted upon the construction of final products. In

some cases, there was still too much emphasis upon local questionnaire-based surveys, which often offered little of use.

For film openings, often research from weaker submissions relied too much upon trailers or film posters, whereas the better work tended to come from candidates who had looked closely at openings and the ways in which they work for audiences.

Construction

Print

There was some very effective branding across the three magazine components, with the best centres encouraging candidates to fully embrace the brief, which was evident as they completed additional tasks, such as adverts in the same house style as the magazine.

Overall, front covers were the strongest element of magazine work with contents pages most likely to fail to conform to forms and conventions, particularly in the use of images. The quality of double page spreads was variable; the best followed forms and conventions closely and featured striking images while the worst showed lack of awareness of the required point size for magazine copy and often failed to show understanding of basic elements such as the use of columns.

There was insufficient variety in terms of original images in many of the magazines. More variety in terms of costume and background is often required, and, for a contents page a variety of artists would be expected to feature. This led to many pages containing similar mid-shot or medium close-ups of individuals who were not styled in a way that made them readable as music artists. There were still a large number of candidates who failed to include at least four of their own images and/or included found images, which is not permitted and often still far too many apparent snapshots of friends and musicians with little consideration of purpose. In some cases, it was unclear as to the provenance of images. Candidates need to include originals in the planning process and ideally show the stages of development.

Candidates would benefit from paying more attention to details of page layout. In particular, use of space, and use of font colour. Font size, particularly in the double page spreads, was an issue in many cases. Front covers were marred in many cases by text superimposed over images. In the very rare cases when this has to be done, then choice of font colour is very important. Particularly on a front cover, image and text should be striking. Text that is obscured by the colour of an image is ineffective. Candidates need to focus carefully on register and spellings; if mistakes are noticed whilst producing their evaluations the centre should encourage them to correct them at that time. Candidates should be mindful that there is a balance to be struck between magazines looking full but not cluttered.

Radio

A small number of centres submitted radio work, with some good examples of appropriate stories and a clear attempt to combine relevant sounds with good mixing of different layers and some good integration of internal and external sound clips. There were some issues with register and tone, but otherwise this work held up well to comparisons with professional broadcasts. The best work demonstrated clear use of recording and mixing, with an appropriate choice of presenter, selected with the audience in mind. Music needs to be original- sometimes there was a tendency to use complete riffs from Garageband. Outside broadcasts should be just that, rather than recorded inside with backing track sound added. In some cases, the work drew upon research into national radio which then lead to outcomes less appropriate to a local audience.

Video

There were several examples of highly proficient/excellent editing and more work is being done on creating an opening with some sense of enigma rather than trying to create a condensed narrative. There was still an over-reliance solely on actors' names and film title to constitute film titles, showing a lack of understanding of the range of titles expected of a film opening and of their construction, appearance and timings. Candidates need to be encouraged to create their own soundscape rather than sourcing an existing well-known track, which is not permitted for this specification.

There were some excellent examples of film openings where candidates had clearly worked hard to establish a sense of enigma and atmosphere. However, more often, candidates did not focus well on what the narrative was. Many film openings ended abruptly; candidates had put some thought into what they wanted to show in the opening sequence but not enough into how they would close the sequence. The combination of effective use of images and sound, titles and lighting worked extremely well in some of the better work. There were many examples of highly proficient editing and excellent camerawork, the outcome of work on skills development. However, in some cases there was little sense of control of the camera, with an over-reliance on zooms and shaky material without tripods. Mise en scene was often well chosen, but weaker candidates still tended to focus on the chase in the woods. Some submissions were very short-the target should be as close to two minutes as possible; there is no penalty for being either over-length or significantly under, but candidates cannot expect to do themselves justice in a piece as short as one minute unless it contains immense complexity. Some openings contained far too much action- centres could advise candidates not to be over-ambitious in this regard. Titles were still often rather limited in terms of understanding of institutional conventions, and often featured non-existent job roles.

Evaluation

At the top end, there were some really creative pieces and here candidates had generally used a different technology to answer each question, exploring a range of formats and experimenting creatively. Centres that did particularly well made sure that the evaluation was not an afterthought and that candidates spent a reasonable amount of time producing it, rather than just a couple of lessons at the end of the project. It also appeared that centres had advised candidates to use a variety of technology; often the evaluations were submitted on blogs with PowerPoint, Prezi, video, audio and embedded documents to support. Director commentaries need to strike a balance between script and spontaneity. Likewise, centres are asked to consider the advice given in their moderator report and to respond accordingly. There were still many which produced evaluations in exactly the same way as the year before – essays to the screen. Where Web 2.0 tools are used, centres are advised to consider the appropriateness and effectiveness of them. In some cases, Prezis were used as just glorified essays, with one box per question. Fitness for purpose is essential.

A significant amount of candidates only produced Level 2 responses: brief, undeveloped short written responses done as an add-on rather than being treated as 20% of the mark. The candidates who had really made an effort showed thorough understanding as well as very effective use of ICT. There was a clear link between the research and planning and the evaluation-candidates who had done little research subsequently suffered in the evaluations.

G322/3 Key Media Concepts

This session witnessed a wide range of responses to the questions set, which ranged from excellent, detailed and sustained answers to more descriptive and less engaging ones. Those candidates, who achieved well, did so, on the basis of being well-prepared to address the question set and this enabled them to engage with a degree of sophistication with the key media concepts. There were fewer short answers or no responses seen than in previous sessions and on the whole candidates were able to use a much more extensive range of media language and terminology in their responses. On a different note there still remains a proportion of centres who have not heeded advice from previous reports and continue to teach dated texts, which are no longer considered 'contemporary' for Question 2 case studies; for example, Notting Hill (1999) and even This is England (2006). In order to ensure that candidates have an equality of opportunity in addressing the key concepts raised by the study of institutions and audiences they should be empowered to draw upon relevant and contemporary case study material.

There were a nominal number of entries for the unit G323 and therefore this report will focus on the unit G322

Question 1
Representation

The topic of representation examined this session was regional identity in the TV drama extract Doc Martin. Although this was the first session in which the candidates' knowledge of representation in regional identity has been assessed, there was little evidence that the task was more difficult than any other areas of representation. Candidates were able to correctly identify the specific regional identity represented and many were able to build a cogent argument around the general representations of rural lifestyles and the contrasts that are set up with an urban-based character. The extract provided candidates with the opportunity to engage with this key aspect of representation through the use of the four technical areas. The most able candidates could provide a discussion of regional identity which integrated analysis of the technical aspects and stereotyping and selected appropriately discriminated aspects of regional identity that they wanted to discuss. These candidates offered insightful analysis of regional identity that was developed beyond the use of accent/ dialect or the rural/urban oppositional themes in the extract. They were able to offer discussion and analysis of identity within the community and the arrival of Doc Martin, whilst at the same time explore the range of characterisations through the region and the nuances of these relationships. Lesser achieving candidates' discussion of regional identity relied on the whole on the examination of geographical divides and an over-reliance on 'binary oppositions' through the use of dialogue and location which often led to some reductive analysis of 'grumpy Londoner' verses happy and accepting community. At times these candidates would focus discussion on gender and class and status, rather than regional identity. It is important that candidates are fully prepared on all area of representational analysis including an understanding of the process of stereotyping. Most candidates were able to discuss differences in the representations of rural inhabitants to those of Doc Martin as an 'outsider'. However, only the strongest candidates were able to discuss which representations audiences were being invited to identify with in order to have a full understanding of the meaning of the sequence. There were many different areas of the UK identified as the location, including Scotland, the North, the Midlands, Wales and Ireland; only a few candidates identified the South West correctly. However, as long as the analysis focussed on the differences between rural and urban communities this was not a major obstacle to success.

Technical Aspects
Camera Shot, Angle, Movement
On the whole there was plenty of purposeful analysis by candidates. Those responses which worked well identified the purpose of the establishing two at the start of the sequence, which set

up the location of the extract. Candidates who were able to identity a range of shots in a sustained and methodical way could use this evidence to sustain an argument of how meaning was constructed, for example, with the use of interior shots in the house with the plumbers, although often there was confusion over the use of high and low angles and the connotative meaning associated with these. Typical errors provided by candidates were to argue for the use of bird's eyes shots in the extract – there were none used. Camera movement tends to be the most challenging for candidates with track or crane shots often misidentified and the functions not fully understood.

Mise-en-scène
Candidates would use this technical aspect to demonstrate the cultural and regional differences between characters. Most candidates were able to discuss mise-en-scène in terms of the locations used, costume and key props. Stronger candidates were able to show a coherent set of values attached to the rural community through the various locations and the ways in which Doc Martin stood in opposition to this. There was also some awareness of counter typical representations such as the receptionist's dreadlocks or the costume of the young women who called Doc Martin 'Bodmin'. Weaker candidates tended to fall back on clichéd analysis which leads to unsustainable assumptions - 'she is wearing red which signifies danger'. There were many references to Doc Martin's attire and how he stood out from the more informally dressed 'locals'. For many candidates this represented his pompousness and status, whilst the inferior and poorer locals were dressed to reflect the working rural community. Good contrasts were demonstrated through the use of the police officer and the disrespect Doc Martin showed to him. Lighting was addressed much more this session, particularly with the interior shots and candidates would link the dinginess of the lighting, to fall below the expectations and standards of the Doctor and the status he has in his 'new' community. This was in part reinforced through his actions as a non-acceptance of the way of life in Portwyn.

Sound
This technical feature was dealt with well in the majority with candidates being enabled to analyse the use of diegetic and non-diegetic sound well in relation to the location and the character's actions. There was also good discussion about the ambient sounds in the clip and the use of score. Many candidates picked up on the use of the soundtrack in relation to the character's mood and associated behaviour and how this represented their oppositional regional identities. Sound was best examined again through the use of dialogue which focused on lines such as: 'down here we go with the flow' as an illustration of how relaxed and laid back the rural community is in comparison to Doc Martin, as well as and the use of the colloquial and regional phrase 'Bodmin' . Some candidates would pick up on the young plumber's discussion of the word 'Bodmin' as representing an articulate young local who challenged expectations of the local plumbers with an impressive literary reference to Daphne Du Maurier, thus providing a challenging to the dominant discourse within the text, suggesting that locals were inferior to Doc Martin. Indeed this proved to be a fascinating counter stereotype for many to discuss.

Editing
On the whole those candidates who achieved well with editing would be able to identify and explain the use of shot reverse shot and conversations between characters, and the use of ellipsis to explain the unfolding sets of events in the extract, for example in signifying the frustrations of Doc Martin and his motivations when visiting the police station and being greeted by the Police officer in a pinafore. Candidates dealt better with eyeline matches and match on action sequences in this session and there were fewer guesses about editing transitions used. At times there was a reliance on the use of jump cuts as a term which is not present in the extract. Editing is used best when candidates are able to discuss the motivation of characters actions and the need to integrate other technical aspects for example, the comedic actions of the plumbers in the doctor's surgery. For many editing was the weakest area of analysis, with some candidates omitting it altogether. In a number of cases, candidates were not well prepared with sufficient editing terminology to discuss the sequence in detail. This led to superficial, common sense analyses or the adoption of inappropriate language to describe what they are seeing.

Question 2

General Comments
On the whole the question appropriately differentiated candidates' abilities. Section B provided appropriate challenge in asking candidates to assess the impact of digital technologies on marketing and consumption. Where candidates focused on production and distribution they did not achieve as highly. Those candidates who explored how a range of products were marketed through the use of digital technology were more successful. These candidates were able to offer sustained arguments and detailed case studies to the exploration of how marketing practices are being transformed in the online age. The most able candidates also found the right balance in address of the question set and met the highest level when they discussed marketing and consumption by audiences rather than one or the other concept. The lesser achieving candidates had little case study material to work from and may not of entirely addressed the question set.

Centres are reminded that candidates require plenty of practice around the questions set in the specification in relation to question two. There are still too many candidates who are under-prepared in their case study materials or in exam technique, but most were able to offer some argument as to the impact of technology and to illustrate this with relevant examples. There is a tendency for some candidates to ignore the focus of the question and merely reproduce all the material they can remember about institutions. There is also clear evidence that candidates are learning model essays and re-producing these in examination and there was an especially strong sense that many had prepared for the exam by learning an exemplar response. For example, responses that described at length the business models of independents and conglomerates, but without linking this knowledge or developing an argument around marketing and consumption were, therefore, limited in the depth of argument that they could achieve as they didn't fully address the set question.

Film
Some superb responses seen under this topic which dealt very well with digital technology and marketing/consumption practices. The most able candidates were well prepared, which enabled them to compare and contrast a range of examples through the case studies set. These focused on a studio, often Hollywood practise and UK film making. Best examples included Skyfall, Harry Potter, The Hobbit, The Dark Knight Rises, Les Miserables, Paul and the Kings Speech, Streetdance 3D, Inbetweeners, Submarine, Monsters and Fish Tank. Many candidates could draw upon the use of viral marketing campaigns and how this promoted a film's release, were able to compare US and UK film releases and discuss the role of digital technology via the key concepts of synergy and cross media promotion/ convergence of technologies. There were good comments about the use of social media and mobile technology to market films and candidates were able to support their comments with examples of Facebook and Twitter pages and apps. Facebook and Twitter were mentioned by many candidates and stronger candidates were able to give clear examples of how they were used to target audiences - notable examples were a S.H.I.E.L.D game on the Avengers Assemble Facebook page and The Dark Knight Rises.

There was also plenty of discussion between older traditional (non-digital) forms of technology and marketing and digital versions linked to the capabilities of different film companies and the need to make the market aware of the product. Lengthy and informed discussions of how US film companies had more power to market a product globally was frequently compared to how British companies could not compete at the same level, in terms of a range of services being promoted. On occasion candidates could discuss how digital marketing strategies succeeded, but the film was not considered a success, for example Disney's John Carter. Those who achieved less well lacked focused on the question set and at times offered too much textual analysis of the exemplified text. In the area of film, many candidates are still using case studies from 2006 or older which do not give them the opportunity to discuss the major role that digital marketing and technology play in the contemporary film industry. It is felt that case studies such as Trainspotting (1996) in particular disadvantaged candidates for this paper. There was on

occasion responses which focused on the history of a film company which is not what the question demanded and candidates did not address the question set.

Music
Candidates demonstrated very good understanding of this media area. Many excellent case studies were discussed through major record companies and smaller independent record companies, for example Sony Records, Domino records, Sony v Macklemore, the artist Beck and digital technology, Dr Rubberfunk and the Artic Monkeys. Candidates who achieved very well were contemporary with the focus of their response, exploring a range of examples which demonstrated the effect of digital technologies on the publicity and promotion of bands and their campaigns. This included how some are now reliant upon the internet to market the product to fragmented and diverse audiences. There was plenty of cross promotional discussion through the music shows such as the X –Factor and the symbiotic relationship between music and other media areas. The role of digital technologies in marketing and consumption was generally well-explored with well-chosen references. Most able candidates provided a range of examples from independent and major producers to back up discussions. These concerned development of artists, Adele, Ed Sheeran, Lily Allen and, less successfully, One Direction in terms of development, marketing and consumption. Some of the best responses seen, dealt with the advantages of digital marketing and consumption through online channels and social media and the beneficial nature of close contact between the artist and consumer. Radiohead's honesty box approach to marketing an album was usefully evaluated in some cases. Overall, knowledge of the industry was well-displayed and the perceived disadvantages to the business of a purely smartphone- based pattern of consumption were discussed thoughtfully. Much analysis dealt with the impact of social networking generally, but far fewer candidates tackled individual examples of marketing strategies. Arctic Monkeys and Radiohead were less current examples of manipulation of technology for marketing purposes more useful examples included Beck. There was plenty of discussion of iTunes as a distribution and marketing platform along with Spotify and Soundcloud. However, Apple should not be used as a stand-only music case study because they are not a content producer rather a distribution platform for music sales. It should also be noted that discussion of Napster is now dated and a focus on Dr Dre headphones as a case study was misplaced as a response. Less relevant responses simply described talent show acts and the power of Syco as a record company without further technological consideration.

Video Games
There were some good answers on video games which contrasted strategies used by console and mobile games producers and how this was shifting marketing and distribution in the games industry, for example Rovio and Angry Birds, Birds, Farmville, Minecraft, World of Warcraft and the Wii. Candidates used to their advantage the idea that a gaming platform provided plenty of technological convergence for which a game could be successfully marketed and consumed. It is evident that with this area it is inevitable that a digital platform is needed to promote and publicise the gaming experience.

Magazines
For the magazines responses Heat (Bauer) in contrast to The List (Robin Hodge, a small indie) was done very well and that allowed candidates to demonstrate their understanding and address of the question set. Those that explicitly addressed the question with this major verses indie case study were able to achieve very well by showing an excellent understanding of the relationship between print and online platforms. Further, good contrasts included Vogue, Marie Claire, NME and Kerrang and Look. These case studies showed understanding of offline and online marketing. Weaker candidate responses focused on the history of a publication for example, NME. Where centres had focussed on one case study this appears to have limited candidates discussion use of range of examples. At times, candidates missed the point about the question set, focusing instead on ideology, messages and values rather than what the question demanded. Magazines were often very successfully addressed when music magazines were utilised as the case study, with Bauer providing useful institutional background and NME and Q offering a wide range of detailed examples. Candidates were able to explore the impact of

music consumption on the magazine industry quite successfully. Overall, responses on magazines tended to cover consumption far more strongly than marketing, but it needs to be noted that audience reception theory remains misplaced in relation to the addressing consumption within this question.

Newspapers
Some good case studies were approached through the Guardian and The Telegraph and to a lesser extent The Sun newspaper, whilst some very good contrasts were used between national daily and local newspapers. The most able candidates clearly understood the differences between the impact of digital technologies on marketing and consumption, with an examination of use of synergy and the advantages of being able to cross promote products via a website. For example, there was consideration of synergy as an element of marketing within Channel 5 and The Sun and references to marketing were included in a few cases such as The Sun being advertised on TV/radio and its £5 holiday token. A more amenable approach was the discussion of The Mail online and here candidates used statistics as evidence for its success and its new female target audience for the gossip and celebrity elements of the website. On occasion, candidates struggled to address the issues of marketing in the question but, had enough examples of consumption to support the response into higher levels. An element that was less successful was the discussion of theorists e.g. on news and the global village, citizen journalism and Use and Gratifications theory. Lesser achieving candidates provided generic answers about the proliferation of technology and the changes from print to digital technology and the decline of print versions of newspapers, which it was argued would eventually desist. At times, the 'free' nature of online news predominated candidates responses with references to the social networking sites/the London riots/Boston Bombing and instant images and reporting by the man in the street. For the Guardian online there was interesting issues raised about 'tell us what you think' as part of the interactive element of technology and then discussion on open journalism - although not always related to specific newspapers but to bloggers like Guido Fawkes.

Radio
Few centres answered on this media area. The more able candidates focused on the need to identify marketing practices by radio stations through the programmes promotion and changing audience consumption. Discussion would often focus on the use of phone technology and apps and how the use of music downloads and podcast and sponsored online streaming were beneficial and necessary for the marketing of the radio station. Whilst others still recognised the need for cross promotion between radio and the music industry and in term of local radio production how they create a community feel through digital technology. Good examples included Bauer Radio, Kerrang and Hallam of Sheffield Live, Radio One and Silk FM, BBC Radio 4 and Star FM, XFM. These responses were characterised by a great deal of detail and extensive use of exemplar material and a strong sense of comparison that highlighted the different opportunities and restrictions that are specific to each institution. Lesser achieving responses focused on the digital production of radio.

G324 Advanced Portfolio in Media

Administration

Administration by most centres was excellent. Marks and samples were generally submitted promptly, with orderly presentation of their candidates' work; however, there was a significant minority of centres who submitted work well beyond the deadline - some work arriving over a month late. This delays the moderation process considerably and jeopardises the publication of results for those centres.

Most centres used the new coursework cover sheets, which greatly aided the moderation process due to the requirement to indicate candidate numbers of those who had worked together in groups. There were a few centres who did not fill in cover sheets fully, often leaving off candidate numbers, for example, which made the moderation process very difficult (These details needed to be included on many blogs too.) It would also help if centres printed out the coursework cover sheets and submitted them with the work rather than submitting them on numerous disks which makes the process very difficult for the moderator.

Centres using the interactive coversheets tended to make fewer clerical errors than those which added the marks for themselves – nevertheless more clerical errors seemed to have been made than ever which seriously delayed the moderation process at times.

Some centres wrote extremely detailed comments, referring closely to the assessment criteria and outlining individual candidates' contributions. This made it very clear to the moderator how marks had been allocated and it was also noticeable that these centres tended to be the ones who had applied the assessment criteria more accurately. On the other hand, there is still a very small number of centres where comments written are extremely subjective about whether the teacher liked the work, or not, and whether the candidate worked hard or not; with no reference to the assessment criteria. These were often the centres whose marks were adjusted significantly when the criteria were applied objectively to candidates' work. Unfortunately many centres did not specifically address candidates' contributions to group work, often just copying and pasting identical, non-differentiated comments into all cover sheets; centres need to appreciate that moderators depend on their comments for information to support the marks allocated. This is particularly important where different marks are allocated to candidates who have worked together.

The majority of centres are creating blog hubs containing hyperlinks to their candidates' blogs. This is excellent practice because not only does it make the moderation process more efficient, but it is also an excellent way for the centres to monitor their candidates' progress throughout the unit. Some blog addresses were handwritten and illegible and moderators had to contact the centres concerned for the addresses. Centres are firmly requested to provide typed urls.

A few centres are still submitting some work on paper, yet the Specification clearly states that all work must be submitted digitally/electronically (p35). Print production work should be submitted on blogs or disks as jpegs or pdfs not paper printouts. Discs are, of course acceptable, but multiple discs from each centre should be avoided – well menued discs with candidate names, numbers and artefact are essential if the moderator is to identify each candidate's work accurately and then assess it. There were, as usual, some formatting issues with some work that was put onto disc; centres are requested to check acceptable formats in the Specification and to ensure discs are working before despatch.

Blogging still remains the most effective way of documenting and submitting work through the entire process from Research through to Evaluation. It seems that blogging is now thoroughly established. Some centres remain resistant – often for understandable reasons – to mainstream blogging platforms like Blogger, Wordpress and Tumblr, but other offerings are often

characterised by less effective multimedia content, instead relying on text and images alone. The choice of candidates' blog template design is an important issue for moderators: those without a date archive or, at the very least, tag/category archives, can be a problem. Similarly, blogs used as a repository for 'copy and pasted' long documents that are added to through the project aren't helpful as the chronology, and so the development, is not transparent. Some blogs were also difficult to access due to privacy settings being in place, some video posts were no longer active mainly on Vimeo and some posts used odd formats that were not compatible with moderators' laptops. Some work needed to be downloaded onto moderators' computers in order to be viewed; this is not acceptable practice.

The Specification also clearly states that all work must be original, produced by the candidates themselves. It is not acceptable, for example, for candidates to use just one main original image on a magazine front cover or digipak and then use found images to fill out the rest of the layout. There was also a disturbing number of candidates who used the productions of other candidates in the Centre as images in their print production work. P34 of the Specification says, '*All material for all tasks to be produced by the candidates with the exception of acknowledged non-original sound or image material used in a limited way in video/radio work… For music video, permission should be sought from the artist for use of the audio track.*' Where this rule was breached, centres either didn't comment on the use of found material, or acknowledged its use but did not reflect it in the marks allocated. In these cases significant adjustments were made to construction marks which potentially jeopardised the order of merit in a centre, thereby affecting the outcomes for those candidates who had followed the requirements of the Specification; such a situation may also result in all work being returned to the centre for remarking.

A significant proportion of centres pushed the '3 working days' deadline for submission of samples. Centres should have all work ready for submission when they enter their candidates' marks.

A number of centres had very inconsistent marking which was very difficult to moderate since there were few, if any, trends; several had merit order issues that should have been obvious. Some of these seemed to be a result of rushed marking; occasionally, it appeared this was the result of different teachers marking work with little standardisation or collaboration occurring. The standard of comments on the cover sheets was also inconsistent within centres for the same reason. Effective internal standardisation is essential.

Research and planning

In this session most candidates provided evidence of detailed research into existing media texts relevant to all three productions they had undertaken. However, a significant number of Centres presented no evidence of any research into industrial examples of their ancillary productions. Furthermore, there is still a worryingly large number of centres where candidates did not conduct any research into a potential target audience, despite this being commented on session after session in Principal Moderator's reports. Target audience research sometimes appeared rushed and lacked detail, especially in the case of the analysis of results. In a significant number of cases there was not even mention of the target audience for the production.

Textual analysis of relevant professional products, relating to both main and ancillary tasks, is vital, yet some centres' textual analysis was cursory and made up of numerous embedded video clips with little evidence of their candidates' interpretation.

Research and planning that was presented as one PowerPoint with the evaluation, limited access to level 4 marks. Whilst this does not contravene the requirements of the specification, it did constrain students as it felt like the planning was done after the event, rather than an ongoing process that impacted on the final productions. The evaluations became an essay with a few pictures and, in some, cases sound. This meant that candidates could not show 'excellent skill in the use of digital technology' or 'excellent choice in the form of presenting the evaluation' as all questions were answered in the same way. It is appreciated that all centres may not have

access to electronic blogs, however candidates could be encouraged to use DVD extras (film), as well as PowerPoint to complete research and planning/evaluations.

The quality and depth of planning was varied. The best was extremely thorough and this was clearly evident in the finish of the completed production work. For video and film productions, the number of candidates who did not produce storyboards, or produced six or fewer frames, was significant, and this was clearly reflected in the completed productions which felt improvised as a result.

The strongest candidates were thorough in documenting the process, which includes researching texts for each of the production tasks and some centres have clearly addressed issues raised in previous Principal Moderator's reports about the presentation of research and planning. The best examples used a variety of presentation methods effectively and creatively to showcase their work; the weakest merely submitted their research and planning as illustrated essays on their blogs (or worse still as word files on disc), which limits candidates' achievement in this aspect of the unit.

Some research and planning had numerous elaborated explanations of various audience and genre theories bolted on with no connection to the work, which seemed pointless without connections being made to the productions.

This element was often over marked; it seems that centres have become more willing to push for higher research and planning marks. This wasn't a problem for those candidates with diligently maintained blogs full of depth, but sometimes it appeared that the centres were reverting to a sense of the final construction pieces offering implicit evidence; this is not appropriate – research and planning evidence must be presented explicitly.

Construction

In the main it seems that candidates are making themselves more fully aware of the conventions of media products. This year this has resulted in some excellent work. The best work was from centres who had obviously both supported the candidates in their research and planning but had also offered sound skills development in the use of the relevant technology - teaching of more advanced camera and editing skills is vital for success at this level - and it was rare to see candidates working with relatively basic software packages like Movie Maker and Publisher, with centres providing access to the likes of Premiere Pro, Final Cut (Express and Pro), Audacity, Cubase, Garageband, Photoshop, InDesign and Dreamweaver.

Moving image briefs continued to be the most popular with centres and their candidates. At the upper end of the scale there was some moving image work that was confident, creative, technically accomplished and clearly the work of young people destined for the industry; as one moderator put it, 'The most able candidates demonstrate confidence, competence, an understanding of the conventions, and the bravery and flair to create something fresh and unique'. However, at the lower end of the scale, moving image work was badly framed, poorly white balanced and lacking in any static shots, displaying jerky camera movement. Some had noticeably different grades of video in the same piece. Mise-en-scene was sometime very unimaginative and the editing was lacking rhythm and kept far too many long-takes.

Music and film promotion briefs continue to be the most popular undertaken by centres. In both cases there were some outstanding productions in which candidates showed a complete grasp of the ways such texts are constructed and function. In many cases, however, productions lacked appropriate pace, which was due to the lack of variety of shot types; filming things from a number of different camera set ups (for example the artist's performance for a music video) would have enabled more creative editing, so resulting in an entertaining and appropriately paced text.

When it came to film trailers, candidates employing a variety of shots produced a more appropriately paced production, demonstrating excellent understanding of the genre; indeed, in this session, the majority of trailers had a closer relationship to trailer conventions than in previous sessions. The only concern with some of the trailers was the delineation between teaser and theatrical. There were trailers of two minutes and over which did not have enough content from the notional film to justify a trailer of this length. This meant that they lacked the pace, narrative/genre/character exposition and complexity to sustain the two minutes. With more judicious editing they would have worked as one minute teasers. Greater analysis of the stages of trailer release in a real campaign may have helped candidates to see the difference and plan accordingly. Intertitles showed a lack of development and, for some candidates, they needed to research how these anchor meaning to disparate visuals for the audience. What they say and where they are placed is extremely important. Sound development within the trailers was often poorly considered and candidates failed to appreciate that often trailers will use L or J cuts (where sound and visuals from different parts of the film are cut together) to develop the condensed exposition of narrative/character/genre/setting.

Music videos, somewhat alarmingly, were often missing performance. Whilst there are plenty of examples of performance-less music videos, the narrative-based music videos moderators saw were almost always more like short films, and often had little connection to the chosen track. Also, candidates were often creating narrative-only music videos whilst choosing an artist or track completely unsuited to such an approach. The accuracy of lip syncing was a big problem: at times it felt like an impossible skill that candidates once found possible; a technique lost to time. As one moderator put it, 'It's ironic that accurate lip sync has never been better served by technology and yet we're seeing less of it'. However, there was a wide variety of creative responses to the music video brief main task, including a wide selection of musical genres. It was good to see a few centres where candidates had worked with unsigned bands and produced videos for them; the best of these also used the performance of the actual band. This also overcomes the problems with some work, where some videos were blocked due to copyright issues.

Short films were even more popular again this year. Most of the short films were within the 5 minutes stipulated by the specification and in general these were more successful than those 'shorts' that went significantly over this timing restriction. Candidates produced succinct, sometimes touching, occasionally humorous narratives. The short film brief seemed to produce a greater engagement with creation of mise en scene, cinematography and sound than some of the other moving image work. There was also less of a tendency to produce work within the horror genre, which can often end up in the woods, so this was refreshing.

Some centres undertook the TV documentary brief. There were some excellent productions but a number lacked the generic conventions necessary to produce effective outcomes, not least because of the use of people playing roles in interviews which, in some cases, almost tipped the production over into parody. Centres undertaking this brief should encourage candidates to choose topics for their programmes which will allow them to source and interview real people relevant to the topic. Not only will this improve the quality of their production work, but it will also clearly improve the quality and depth of their research and planning.

A few centres produced television advertisements, most of which were rather weak, being overlong and laboured; the accompanying sponsorship sequences often looked like a third TV advertisement, with no reference to the programme being sponsored.

The few Soap Opera trailers that were submitted were often less successful than other moving image work and in part this is due to the lack of new soap operas, so that candidates had analysed trailers for established shows, forgetting that their soap was new. This meant that they lacked that sense of initial promotion and had considered in only a basic way broadcasting conventions for new programming. It may have been helpful to look at the trailers for new TV series and then apply this to the Soap Opera genre.

There were a few regional magazines, but these were not always successful. A couple of centres allowed candidates to make a regional magazine which was a music special, thereby effectively reproducing the AS brief which is not acceptable.

There were a handful of local television and local newspaper submissions but very few radio or web-based main tasks. It remains surprising that only so very few candidates opted for Brief 4 or Brief 11: with gaming being so popular and with the games industry being such a significant earner in the creative industries, one might expect quite a number of candidates to choose the games options.

Ancillary texts were generally produced to a good standard. Most centres now understand what a digipak is – and the need to provide at least four panes and a spine - and made good use of the templates which are freely available online. However in a significant number of centres greater attention needed to be paid to the orientation of panels as, in a lot of cases, if the design were to be folded it would not function properly. It is worth considering doing a mock up of the final digipak, taking photos and then posting those on the blog too (but NOT sending them to the moderator as some Centres still did). It was noticeable in a large number of centres that did not use templates that the dimensions of panels produced were inappropriate and/or inconsistent in size across the production. Some were submitted as individual panels making it difficult to see how the parts would work as a complete product. There were still examples of CD (jewel case) covers being created, rather than full digipak designs (usually set in motion by centres rewording the task). Too many digipaks did not feature any of the conventional institutional information expected on the back panel.

Magazine adverts for the music promotion brief tended to be the weakest aspect of candidates' work. Convention suggests that the front cover of the digipak would feature at least as an insert image on the advertisement so the audience knows what they are looking for when they want to buy. This would also help to create synergy across the promotion campaign.

Magazines for all the briefs were sometimes the least successful. There were only a few candidates who managed to create a house style, convincing mode of address or stories/giveaways that would match that edition of the magazine. Sometimes images from the moving image work were used on the magazines, which did not create that sense of staged promotion/access to the stars and films that front covers achieve through taking their own photographs and manipulating them.

Marks were needlessly lost in many ancillary productions, as attention to detail was not applied. Posters particularly suffered in this category. Although some film posters contained some striking images, consideration of the use of text and font sizes in particular was a weakness in much work; especially for the lines of institutional text such as the credit block.

Websites were usually in working order, though not always - some websites were still not live. It is not acceptable to just send the image or design for the site if it is an ancillary text. All web work must be hosted and remain live during the whole moderation period. In some cases, web pages were over crowded with written information therefore lacking a conventional feel.

A few centres submitted self-devised ancillary tasks, which inevitably led to candidates' work being scaled.

Sometimes audience feedback only appeared in the evaluation section, when ongoing feedback is best practice throughout the construction and post production phases.

As in previous sessions, there were some issues with health and safety – care should be taken in allowing candidates to feature cars, guns, swords, and even paint (where goggles might be a wise precaution).

Marking was usually over-generous for construction. Centres where a number of options were made available to candidates were generally less successful than those which were more restrictive. This is particularly true of smaller centres which appeared to have offered free choice to their candidates; practical work in these situations was usually weak and did not appear to have been sufficiently well supported for the candidates' abilities.

Evaluation

The vast majority of evaluation responses clearly addressed the four set questions and used a variety of digital techniques to creatively demonstrate their understanding. Candidates from a small number of centres did not address the required four questions, often just describing process and outcomes instead, and relied on a single long essay presented as a blog post, embedded Word or PowerPoint, for example; consequently they failed to discuss the required issues which usually resulted in significant adjustments to centres' marks. It has been shown by a number of centres that best practice is to ask candidates to use a different presentation method for each answer, to totally avoid the use of essay prose and to fully exploit the potential of each presentation method.

Many Prezis were problematic, candidates writing far too little to demonstrate their understanding, ignoring the platform's multimedia capability etc; a handful of Prezis were exciting and insightful (see below). The illustrated video, making use of cutaways, voiceover and screen recording, remained a solid option, and generally led to greater depth than a Prezi or a text and image only blog post. However, there were some really inventive formats used with excellence eg Bubbl.us, storybird, vuvox, animoto, Kizoa, issuu, Screenr. Equally there was some excellent use of PPT and Prezi with embedded video/ images and other formats. Some candidates presented their whole evaluation within Prezi (with each question answered in a different format, embedded within the Prezi).

Commentaries were usually much better than in previous sessions with insert images and videos to illustrate the points made in the commentaries. However, some candidates still waffled to their webcam – sometimes for 25 minutes for each question – usually excellent communication skills can be demonstrated by being concise!

Go Animate was rarely used effectively.

There were some outstanding evaluations where candidates had clearly given a great deal of thought into how to present their work. In one case this included parodies of the 'The Weakest Link' to outline audience feedback, and a cooking show outlining the ingredients of new technology which went into creating the dish that was the coursework. We are not advising other centres to copy these approaches - but we do recommend real consideration of creativity which responding to the set questions.

Group evaluations were the most problematic. In a large number of cases, groups divided up the four questions amongst a group, which inevitably meant that each candidate only answered one, or at best two, of the evaluation questions. This is unacceptable as the Specification requires all candidates to answer *all* of the questions. If this is done in groups then each member is expected to contribute to each answer and the centre should outline their individual contributions on the coursework cover sheets. Where this is not done candidates are limiting themselves to, at best, 50% of the available marks for this aspect of their work, as they can only be marked pro rata. Where a whole group did present their evaluation collectively to camera, the candidates often didn't introduce themselves or have name captions.

In terms of some of those evaluations that were presented by candidates in front of their teachers, the mediation and summarising by the teacher sometimes became problematic as it disguised the level of the answers actually given by the candidates, which made them difficult to assess.

A few centres sent a disc with word docs, or included links to Word documents which had to be downloaded from the blog. Candidates should copy and paste the content of the Word doc straight onto the blog or use Scribd or similar to host their files.

Q1 was generally done well. Q2 was very varied. Q4 was generally descriptive – the best examples used screen shots or screen captures to show progress when using the software and, for example, used before and after images to display their editing skills. Q3 was often weak – with candidates' friends telling them how well they have done. This doesn't allow them to reflect on and evaluate their feedback.

The Evaluation element was frequently over-marked by centres, either in terms of the level of understanding demonstrated or because the means of presentation did not communicate well enough for the marks given by the centre.

That said, it remains an exciting time to moderate this unit with much evidence of vibrant and accomplished work. As one moderator expressed it, 'Centres at their best are just great. What fabulous learning goes on'.

G325 Critical Perspectives in Media

General Comments

Once again it was pleasing to see candidates demonstrating their critical media literacy in responding to contemporary debates about the mediation of our social and cultural lives and in theorising their own creative practices. Whilst levels of quality and engagement were variable, the 'spirit' of this component appears to have been grasped and, in the main, critical reflection on media in relation to students' own lives and culture was demonstrated across the cohort. As always, the candidates who embraced the 'now' of these critical perspectives were those that, generally, received marks in the level 4 band.

I am very pleased to report that most examiners felt that this was the most successful 'return' from candidates so far, with more answers featuring **theoretical analysis of contemporary examples** and higher levels of **critical and theoretical reflection on production work**. Indeed, it is fair to say that, were candidates able to avoid some by now perennial problems of focus and register, we might expect an even more significant upturn in performance, so centres are very strongly urged to pay attention to the following statements.

The most common reasons for candidates failing to reach the higher mark levels are constant from session to session - failure to engage with **contemporary examples** for the majority of an answer (texts, case studies, debates, institutional practices and / or policy from **within five years of the examination**); a failure to **distinguish between the requirements for 1a (process, decisions made) and 1b (textual analysis using media concepts);** a failure to apply academic theory in section B (most commonly evident in answers on the online age and regulation) and failure to engage with **alternative arguments within a debate**, resulting in one sided answers (across all topics, this is an issue at the level 3 / level 4 borderline).

The following reflections on candidate responses and performance are taken from an accumulation of reports submitted by all of the examiners for the June 2013 session. As such, it combines 'macro' level observations of general trends and patterns with 'micro' level examples of particular successes and problems.

Section A

1(a) This was a strong response to the question in the main, in comparison to previous sessions. The highest marks were secured by candidates who were able to relate their decision making to the creative outcomes and deal specifically with how digital technology – for example, editing software and image manipulation either affords or limits creativity. Most candidates approached the question chronologically, citing examples of creativity stemming from production work, whilst level 3 responses broadened the discussion to explain how digital technologies had facilitated creative decisions at the research and planning stage, with reference to *You-Tube for* textual research, *Survey Monkey* for audience research and social networking for audience research and planning. Many candidates demonstrated how they had become more creative in the presentation of their work by making more effective use of a broader range of apps on their blogs/websites. The least successful answers tended to list/describe the technology used and confused creativity with quality. To achieve level 4, candidates also needed to provide detailed examples of progress in their use of technology over the course.

1(b)

Once again, marks for 1(b) were often the lowest awarded but there was a significant increase in the application of theories to the candidates' own chosen text. A large number of candidates were able to access the question by focusing on the extent to which they had reinforced or

challenged gender stereotypes usually by applying Mulvey's 'Male Gaze' and Propp's 'spheres of action' (other concepts are available). Representations of class and ethnicity were frequently discussed in terms of hegemony. There was also a sense of how active audiences might decode the representations that had been created using Hall's dominant, oppositional and negotiated. All this was pleasing but there are two important points to make – firstly, candidates need to 'switch register' from 1(a) to 1(b) to move from talking about what they did to how the text can be analysed. Still only a small number of candidates manage to this, with the majority writing about how they applied the theory, as opposed to how the theory can be applied to the text. Much more disturbing was the overwhelming acceptance of the 'male gaze' as a neutral fact of life, something to be straightforwardly 'applied' in the production of a text, with the objectification of women accounted for as no more than a convention. Although candidates would not be penalised for describing their own text in these terms, if Mulvey's theory was appropriately applied, centres are encouraged to support candidates in taking a rather more critical perspective on representation.

Section B

As much of the examiner feedback and subsequent advice to centres cuts across the topics, which are in any case designed as convergent 'transmedia' cites of study, this session's report does not attempt to 'silo' these under discrete topic headings.

The overwhelming feedback from examiners indicated an impressive engagement with theories of mediation, identity, democracy and culture, with candidates able to apply complex theory to examples and, in the best cases, weigh up the critical debates that frame them.

At the same time, examiners commented on the scarcity of contemporary examples, with one observing that, from the case study wordel – of examples from the last twelve months or so – offered at the 'Getting Ahead' conference in March, only one example, *Black Mirror*, was cited in the exam.

Some application contexts dominate for some topics – the majority of candidates writing about collective identity focus on youth, which is clearly appropriate given the closeness to home of this, but surprisingly the examples chosen were often from generations before they were born. As one examiner puts it, *I was concerned that some centres are doing their candidates a disservice by relying too heavily on historical textual examples to establish the chronological development of the representation of the chosen collective at the expense of engaging with contemporary texts.* Other themes with real currency were the representation of ethnicity and religion in multi-cultural Britain, and the stronger answers were those that managed to tackle the question of how dominant representations inform identity, with the less accomplished responses taking the latter for granted, or merely dealing with the degree of 'accuracy' of the representations. Many of the most successful responses tended to cite Buckingham and Gauntlett in connection with contemporary media texts examples to establish that collective identities are diverse and fragmented, considering how both intended audience and institutional characteristics might determine the re-presentation of the collective.

Regulation was a popular topic, perhaps due to the recent richness of the media environment. It will come as no surprise that many of the stronger answers were those that tackled the broader implications of Leveson with confidence, whilst those clinging for dear life to Jamie Bulger and Clockwork Orange, with lip service to the internet later on, were not able to reach the higher mark levels. Popular areas of focus were Film and the BBFC, The Press and the PCC, Leveson, Gaming and PEGI, Broadcasting and Ofcom. There was a fairly even split between candidates opting for question 2 and 3. Candidates answering question 2 tended to argue that the regulation of film and broadcasting is more effective than the regulation of the press. Candidates answering question 3 tended to argue that stricter regulation of the press is required, or that stricter regulation whilst needed is not necessarily attainable in a global context. Most candidates had a good balance of industry knowledge, texts, theories and debates and were able to apply these to

support their arguments. The most successful responses engaged with the challenge regulating any media area in the online age and debated the future of media regulation in light of the government's response to Leveson's findings.

We Media was tackled well and centres should consider the currency of this topic and the way that it's 'macro' issues are perhaps more accessible to candidates than in previous decades. Candidates demonstrated very strong engagement with contemporary media theory and industries linked to ownership and globalisation. Discussions around citizen journalism, news blogging, Murdoch's relationship with politicians and the Arab spring were well articulated and this topic appeared to facilitate the most confident debates between competing perspectives, with candidates able to offer examples that both supported and challenged the hypothesis in the question / broader topic premise.

Postmodern media is a topic where, session on session, confidence with complex theory is growing. Most candidates were able to offer a definition of post-modernism, selecting key theoretical ideas regarding definitions and using their case studies to debate these ideas. Film dominates, along with a developing 'canon' of videogames (*GTA, Call of Duty*) and television (*Family Guy, Mighty Boosh, Misfits*) or music video (Lady Gaga) often being used as the 'other media'. Some of the stronger centres enabled their candidates to apply a shared theoretical 'bank' to their own varied examples, and this generally worked well. Other centres shared older examples, despite consistent advice – *Pulp Fiction, Truman Show, Blade Runner, Matrix*.

Media in the Online Age is a topic which continues to yield, despite the assumptions we might make about accessibility, the weakest responses. This is because a profoundly untheoretical approach pervades, with far too many candidates simply telling the examiner about itunes, Youtube, Netflix and Wikileaks without either theorising these or providing examples that disrupt the neat teleology of the 'brave new world' utoptia. Piracy is often thrown in towards the end, along with the dangers of the internet for children. Where candidates did manage to utilise academic perspectives, the most well handled were The Long Tail, Wikinomics, Gauntlett on Media 2.0 / Web 2.0 and the counter-arguments provided by Morozov and others.

As is always stated in guidance for this paper, balance is important. All of the critical perspectives are chosen because there are 'no right answers' and generate polarised arguments. More candidates would reach level 4 if they approached the exam with this in mind and it is paramount that generalisations are avoided. As one examiner observes, *"some candidates seem to regard the media as party to one great conspiracy to deceive the public, some of the sweeping generalisations that I have read this session are exactly what the candidates are accusing The Sun, The Express and The Mail etc of doing - demonising on the basis of unverified anecdotes to let the sparse information fit one's own ideological prejudices"*.

Structure and Presentation

The stronger answers, particularly for Section B, are those which present a balanced argument with a clear structure, weighing up competing arguments, developing the case through the use of examples and working towards a conclusion. A number of intelligent answers are reduced to level 3 because the clarity of the argument is undermined by structure, so centres are encouraged to spend time helping candidates with shaping and crafting section B answers.

All examiners apply the mark scheme in the context of empathising with candidates working in exam conditions. However, there are some issues which cannot be resolved even with these considerations. There seemed to be a larger than usual number of scripts which were very difficult to read. This is perhaps understandable in the age of keyboards and handheld devices, many of us struggle with the 'old fashioned' art of calligraphy, but candidates opting to write their answers do need to practice legible writing in timed conditions.

General Advice to Centres

This advice is repeated from previous sessions.

Support candidates to prepare different approaches to 1(a) and 1(b) – process and decisions for 1(a), conceptual textual analysis from a critical distance for 1(b).

Ensure that candidates are able to make use of contemporary media examples for the majority of their answer in section B. Theory from any time is appropriate, but media examples and case studies should be **mainly from the five years preceding the examination**.

Enable candidates to engage with a range of theoretical, academic and research perspectives for whichever theme is addressed – there is an abundance of media theory applicable to ALL themes, including media in the online age and media regulation.

Develop time management skills for exam preparation, particularly for section 1.