



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
June 2011**

Communication and Culture

COMM4

(Specification 2625)

**Unit 4: Communication and Culture in Practice:
Portfolio**

Report on the Examination

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COMM4: Communication and Culture in Practice

General

At the end of the second year of this specification it is fair to say that candidates have produced work of greater breadth and depth and consistency than we could possibly have expected two years ago. The obvious conclusion that must be drawn is that centres have understood what was required in terms of production and assessment, and not only ensured that achievement is of a high quality, but that candidates have been appropriately furnished with competencies, tools and concepts that have allowed them to explore ideas far and wide in ways that ultimately enrich us all. It was also evident from moderation that the quality of marking and assessment was categorically better than last year; there was more agreement between centres' assessments and moderators' than could have been thought possible.

There are, however, still issues which need addressing: a new format for the production of Case Studies to be employed and developed; concerns over what constitutes a 'Case Study'; developing and exploring the range of things that can be called 'Creative'; and the matter of how best to make an accurate assessment of the achievements in front of us. Next year, re-designed Mark Schemes will hopefully be more clearly user-friendly and more relevantly applicable.

Case Studies

The new Topic 'Holiday' generated a range of interesting responses in addition to the expected well-worked challenges in the other three Topics. Cinema-going was, again, the least attempted Topic but did offer opportunities for those candidates committed to film in all its manifestations as a significant element of our culture. Celebrity and Body Modification dominated areas of study again this year.

In their discussions candidates tended to over-assert the 'massive' effect of the media in shaping our practices. Centres really should be reminding candidates to challenge and contest such assumptions with the intellectual rigour they so evidently display elsewhere. There was plenty of evidence that references and sources were handled with increased deftness and well-integrated, though few actually challenge what they've chosen to quote. AO3 reflects the confidence of candidates in their application of 'theory'; the better integrated - the higher the mark. There is a real difference between those who use the perspectives to inform their arguments and those who simply 'add' it into their discussion.

Too many Case Studies were generalised accounts, although fewer than last year; the particular angle chosen to be developed was easily buried in a discursive (and, sometimes, personal and polemical) 'essay' rather than a 'reading' in some depth of specifically contrasting examples. The overview discussion with lots of examples isn't really a 'Case Study' as such; centres should take note of feedback and advice from moderators in this area. The formulation of suitable Case Study titles will hopefully be more securely addressed in the construction of the new 'grid' for the 2012 Themes, about which centres are urgently advised to inform themselves.

Creative Work

Congratulations are in order for the competency with which centres packaged their IT - a vast improvement on last year; very few candidates' work was inaccessible. Centres are reminded to check that work placed on disc, memory stick, or on-line, actually works before sending it to the moderator. Centres are evidently using a wide range of IT tools to allow a lot of creative room for candidates to express ideas. Except in a few cases, where technical and intellectual sophistication emerged strongly, PowerPoint sometimes provides an example of the form limiting the content.

Some suggestions as to what to avoid arising from an overview of this year's work: text heavy slides (in PowerPoint or Movie-Maker) which are really not geared towards the designated audience of A2 Communication and Culture students; overlong documentary-style interviews against an inappropriate background (which could be more adventurously edited and integrated); overlong and un-edited YouTube clips and trailers; sound balance where the soundtrack (often artfully chosen) drowns the voice-over. Many Creative submissions were rather dull, worthy in intent, clearly personal and polemical, but the theory was frequently indigestible and poorly integrated at source. Many submissions were overlong when considered as 'consumption'; there was easily enough material there to occupy readings of 8-10 minutes; it may be that the production is only 5 - 6 minutes in length to generate a consumption time of 8-10 minutes.

Still a troublesome issue is the relation of Creative work to Case Study; a number of centres submitted work in which the candidate simply repeated the content of their Case Study rather than seeking the opportunity to take a more tangential line from the Case Study to be developed as a distinctly different focus for the Creative Work.

All of the above should not detract from the delightful and fascinating range of ideas and voices that were allowed to emerge from the Creative piece: compared to last year the step forward in terms of competencies, skills and ideas, was a 'giant leap'. One can only look forward to the further evolution of candidates' creativity.

Looking Forward

Many of you will have noticed that we have made some improvements to the **new** coursework grids, which appeared on the AQA site earlier this year. These changes are our response to our early experiences of running COMM4, both as assessors and teachers and to the feedback we have received from teachers and candidates. In simple terms we have streamlined the process by which candidates identify the focus of their coursework. Where once there were titles **and** discrete issues to select, now it is simply about identifying a single **Theme** for both coursework pieces. Rather than discrete issues we now have COMM2 style 'clarifications' which sketch out a part of the 'territory' of the topic and which will hopefully make it easier for individual candidates to site themselves within a topic theme. Also in the manner of COMM2, candidates will provide their own **titles** (the Topic Guides are now accompanied with advice on how to devise COMM4 titles). We hope that these changes will help you and your candidates formulate successful coursework responses.

The relationship between the Case Study and the Creative Work remains fundamentally unaltered but it too will benefit from the more relaxed approach to the themes. The Creative Work is derived from the work undertaken in the preparation of the Case Study and for this reason it should be based within the same theme. However, the register of the Creative Work is different to that of the Case Study: it is more personal and more persuasive. For this reason it may well be appropriate for the candidate to choose a different **title**. New mark schemes will also be available for the 2012 coursework entry.

In order to make this transition as trouble-free as possible we will be retaining the current grids for the two surviving **Topics** (Celebrity and Holiday), but bringing these into line merely by insisting that only a **Theme** needs to be chosen (and substituting '**Theme**' for 'title'). More than one issue can now be addressed as long as the candidate makes this clear in the **title**.

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