



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

**Media Studies**

**MEST4**

**(Specification 2570)**

**Unit 4: Media: Research and Production**

***Report on the Examination***

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## **Introduction**

There were 6920 entries for this A2 coursework unit for GCE Media Studies. This was the third time that candidates had submitted work for this unit and unfortunately there were still a few problems encountered by moderators. Yet again there were instances where the specification had been misinterpreted (if it had been read at all). However, I am happy to report that there was still plentiful evidence of engaged and interesting work from most of the candidates.

MEST4 is considerably different from the previous A2 coursework unit. It is much more a response to a media issue or debate, or indeed what we liked to call a 'problematic'. It was envisaged that over the period of the 2 year A-level course there would be certain topic areas that intrigued, mystified or stimulated candidates and that the Critical Investigation would allow them to explore this topic area and share their findings in a 2000 word essay (the options also exist for candidates to submit their findings in other media forms such as podcasts, radio documentaries etc - although this option has not proved to be at all popular) The major change from the old specification is that candidates should then submit a Linked Production which would allow them to clarify, exemplify or indeed challenge their findings. The production was introduced partly in response to the request of many centres who told us that most candidates sitting the old specification tended to be very disappointed that there was no practical work in the second year of the course. It also felt somewhat incongruous for a media studies examination to rely to heavily on the printed word. There was also plenty of evidence to suggest that the very best of learning and exploring the media takes place through the practical process.

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

## **Administration**

A few important administrative points need to be made:

- Please ensure that all 2000 word essays have been properly labelled candidate by candidate and stapled or tied together so that moderators have easy and secure access. Nothing is worse than when a moderator opens a packet and a bundle of unattached and unnamed papers fall to the floor.
- It is most helpful if the cover sheet has been attached to the coursework rather than delivered in a separate folder.
- Please check the addition of marks – there were several instances where the addition was again incorrect disadvantaging candidates. The sampling process often means that we do not see all candidates so some of your candidates might suffer unnecessarily.
- Please ensure that all CRF and CDS forms are filled in appropriately and signed by teachers and candidates as necessary.
- Please annotate all work (this is a QCA/Ofqual requirement) remembering that the more comments that are made (both on the work and on the cover sheet) the easier it is for the moderator to understand why the marks you have given have been awarded. It is good to note that some centres not only annotate the work fully but also submit what amounts to a dossier of comments on the work of each candidate. This certainly makes the process of moderating the work far easier and is again of great benefit to candidates.
- If centres have engaged in a dialogue with their Coursework Adviser then it is particularly helpful to print off the correspondence and send that along with the work
- Centres are advised that a great deal of very helpful information is available about this, and all other units, on the AQA Media Studies website. This is updated on a regular basis
- Linked productions should be fully realised artefacts. Magazine pages should be printed, websites should be fully functional, broadcast material should be playable on most domestic machines.
- Please note that Quicktime files do not play on domestic DVD players and behave very strangely on PCs. Strangely enough, they also behave in a very erratic manner on Macs. Quicktime is to be avoided. This point cannot be stressed enough.
- Please label all production work as thoroughly as possible.
- DVDs and CDs must be labelled.
- Please remember that DVDs scratch very easily. They then become unplayable. Please send DVDs in a case or plastic cover.

- Please check that the disk has been formatted properly before submission to the moderator
- It is best if each individual's broadcast or e-media work is stored on a separate disk rather than storing all a centre's work on one disk. Where a centre's work is stored on one disk, please place the work in candidate number order and again label as carefully as possible.
- Please do not send in huge boxes of research materials and pre-production planning. This is a requirement of MEST2 but even there only a representational sample is required. We do not need to see anything other than the linked production itself.
- There is no call for an evaluation of the Production.
- There is no longer a need to have work approved by Coursework Advisers but they are there to help and advise when and if needed.

### **Critical Investigation**

Centres are reminded that the topic areas and the problematics should be chosen by each student on an individual basis. MEST4 is a synoptic unit and individual research and critical autonomy are essential components of this unit. There may well be isolated instances where two candidates in a cohort may want to look at similar areas – and if this is the case it is not too difficult to ensure that they adopt a different path through the problem and in particular look at completely different media products - but the spirit of the unit mitigates against the idea that a cohort should all answer the same fundamental question and simply refer to different texts. There were still instances where all candidates had been given a basic essay title and then all had then chosen different products to examine. Each essay referred to exactly the same general research which tends to suggest that the teacher had far too much influence over what candidates were studying and how they were studying it. Centres should ensure that candidates are working on topic areas of their own choosing. Teacher input into topic areas and the texts to be studied should be minimal.

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

Some titles are still quite 'vague'. The word limit is 2000 words which means that a focused essay is vital. It is advisable for candidates to pick no more than two or at most three central texts for their investigation.

Some candidates fell into the trap of writing potted histories of their topic areas. Contextual issues need to be integrated into the investigation rather than explored in separate sections. Some essays had very tenuous media studies links and tended to read more like an investigation into the candidates own interests and/or hobbies. The central core of the investigation has to be a media issue/debate or problematic.

Candidates should also be prepared to challenge where they feel appropriate. There was a sense in many investigations that candidates were trying to please their stereotypical notion of what an AQA moderator wanted them to say.

Many of the Critical Investigations seem heavily reliant on media theory which is rather old and outdated. Candidates should attempt to engage with more contemporary theorists where possible. For example Mulvey's 'male gaze' has been modified, challenged and reinterpreted over the past decade and more and investigations should recognise this. There were several instances where it appeared that reference to a media theorist had been rather shoe-horned into the essay. Whilst some media theory is important and could well be relevant to the point being made by the candidate it must also be noted that what is much more important is that candidates demonstrate an understanding of the key concepts, contexts and debates that are fundamental to a synoptic study of the media. Candidates should be reminded that it is the argument and debate, with focused reference to specific media texts that gain marks.

It must also be noted that particular advice has been given through Coursework Advisers, in standardisation meetings and also on the website about the necessity of avoiding a MEST4 topic area which is simply in essence a repeat of the MEST3 case study. This does not mean that Representation or New and Digital Media should not have a presence in MEST4 – but it does mean that the question 'why' needs to be asked. Thus the "How are teenagers represented in xxx" is not an appropriate title but "Why are there negative representation of teenagers in xxx" probably is. Centres should look at the MEST4 Checklist which is available in the Teacher Resource Bank on the AQA website.

Unfortunately this point has to be stressed because there were some centres where it was apparent that candidates had simply repeated their MEST3 case study and then simply

added a linked production. The phrase ‘my case study’ in the opening paragraph of the Critical Investigation was a bit of a give away.

It is important that candidates supply a bibliography. Many omitted to do this and those that did hardly did themselves justice. Candidates are also recommended to consult texts which are not internet based. The Level 4 descriptor refers to “making use of extensive and wide-ranging research” Wikipedia can be a useful starting point – most especially the list of references at the bottom of the page – but does not qualify as “wide-ranging” when it is the only reference listed. Unfortunately too many students still believe that if they read it on the internet it must be true!

Please remember that the Coursework Advisers are there to help you – all it takes is an e-mail. If you do not know who your Coursework Adviser is then simply call or e-mail the Media Studies Office in Guildford and they will provide you with the relevant details.

And if the pages above sound unduly negative it must be said that there was a very high proportion of well researched independent critical investigations seen by the team of moderators this summer and centres are to be congratulated on the sterling work being done across the country!

### **Linked Productions**

There were many excellent pieces of production work this summer. This is particularly true, again, of moving image work. Some of the examples seen were of an extremely high standard and were incredibly ambitious and very entertaining. One of the great pleasures of moderating this unit is the opportunity to watch some first rate video work.

However, it must also be noted again that there was a sense that much of the production work seen tended to look as though it was very much an add-on, completed fairly hurriedly sometime late in the spring term. This may have something to do with the fact that the production is worth fewer marks than the Critical Investigation, it may be to do with the fact that the research and 2000 word essay was more time consuming than first thought and it may also have to do with the fact that candidates have a tendency to leave things to the last minute. Unfortunately a lot of work was seen that was really no better than weak work seen in MEST2. This is particularly true of the print productions that were seen and which tended to be very similar to many of the print productions seen at AS. In many cases the work was not enough or just about met the published minimum requirements

Rather too many productions relied on found images – most particularly in the print productions. Candidates should at this level be producing original artefacts wherever possible.

The A2 linked production is meant to encourage the ambitious candidate who has learnt about the various platforms and processes in the previous year and now wishes to build upon that experience. This enables them in Year 13 to produce something that can stand in its own right but also enhances, explains or challenges the research that has been outlined in the Investigation.

The production does not necessarily come after the Critical Investigation. The two strands could be worked at simultaneously – or indeed a candidate may wish to start with the Production piece which may then in turn stimulate the Critical Investigation.

If candidates wish, they may like to add a short explanation of the link between their Production and the Critical Investigation – this should help moderators and centres because there are occasions when the links have appeared quite tenuous although patently clear to the candidate!

Similarly, many centres stuck very firmly to the advice in the specification about expectations. The specification states that moving image and audio work is not expected to be more than five minutes long. It then states that print or e-media work should be at least three pages long. The majority of candidates/centres stuck to this advice absolutely. It is pleasing to note however that there were candidates who clearly spent a great deal of time and effort on the linked production and moved far beyond the minimum requirements. Some of the best work seen also utilised more than one platform.

It is our hope that candidates in future will be more ambitious and enterprising with their linked productions.

### **And finally....**

Despite all the provisos above, the unit seems to be working well. The report is not meant to read as a negative one – the vast majority of candidates performed well in this unit, demonstrating a synoptic understanding of the issues raised in the course and clearly responding well to the opportunity to improve and increase their production skills. Candidates seem to have enjoyed the process and the results will hopefully please many of them.



Please ensure that you as centres look regularly at the website:

[http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/arts/media\\_noticeboard.php?id=06&prev=06](http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/arts/media_noticeboard.php?id=06&prev=06)

and

[http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/arts/media\\_materials.php?id=06&prev=06](http://web.aqa.org.uk/qual/gce/arts/media_materials.php?id=06&prev=06)

for regular updates and information about all units.

Please also use your Coursework Advisers – many centres did not contact their advisers and they tended to be the centres where candidates researched inappropriate topic areas or simply failed to find a focused approach – mainly because of an essay title that needed the gentlest of tweaks.

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

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

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