



**General Certificate of Education (A-level)  
June 2012**

**Media Studies**

**MEST4**

**(Specification 2570)**

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

***Report on the Examination***

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## Introduction

There were 6595 candidates from 530 centres for the MEST4 coursework unit this series. The cohort produced rather a mixed bag of portfolios – some were particularly impressive with Critical Investigations and Linked Productions of equal excellence, many tended to produce a pairing which was rather uneven and there were a small minority which, for a variety of reasons, struggled to reach A-level standard.

## Administration

Even though these administrative points have been made over and over again, there are still centres who are not complying with these requests. This does make moderation an extremely lengthy process at times and so centres' cooperation is asked for. Where there are problems with administration, teachers are asked to contact AQA in the first instance.

- Please ensure that all 2000 word essays have been properly labelled, student by student, and stapled or tied together so that moderators have easy and secure access. 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 several instances this summer where the addition was incorrect and often this was very much to the disadvantage of the candidate – the sampling process often means that we do not see all candidates so some of your candidates might suffer unnecessarily.
- Please ensure that all Candidate Record Form (CRF) and Centre Declaration Sheets (CDS) forms are filled in appropriately and signed by teachers and candidates as necessary. There were more unsigned forms this year than at any other session previously.
- Please annotate all work (this is a 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. This is particularly true when awarding the marks for the Linked Production. It is pleasing 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 frequently 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.
- 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 individuals broadcast or e-media work is stored on a separate disk rather than storing all a centres work on one disk. Where a centres work is stored on

one disk, please place the work in candidate number order and again label as carefully as possible.

- Some centres submit work on a memory stick and this is a particularly effective way of submitting work to the moderator.
- 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.
- It is still an extremely wise idea to run your titles and linked productions by the Coursework Adviser – some topic areas this summer were not particularly helpful for the candidates.

### **Critical Investigation**

Centres are again 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 too many instances where all candidates had been given a basic essay title and then all had then chosen different products to examine. Each essay then 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. Indeed, in one instance, all the candidates from a centre answered exactly the same question and the topic area had clearly been taught - even the references to media products were identical throughout all the Investigations. Taught coursework is totally against the spirit of the Specification and is self-defeating given the requirement for candidate autonomy. 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 absolutely minimal.

To achieve synopticity, candidates work should really utilise all of the five Key Concepts where appropriate, 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. This is particularly the case with some topic areas – unfortunately topic areas that seemed to be very popular this summer – the question “To what extent are video games responsible for violent behaviour amongst teenagers” is simply unanswerable.

There were some topic areas that seemed to be particularly common this summer. The effect of video games (see above), vampires, body image, reality tv/celebrity being the most common. These areas were also the areas which need to be treated most carefully because they are actually rather difficult to handle in an analytical and evaluative way, the focus of the title becomes all important. Thus, to really be successful as a Critical Investigation the most helpful essay title about video games and their effects is “Why are video games considered to be responsible for violent behaviour amongst teenagers?” and then a focus on a particular game or critic.

Similarly, there were far too many Critical Investigations which were really just MEST3 Case Studies. 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. Unfortunately this point has to be stressed because there were a couple of 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.

Centres should look at the MEST4 Checklist which is available in the Teacher Resource Bank on the AQA website. There is also a section which lists some particularly successful titles seen over the past few sessions – this will be added to over the ensuing months.

Some titles are still quite ‘vague’. The word limit is 2000 words which means that a focused essay is vital. Some candidates are straying way beyond the word limit – this summer there were several 4000 word essays submitted. These clearly lack focus and can rarely be considered fluent or cogent. It is advisable for candidates to pick no more than two or at most three central products for their investigation. This is an area where a conversation with the Coursework Adviser can be particularly valuable.

Some candidates still fall 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.

There were a few essays that had very tenuous links to media studies and tended to read more like an investigation into the candidates own interests and/or hobbies. This can have the effect of making the 2000 word essay seem more like a piece of feature journalism than a critical investigation. As a general piece of advice, candidates are advised not to investigate a topic area of which they are particular fans. 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 is important that candidates supply a bibliography. Many omitted to do this and those that did hardly did themselves justice. That said, there was greater evidence of research this year but candidates are reminded to consult texts which are not simply 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 contact details.

If the pages above sound unduly negative it must be said that many of the Critical Investigations seen this series were well researched independent Critical Investigations 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 series. This is particularly true, again, of moving image work but there were also some truly excellent print products submitted this year, moving well beyond the AS level, as well.

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

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

Adding a short explanation of the link between the Production and the Critical Investigation seems to have been a very helpful addition this series. Certainly it made the Moderators work that much easier but there was evidence that it also helped to focus the candidates on the important link between their Investigation and the Production.

It was also pleasing to note that many centres have recognised that the advice in the specification about expectations, referred to minimum expectations. The specification states that moving image and audio work is not expected to be more than 5 minutes long. It then states that print or e-media work should be at least 3 pages long. 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.

Conversely however, there is also increasing evidence that many candidates see the Linked Production as a bit of an 'add-on', something to be done once the Critical Investigation is completed and something that does not require much ambition or effort (in fact something to be tackled late on in the Easter term just before deadline day). We saw many more three page print pieces this year – many of which were not even really up to AS standard. There is also compelling evidence that some centres are simply recycling/reworking the work that candidates had created for MEST2.

Even though the Linked Production is worth fewer marks than the Critical Investigation it is still an important part of the unit and demonstrates synopticity and understanding very effectively. Some candidates are seriously underachieving because they do seem to think that the Production exercise deserves their time and effort. This is a real shame because the work offered in MEST2 is constantly improving. Sadly the overall impression in MEST4 is that this is not the case. The 32 marks available for the Linked Production make an enormous difference to the total marks achieved by a candidate and the final grade. It is still our hope that candidates in future will be more ambitious and enterprising with their linked productions.

**And finally....**

Please ensure that you as centres look regularly at the website for regular updates and information about all units.

Please also use your Coursework Advisers. Many centres did not contact their coursework Advisers. These 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.

**UMS conversion calculator** [www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion](http://www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion)