

Media Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 7860**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS 3860**

Report on the Units

June 2008

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the syllabus content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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2730 Foundation Production

General Comments

This report has been compiled through the comments of 18 Assistant Moderator report forms and on-line comments from four team leaders. It is the final summer session report for this unit. For those Centres taking the new specification, Unit G321 should be taken from September 2008, although we will be running two further sessions with this unit in January and June 2009, for those Centres who wish to re enter this Unit.

If centres are to be successful in their delivery of the new specification it is advised that ALL centres read the reports of the Principal Moderator for both 2730 and 2733.

Introduction

There were 18,395 entries for this Unit. Overall moderators indicated that the work presented for this session reflected the standard from June 2007 session, although there were a number of issues that will be developed further in this report. The most seen brief this session was set brief 1, the film thriller followed by set brief 3, the print magazine work (although the 'thriller film' opening is still referenced through 'horror'). Set brief 6 – new media is beginning to comply with the rubric of the task, in that more centres are providing URLs, although this is not universally the case. A point ALL centres will need to consider in preparation for the new specification.

Centres are reminded that if the set briefs are not adhered to then candidates work will be adjusted and in certain situations work will be returned to centres for re-marking, which could result in marks being delayed and not available to candidates in August. An issue seen a number of times this session was the working group size of candidates. The maximum number is 4. There were groups of 5 and 6. This breaks the unit's rubric and will not be tolerated in future sessions of the new specification.

The majority of centres included the Coursework Authentication sheet (CCS160), which as a requirement, should accompany either the work or the MS1 sheets, which are sent to moderators for the selection of the moderated sample. However, a number of centres did not provide this form, creating unnecessary further work for the moderating team. The deadline of the 15th May is and has been a fixed deadline for centres to get their MS1s to their allocated moderators for a number of years. It should be remembered that the moderating team are teachers too (many teaching this specification) and also have to meet deadlines. It has always been the view of this Principal Moderator that the coursework should be regarded in the same way as the examination.

As has been stated in the last three reports, the use of original images is a major requirement of a number of the set briefs. There are centres which still continue to avoid this requirement. In particular the use of large found images of celebrities on the front cover of candidates' magazines is not appropriate to the spirit of this task and centres should discontinue this practice. Centres are reminded that in the new specification ONLY original images are acceptable. It is good effective practice for candidates to produce and create ALL original images in their work. Centres should support candidates in their focus upon mise-en-scene in print work and ensure that all aspects of a front cover or double page spread or a set of still images for the advertising campaign and the Games packages, support this approach. In the remaining session of the present specification, moderators will adjust candidates work if the outcomes for each set brief are not fulfilled.

The administration of this unit was reasonably well executed. Where work is annotated with attention to the Level criteria in the specification, it is clear that these centres are supported in their judgements by the moderation process. Where centres allowed a number of briefs to be used, marks appeared to be adjusted more so than if a centre used only one or two set briefs. There did appear to be a difficulty where some centres tried to create a marking scheme to award marks across the set briefs. Centres should only use the assessment criteria for each set brief but be mindful of the need for parity across the set briefs. (See below in the Assessment section.)

The most common concern amongst moderators this session was the lack of supportive information (such as annotation on candidates' work) that would inform the moderation process of why marks were given in the way that they were. A considerable number of centres were over generous in their marking of the construction assessment criteria. The misuse of what is described by moderators as 'tolerance' by centres must cease, or the moderating team will not be able to use this mechanism in future.

The Set Briefs:

It appears for this session that the most popular brief was the **film thriller – set brief 1**, closely followed by print brief 3; the production of a teenage magazine.

The film thriller set brief explicitly requires candidates to illustrate how their work will relate to a 15 or 18 certificated audience and perhaps for this reason it is clear that the 'stalker' or 'horror' thriller is still being created.

Candidates must ensure that they illustrate how their text caters for whichever audience. Without this clarification – most likely expressed in the production report – candidates are unlikely to achieve a Level 4. Centres are advised to support their candidates in this requirement. It is the focus upon the 15 or 18 certificate that has and still creates a tension for the moderating team. A large number (perhaps more so than previously seen) of candidates are creating texts that cause concern. This concern ranges across health and safety issues, child protection and how and when candidates film their work away from staff supervision. This suggests that it is not always clear that a centre can vouch that the work presented is wholly that of its candidates

It is still the case with 'car chases', 'bedroom scenes' and 'night time scenes with the use of knives and toy guns in public spaces', where concerns for both the safety of the candidates and the implications of police intervention exist. The most effective thrillers do not need to include the 'horror' conventions or violent scenes. One film noir thriller, with two characters and no violence was exceptional as was a sequence that used fast forward and re-wind editing techniques to create a real sense of tension and a desire to want to watch the whole film.

Centres should undertake risk assessments for this brief. These are all valid issues of concern for a public examination.

To include the opening titles within the sequence being offered is very important to the success of the work. As was stated last year, what appears to be a 'need' to complete the 'opening of a film thriller' with the captions of who did which part of the making of the film, does not fit the requirement of the brief. Where candidates are successful with this brief is where the viewer has not been told the complete story and wishes to know more of the narrative, once the opening sequence has stopped. Excellent productions reflected excellent planning (good storyboarding and scripting) and focussed mise-en-scene and effective locations. The weaker texts relied too much upon music to cover up poor camera shooting and editing.

There were a few examples of the **television brief**. In the majority of cases the work addressed the target audience (5 to 12 year olds). Where this work was seen this session, candidates did

try to attempt to address a range of issues for a younger age group. The main problem with the brief appears to be the lack of research. What is created may not be as a result of target audience research, but ideas considered as being of interest to the target group by the candidates creating the work.

As with the other set briefs, one moderator makes the point that centres should encourage ALL its candidates to ensure that as part of the final production report, (regardless of the set brief used) feedback (viewing / reading sessions) are set up in order to get well considered feedback from the target audience, which in itself will provide invaluable material for the production report.

The teenage magazine brief was again very popular. The use of ICT is having a growing impact upon the outcomes achieved. Although again the correct software packages need careful consideration when candidates use and select them – correct materials required for the correct job! If the use of found images were to stop, then this brief would bring a clarity of intention to the work that would enhance the success of this brief.

A number of moderators did indicate that some centres are not teaching the basic elements of layout, design and picture editing (cropping) leaving candidates to 'pick up' these techniques from the research they have been asked to do in preparation for this task. As a fundamental principle, which ever brief a centre is asking its candidates to create, the centre **MUST** teach the basic principles (and more advanced skills, if possible) in order for their learners to achieve at an appropriate level.

Centres are also reminded that those working as part of a group have to create the equivalent to that of an individual (see page 62 of the 3rd edition of the specification). There were also a number of cases this session where some centres had returned to sending large amounts of copied research material in very large folders. Most of this material does not support the moderation process. The Principal Moderator saw at least four centres where complete magazines were included in the research material.

The **advertising campaign brief** was generally well-executed and made good use of original image manipulation in context. In general, candidates use existing charities and attempted to re-brand them. It is worth considering, as stated before, the option of inventing an entirely fictitious charity, or using a little known medical condition, as this could lead to more attention to form rather than an emphasis on content. Centres are also encouraged to engage candidates' thoughts about where campaigns could or should be placed or shown. Every media text has a context.

There was some evidence this session of the **video games package**, where it was seen there was some attempt to be original. However, the content and working processes of this brief and set brief 6 may become more of a focus in the new A2 specification, because of the requirements around new media. If this is the case centres will need to ensure that they can provide and support the necessary expertise and advice for candidates to be successful in the use of new media technologies and outcomes!

Again there was little heard of the **radio brief** this session. However, where it was created, the work seemed to be of a high standard. A very small number of centres that use this brief regularly do create work that uses the unique strengths of this medium to full effect. To centres that do use this medium please continue because the work is of a good order and the medium of radio has a great deal to offer candidates not only in its own right but also as the 'forgotten' sound medium of video, film, television and now new media. Centres might wish to reconsider the use of radio in media production work, as equipment is relatively cheap (compared with other resources) and easy to use. There are no limits on what candidates can do (other than those of the brief); a good quality product can be done in a fraction of the time it takes to do video and print. 'The only practical restriction is your own imagination.' (Team Leader – 2730)

For centres that created the **web site brief**, the issue of the lack of an URL address was again evident. However, where a small number of centres did provide a URL, it was most gratifying to view candidates' work on-line. Centres should ensure that candidates do analyse a range of web sites and not perhaps rely upon candidates own knowledge without the research of analysis as occurs with other mediums. If centres cannot support candidates with access to a web based programme and or cannot provide an URL address (the school / college web site would be adequate) then centres are asked NOT to attempt this set brief. In view of the new specification the use of new media will be vital to the success and development of candidates' work. Now seems the time for media studies departments to work alongside ICT colleagues. Perhaps OCR's iMedia course will help to teach and support media studies teachers in the techniques and tools necessary for future success.

Assessment Criteria:

Overall the majority of centres did apply the assessment criteria with confidence. Although, as stated above a number of centres did use the 'tolerance' mechanism to over inflate marks, particularly for construction. As with previous sessions there were a number of centres whose marks were either reduced or raised. This is done to bring a centre's marks in line with the agreed base line national standard. Centres are reminded that the application of marks must reflect the level criteria as stated in the specification.

During this session a number of moderators pointed to the fact that some centres will make cursory links to Level criteria. When this occurs moderators may find it more difficult to support a centre's assessment, because little evidence is provided by the centre in support of its initial award of a Level and a mark within that Level.

This session did witness a number of centres where rank order (order of merit) was questioned and this led to a number of moderators asking centres to remark according to the Level criteria as illustrated in the specification. One major reason for the rank order issue is the lack of detail in the internal standardisation process in which centres should undertake. It is also the case that some centres do not recognise the need to ensure parity between the set briefs in the assessment process, which itself can lead moderators to question the rank order, when a centre encourages its candidates to either self-choose or provide a range of set briefs. (See the comment above.) The moderating team is seeing a pattern emerge where some centres that encourage candidates to choose from more than two set briefs, appear to create a rank order issue. This is because the assessment criteria applied by such centres do not consider parity across the work created and ignore the impact upon them to assess across different briefs in order to create an order of merit.

The most common issue that arises from the application of the assessment criteria to a candidate's work is the level of comment provided by the centre. If comments on the Coursework Cover sheet are detailed then the moderator can see how marks have been arrived. If centres do not provide detailed comments, it is much harder for moderators to support assessments made by centres. The annotation of each candidate's work is a requirement of the examination boards' Code or Practice.

As stated above - Construction is the category which still tends to be over-rewarded, though on occasion, inflated marks for planning and the production reports were in evidence.

Administration:

The best practice witnessed by moderators is where the moderator can easily access the text outcomes (especially print) from the written work and any appendices. As has been stated

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previously, centres and candidates support the moderation process, when all administration and 'tips' in coursework presentation are made a priority.

A number of moderators have commented upon the way in which some centres DO NOT provide DVDs with menus and or appropriate labelling of DVD covers in order to access the correct piece of work for the correct candidate(s). Centres are encouraged to ensure that ALL DVDs are in a format that can be viewed on domestic players and preferably having menus from which to choose the appropriate work. One DVD with a menu also saves on postal charges and avoids confusion over which candidate has worked with whom in group productions.

Advice:

- All print work should use original images (in preparation for the new specification.)
- Common tasks for ALL candidates within a centre seem to work best and provide the centre with less difficulty in arriving at a rank order.
- Expertise and the development of skills in one medium / task can be achieved by focusing upon ONE set brief, which could be expanded year on year across two or three set briefs.
- A clear policy on Health and Safety is in place and that a centre ensures that Risk Assessments form part of the pre-production process.
- The content of productions, along with clear and detailed planning should be in place and discussed before productions are started.
- Access to appropriate equipment, resources and training (for candidates and staff).
- The close study of real media texts related to the candidates' choice of brief encourages more detailed understanding of that task with the potential of more appropriate outcomes (and marks).

All the above information is provided as advice and guidance in order for the moderating process to support centres.

2731 Textual Analysis

This is the final 'full' session for 2731; there are two legacy units available in January 2009 and June 2009, these are expected to consist of a smaller number of entries than previous sessions. This unit of work has been extremely enjoyable to mark over the years and has seen some memorable students work; testament to their ability and the commitment of media studies teachers in delivering the key media skill of textual analysis. I must also thank the teams of examiners for all their hard work and expertise; who have in turn also been very encouraged by candidates' abilities and performance in this exam.

The June session had approximately 14500 candidates entered.

Where they continue to apply, some observations have been repeated from previous reports to help Centres in their preparation of candidates for this unit.

Overall Performance

The overall performance was very good and the question paper was appropriate for the exam sat. There was plenty of evidence which indicated that the candidates were fully engaged by the extract used in Question 1, which led resulted in some very full and detailed analytical responses. On the whole question 2 has been answered well.

There were fewer examples of candidates who had run out of time than in previous sessions and the majority of candidates answered both questions. All questions were considered appropriate in their level of demand, allowing for good differentiation between all candidates, especially in Section B. There were no significant issues raised by Centres regarding the choice of extract or wording of questions.

The majority of candidates seemed to answer both questions and seemed confident about rubric and question requirements.

Screening Conditions

It is the responsibility of Centres to check that every candidate can see and hear clearly, especially if they have specific difficulties with either sense. It may be preferable for Centres to use a large space, with a video/data projector and a large screen, so that all candidates experience the same conditions. Some measure of blackout will improve picture quality and care should be taken to test sound and picture quality in advance. Most data/video projectors have limited sound projection, so it is advisable to add a booster speaker(s).

Previewing the Extract

The DVD extract is sent in advance with precise instructions to Centres regarding when they should preview the DVD in order to check that it functions and whether any adjustments need to be made to sound and picture quality. It is very important that Centres check the contents of the DVD prior to the exam.

It is the responsibility of the Centre to preview the DVD extract when advised, as OCR cannot rectify any problems on the day of the examination. If the DVD has not arrived when expected, Centres are advised to contact OCR at once, rather than wait until the day of the examination.

The opportunity to preview the extract is for technical reasons only. Any Centre suspected of leaking information about the choice of extract to candidates, or using this knowledge to gain an unfair advantage will be referred as a potential malpractice case and candidates will be at risk of being withdrawn from the examination or having their marks disqualified.

Note-making

As far as note making on the extract is concerned, Centres should address helpful strategies directly with their candidates in advance (for example, dividing notes into five sections for quick reference) and give them ample opportunities for practice. The notes are not marked. They are simply to aid the student in recording details from the moving image extract and should be as brief and clear as possible.

Section A: Textual Analysis - Unseen Moving Image Extract

The extract chosen, '**Stormbreaker**', Dir. Geoffrey Sax, 2006, provided ample opportunity for students to discuss the five technical aspects of moving image language for discussion.

Question 1

The overall performance of candidates was consistent with previous sessions. Candidates performed well, with ample opportunity for candidates to comment on the construction of meaning in the extract, through an analysis of the technical codes.

Candidates were able to recognise generic links with spy/ espionage movies, and plenty of responses mentioned inter-textual reference to a James Bond like character, Alex Ryder. The candidates were clearly engaged by the extract and what it had to offer. The use of technical and media vocabulary was excellent and above that set in previous sessions. We are entering an age; where candidates are armed with highly literate media skills and vocabulary, which is very encouraging for A Level Media Studies.

The questions allowed for differentiation in student responses and the extract was explored thoroughly with most candidates managing to comment on all aspects of the question with some confidence and in doing so, providing balanced responses. It has been noted that some centres had spent a great deal of time on superfluous theory which on the whole was applied poorly, centres need to be reminded that this paper is a test of students application of analytical skills and how to read a media text.

The analysis of camera, shot and movement was adeptly analysed by most candidates, many would state generic principles, but would fail to provide specific examples and the consequent significance/ effect on the audience. Nearly all candidates could describe what they saw in the extract and many could analysis the significance of shot selection and the connotative meaning constructed by shot sequences, for example in analysis of the montage of shots during the opening sequence of the extract as Alex rider weaves in and out of the London traffic. Many candidates also illustrated the use of unusual camera angles and points of view constructed of Alex Ryder in the car in the scrapyard and the sequence of mid and close up shots used. The martial arts sequence at the end was the least analysed in terms of camera, angle, shot and movement – perhaps because most candidates dealt with the extract chronologically.

Most candidates were able to identify the themed sequence in the extract and recognise the location the extract was set in London, and dealt with the binary contrast of the public urban streets and the privacy of the scrapyard. There was some very insightful analysis of the scrapyard location used and the ways in which this connoted danger. There were also plenty of discussions about the regionality of the setting and how this represented the characters. The

distinct chase and fight scenes enabled candidates to organise and focus their discussion of *mise en scène*. There were also plenty of opportunities for candidates to analyse the *mise en scène* of the set up between antagonist and protagonist. Some candidates persist in using overly informal language in the kind of analysis – ‘goodies and baddies, chavs etc, and there is a tendency by some to use simplistic colour analysis, leading to superficial statements such as the “white bridge signifies purity and innocence”. On the whole candidates addressed *mise en scène* very well.

Candidate’s analysis of sound was encouraging. There were many responses which discussed the use of diegetic and non-diegetic sound, and with a degree of detail, for example, many candidates identified the role of the radio as diegetic, playing the Kaiser Chief’s, I Predict a Riot’ and then argued that this established what the audience was to expect later in the sequence. Candidates could also link sound to the action and explained how the use of the dance music or techno beat at the end of the sequence, could signify the intensity of the actions of the characters. The candidates also discussed the pacing of the extract and how sound was used to create meaning and this was generally well done.

In relation to editing candidates responses could be characterised by responses, like ‘switched’, ‘flicked’ or ‘moved’ to describe editing techniques rather than the appropriate terminology. There were also some errors in applying the term jump cut and cross cutting. But nevertheless, there was some very good analysis of the editing in the sequence and candidates were able to discuss quite adeptly at times the use of continuity, match on action and incorporate a discussion of soundbridges. There was reference to continuity or invisible editing but candidates didn’t really discuss the techniques used to comprise this system of editing.

For special effects, many candidates were able to discuss the use of profilmic stunts, for example, the use of bike stunts, and the discussion of combat scene at the end of the extract elucidated good discussion of choreographed martial arts fighting moves. There was plenty of opportunity to discuss a range of special effects in the extract: from pro-filmic stunts, the use of CGI, and the use of pyrotechnics. Weaker candidates were simply descriptive in the use of special effects and did not explain how the effect contributed to the meaning constructed in the extract.

Advice for Candidates for Section A

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

Overall Performance for Question 2

There was plenty of evidence of some very good teaching with a large number of candidates well prepared to address issues on representation using appropriately compared texts. There were still a number of candidates who found it difficult to offer comparisons between texts and some responses were often pre-prepared and ‘shoe-horned’ best fits, without actually addressing the question. On occasion some candidates were sidetracked by unnecessary theory or explanation as to the nature of sitcom or tabloid newspapers with the weak application of Maslow theories of audiences and consumerism, or with the application of Galtung and Ruge’s news values.

Question 2a Consumerism and Lifestyle magazines

The largest misconception by the candidates was understanding the concept of 'consumerism' and many would simply offer an analysis of aspects of the magazine, for example the description of adverts or commentaries on written articles, rather than address the question set. Comparisons included Men's Health and Cosmo/ FHM; sugar Men's Health and Glamour, more unusual pairings were Country Life magazine and Bella, which at times, did not elicit the best responses from candidates. Some of the best answers came from analysing Heat magazine and the Big Issue, though this is not strictly a lifestyle magazine.

Weaker candidate responses would provide a description of the social grouping of target audience and generic discussion of price/ use of colour and layout and design, with guided poor choices of magazines. On occasion the selection of texts were not very viable in order to answer the question adequately, for example, Vogue and Kerrang or Cosmo and NME or Home and Garden Magazine and Wedding/Bride magazines. Where candidates were allowed a free choice of texts for 2a the responses lacked textual exemplification and discussion.

Question 2b Celebrity and the Tabloid Press

Candidates had a firm grasp of the concept of representation, but some struggled with the focus of the question on celebrity representation being news worthy. Those candidates who had clearly been taught the issue of news values did particularly well with the issue of newsworthiness, but there were also plenty of cases of candidates who either wrote a very general response or simply tried to list an application of news value theory, without applying textual exemplification. The question set seemed to elucidate some good responses, for example Heather Mills and Paul McCartney and Amy Winehouse and Britney Spears were good celebrities that were compared and discussed.

Poor selections of texts included the Telegraph and the Sun; need we be reminded that the Telegraph is a broadsheet newspaper? Weaker candidates answers were focusing on really recent publications, the week before the exam or simply discussed the trials and tribulations of the celebrity. Some candidates failed to move beyond a running commentary of celebrity's lives.

Q2c Music Culture and Radio

There were few responses to the question on Music and Radio. Of the responses reported on, there was some poor description about radio stations and candidates tended to address one radio program well and the second comparative text not so well, suggesting that centres taught one text and let the candidates choose the other text, and their choices appeared weak or lacking guidance.

Q2d Gender and Television Sitcom

Candidates' responses addressed very soundly the concept of stereotypes, with the best answers focusing on the contradictory nature of stereotypes, where characters can display both weaknesses and strengths. There were many good responses to this question, with candidates clearly able to apply an argument and textual evidence to the issue of stereotyping/ ideology and gender. Most candidates appear to have been well prepared to address the key concept of representation and could use studied texts to exemplify the points they wanted to make. Weaker candidates would offer characters descriptions in comparison across two texts.

Popular texts studied included Absolutely Fabulous and Men Behaving Badly, Frasier, Royale Family and My Family, Peep Show and Two pints of lager, Fawlty Towers and the Vicar of Dibley (in which one centre, allowed candidates to explore the change of gender stereotypes over time and consider the influence of social context – this led to some excellent comparisons).

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When theoretical ideas were applied these were supported with textual evidence which led to some excellent responses, for example in discussion of the idea of the metro sexual male.

One common problem was that candidates responses may of focused too much on the issue of class and social status, rather than address the key representational issue of gender, which applied to studied texts such as Only When I Laugh and The Office, or Green wing and Friends. Weaker comparisons of sitcom texts were Friends vs. Simpsons or The Office and Fawltly Towers.

This option was again by far the most popular.

Q2e Conflict and Competition in Video Computer Games

The question was generally well answered by candidates who had been prepared well by the centre. There are still many cases of candidates answering the question, despite not having not been prepared for it; as a last resort to answer question 2D – though there are less instance of this session.

The candidates on the whole were able to address the issue of conflict and competition. The question on visual elements was often explicitly answered with some good references to camera, location and character. These textual examples enabled candidates to provide good explanations and discussions of the conflict, for example, King Kong allowed consumers to obtain world ranking and in Grand Theft Auto conflict was represented as fun and dangerous. On occasion were responses not relevant, when some candidates explored sound and some candidates failed to engage with the visual elements aspect of the question.

Good comparisons across a few centres included Grand Theft Auto V. King Kong, with very different visual styles, also Tomb Raider and Splinter Cell, Stuntman Ignition, Saints Row, Pokemon Pearl, Rayman, Assassins Creed and Kingdom Hearts were other video games explored and used for textual exemplification. It seemed that candidates overall had managed to grasp what was conflict/competition in the games studied though. Stronger candidates provided more sophisticated analysis and could link visual elements to the issue of conflict and competition, but with weaker candidates, the tendency was to describe graphics or outfits with no development or comparison.

Advice for Teachers for Section B

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

From January 2009 the first examinable units are available for G322 and G323. In preparation for these units, please visit the OCR website for information and utilise the sample assessment materials that are available. The advice is to prepare students on the topic of television/ radio drama and representation and case studies for Institutions and Audiences. Schemes of work are available on the OCR website, which are by no means prescriptive, but to assist centre's in the preparation of candidates for the new specification which is taught from September 2008.

Some general advice for the first sitting of this exam in January 2009:

- The unit focuses on textual analysis
- Plenty of timed practice for the candidates is needed

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- Candidates need to manage their time appropriately in the exam in order to complete the paper
- The unit tests key concepts – representation, institutions and audiences
- Do advise candidates that they need to address all the technical areas for question one and to address the issue of how representations are constructed in the text.
- Use plenty of detailed examples for question two on institution and audiences
- Do prepare candidates so that they can structure their responses – particular for question two

2732 Case Study: Audiences and Institutions

General Comments

There were approximately 18,000 candidates for this paper, which proved accessible for most candidates, with the vast majority again answering on Section A. On the whole there was evidence of detailed research being carried out, but in many cases there was a significant difference between those centres which had prepared their candidates to adapt case study material to the question set and those which had not. This was particularly evident with Section A question 3, which was a less predictable question than in some previous sessions.

There were few rubric errors involving candidates answering on both sections, but there were many candidates who appeared to have had inadequate practice on past papers, as time management was an issue in a large number of cases, with too long spent on the short answer questions and insufficient time left for the long essay. For question 2b the need to answer using material from outside the passage was often ignored, with a significant number of candidates simply re-wording material from the paper in front of them.

Some candidates were disadvantaged by their lack of a wider media vocabulary, leading to a lack of grasp of some features of the passage and in many cases an inability to address key issues. Often, candidates seemed unaware of the term distribution and floundered when attempting to answer on it. There was evidence of candidates being prepared for the paper without any detailed examples or consideration of the changing nature of the issues, often making reference to events which happened several years ago (such as the AOL-Time Warner linkup) without any apparent awareness of what had happened since.

Section A

Though the topic was a surprise to many candidates, those who read the passage carefully and thought logically were able to deal with the questions effectively.

- 1a. Most candidates answered well.
- 1b. Most candidates got full marks.
- 1c. i. Most candidates were able to work out from the passage what is meant by 'staggered' release.
- ii. Candidates found this harder, but many were familiar with the term and able to access full marks.
- 2a. Where candidates had considered the issue from reading the passage, they were generally able to answer the question.
- 2b. There was too much reliance on the passage, which indicated a large number of centres had not prepared candidates for the style of question. Where candidates engaged fully with the question, it was answered very well. Best responses tended to use examples such as blogging and TV on demand such as the iPlayer, though there were many good answers from a range of media. Weaker responses often tended to refer to internet shopping as the only kind of distribution of which they were aware. There were a lot of generalised responses which made little use of case studies, indicating a lack of preparation.
3. Candidates who answered well were obviously advised by their centres to read the question properly and not simply to write out their case study. The poor answers followed the latter pattern and often completely misunderstood 'creativity' deciding that it was a synonym for interactivity. The best answers were those where the candidates were not just reliant on one case study, looking at Web2.0 features in Youtube, MySpace and Second

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Life, for example, with reference to specific texts to illustrate their points. In some instances, the case studies were so outdated that candidates could not hope to address the question. Some candidates interpreted 'creative opportunities' as referring to the work of media industries; this was fine and led to some very interesting answers on the games industry and phones in particular.

4. This was a less popular question but tended to be answered appropriately, with case studies ranging from Apple to Sony and some particularly good responses around the games industry.

Section B

Far fewer candidates chose to answer this section. Where candidates had prepared for Section B, they tended to cope well; there were a number of responses which appeared to be the result of candidates seeing 'MySpace' in the passage and deciding to hop from section A. In these instances, they tended to fare poorly on the 2b question and the long essay.

- 1a. Usually resulted in full marks
- 1b. There were a variety of responses to this question, some at great length copying out the passage in the hope of alighting upon a relevant point.
- 1c. Most candidates were able to explain the idea of a 'non-stop global party' in relation to MySpace, but many misinterpreted the idea of a 'vehicle' in the second part of the question.
- 2a. Candidates were generally able to identify ways in which MySpace could be of benefit to Murdoch.
- 2b. Where candidates had case studies to use, they were able to mobilize their knowledge and to make reference to technologies as well as companies.
3. This question was answered with reference to a wide range of case studies, including Sony, Microsoft and Apple and the ways in which each had co-operated with other companies. The least successful answers were those focusing on AOL-Time Warner.
4. This was answered by the majority of Section B candidates, with mixed results. Many appeared to answer off the top of their heads with vague speculation and sometimes rants about media manipulation with little grounding in their studies. The best responses were rooted firmly in case study material and systematically looked at the arguments.

Advice to Centres

Candidates need more pertinent examples, need to be flexible with their material and adapt it to the question set and need to ensure that the material used for q.2b is not simply taken from the passage in each case.

Centres are reminded that there are two remaining sessions for this paper, in January and June 2009, for candidates re-sitting the exam. The new specification gives plenty of opportunity to use content previously studied for this paper, both in section B of the AS paper G322/323 and as part of the broad themes for the A2 exam.

2733 Advanced Production

This report has been written with a great deal of input from Team Leaders and Assistant Moderators and is therefore a summary of the moderation team's collective experience of the session. This was the tenth session for this unit and there were 10781 candidates, of whom the large majority produced work which was appropriate to the requirements and demands of this level of assessment; indeed, there was an impressive proportion of effective and creative work produced by candidates. Moving image work remained the most popular option, with the submission of a large number of music videos and increased numbers of short films, film trailers and TV documentaries. As with the previous session, there was slightly more print-based work and slightly more cross media packages. Moderators saw a similar number of web sites as last June but there remained very little radio production – a pity, as always, because the technology is accessible (cheap and easy to operate) and the only limit on the candidates' work is their imagination.

However, in terms of administration this was a difficult session for moderators, with many experienced moderators noting that this has been the most difficult session they have ever moderated. This was for a range of reasons: an exceptional number of centres creating merit order issues; centres submitting work based on inappropriate briefs (such as submission of AS briefs for A2); centres sending parcels that omitted vital coursework elements (such as the DVD of the work!) and/or paperwork (especially the Centre Authentication form, CCS160, which is a QCA requirement). Work was still being sent in the wrong format - some moving image work was sent on mini dv. There seemed to be a trend of sending work on DVD but it was actually in the form of a .mov. One centre sent the soundtrack separately from the moving image – presumably expecting the moderator to put the two together! In terms of rubric, there were a few cases where group sizes exceeded the permitted maximum of 4. There was also an increased number of lost coursework procedures and of clerical errors, where centres added up coursework component marks incorrectly and/or and transferred marks incorrectly to the MS1.

Some centres were still sending samples over a month after the 15 May MS1 deadline and, clearly, this cannot continue if the process is to be fair to those centres following the rules.

Whilst many centres ensured that work was annotated and that coversheets were detailed and supportive of the moderation process, a few centres still did not include candidate names/numbers, group membership, assessment comments - and many did not annotate the Critical Evaluations.

Assignments

The majority of Centres presented appropriate tasks, created using the necessary resources and clearly underpinned by effective and relevant teaching. As always, close supervision throughout all stages led to the strongest work and those centres that set a series of internal deadlines for each stage of the production process ensured candidates produced their best work comfortably by their final deadline. In preparing for the new Specification, centres may wish to encourage candidates to construct blogs with URLs as they go along; centres can use this as part of their planning evidence; and some candidates find this an effective way of progressing, keeping evidence of their research phase, their planning stage and of their construction processes and helping them in structuring their final evaluation. Such blogs can include location shots, working links to other videos by the same artist, storyboards, risk assessments etc and can provide an indication of time management. Several centres filmed their storyboards to edit to their soundtrack using the software that they would later use to edit the final music video; the resultant animatic helped with editing practice and also, critically,

helped with the pace of the videos. The animatic could then be put onto the final dvd or onto the candidate's blog.

There seemed to be an unaccountable increase in the number of centres submitting work which virtually replicated the set AS briefs; as one Team Leader noted: 'This has been a record year for such instances of either a complete disregard for the rubric or a manipulation of the brief to try to justify its inclusion at this level. The main offender was the teenage magazine being refashioned as a "music magazine" or a "lifestyle magazine" targeting an 18-25 year old audience but you couldn't pass a bus ticket through the hairline crack of difference between these A2 submissions and their AS ancestors. After this, music-based websites and the familiar "horror" openings posing as the older, more mature sibling of the "thriller" intros were the next in line'. Therefore it must be repeated that **no AS briefs or variations of AS briefs may be used at A2** - even if a centre's candidates have not presented that particular brief themselves at AS. In fact, if the same brief has been used at AS, the candidate runs the risk of the work contravening the malpractice regulations.

Again, there was a problem with some inappropriate material this session, including full frontal nudity in moving image work; as has been noted in previous reports, while it may be acceptable in the 'real world' of media industries and products, we must not lose sight of the fact this is a public examination and we have a duty of care as teachers.

Video

Video has remained the most popular medium since the start of the Specification and, once again, the submissions were dominated by the production of music videos, the majority of which were technically sound and, as one moderator put it, 'some wildly imaginative and creative work was produced'. Lip-synching was good and editing generally has improved, and work usually communicated clearly with the audience – on the whole moderators knew what they were watching. As one moderator noted, 'themes covered the usual suspects such as love, betrayal, narcissistic self-loathing and homelessness but not necessarily in the same video, although one candidate came close.' Centres that had some kind of studio set up (not necessarily a large purpose built studio – but a backdrop and lighting) allowed for more successful performance elements. Some candidates were confidently using blue/green screen and After Effects to produce virtually industry-standard work and centres are commended for making such opportunities available. On the other hand, there were also the usual examples of poorly executed karaoke, set in a school field/hall/canteen, intercut with a boy/girl meeting narrative. Some candidates promoted unknown or local bands and this often resulted in highly effective and informed productions.

There were a few animations using a variety of techniques.

Film

As with last session, there were increased numbers of short films and film trailers.

A few candidates showed a clear understanding of the style and form of a trailer, creating enigmas for the audience that would encourage viewing; these were in contrast to a montage of random well-shot images or the entire narrative told in two minutes – such candidates would be well-advised to analyse a variety of trailers very closely before embarking on one of their own because very few of them showed a well-developed understanding of the conventions of this particular form. They might also consider the economic construction of the narrative – several examples were over four minutes long – and the importance of the audio tracks in a trailer. The increase in popularity of the short film was justified by a selection of interesting work. Candidates were mostly well motivated by the challenge of developing a story within five minutes and there were several examples of some quite sophisticated storytelling. One or two films strayed perilously close to the thriller conventions but the need to move the story on and come to some kind of credible conclusion usually averted the rubric being broken. What was

evident in some of this short-film work was the importance of learning the fundamentals of filmmaking and appropriate use of the camera in earlier parts of the course. One centre, which had an exemplary submission of AS thrillers, showed the success of their training programme in the technical quality of their A2 short films. The main reason for their success wasn't the amount or the sophistication of their technology, but the fact that the candidates had a clear understanding of the importance of mise en scene when framing a shot and that they understood the formal language of film grammar when editing. The work of this centre showed that high quality film production isn't dependent on state-of-the-art special effects but more on knowing how to use a tripod, when to cut from a long shot to a close up and how to use a dissolve rather than a straight cut. In other cases the short films looked more like music videos – and of course some music videos looked more like short films with a dominant music soundtrack!

Television

The benefits of choosing real material as the basis for a production were illustrated in some of the television documentaries. Issues such as binge drinking where real police officers were interviewed and environmental protection where local councillors voiced their opinions had a level of credibility that really enhanced the quality of the end product. Another excellent piece of work chose powered hang-gliding as its subject and incorporated hard fact with some stunning aerial visuals. There seemed to be a greater emphasis on getting it right because there was a tangible audience waiting to see the televisual outcome of this equally tangible issue. It is a highly recommended strategy – alongside carefully-considered risk assessments. Weaker documentaries tended to over-rely on voxpops or on fake interviews.

Some candidates submitted television advertisements but with varying success – many used a variety of camera angles and matched action, but there were too many long takes, lighting was often poor and overall did not really look like TV adverts!

Some centres produced the openings and title sequences from soap operas, TV dramas and new sports programmes.

Print

Apart from some of the questionable music and fashion magazines, there were a few good examples of newspapers. Always a difficult brief to do effectively, in this session there were a couple of encouraging examples of candidates producing an authentic local tabloid where the emphasis was on the gathering of real local news events and illustrating them with purely original images. Technical constructions were often quite strong but many other candidates needed to pay more attention to generic conventions in terms of layout.

Some centres need to be more aware of the ease of plagiarism – two candidates had copied and pasted articles from the internet (one of these taking nearly all of his work from the Sun).

ICT/New Media

A handful of websites showed a solid grasp of the appropriate codes and conventions, with excellent work produced, but the majority were disappointing – there were hardly any effective examples and although it is growing in popularity, the skills required for good quality production still seem to be in the rudimentary stage for most centres. None of the submissions was available as an active URL, bar one, and on the day it was moderated the school website was down. Most of the work was submitted on a variety of discs – some accessible, some not – and too many centres show carelessness in the submission with erratic labelling and equally erratic disc formatting. A couple of pleas for special consideration because of problems with technology were received. Most of the websites were heavily biased towards written text, very few could be navigated effectively and there was very little evidence of audio or video in the designs. The

least effective brief this year by far. Once again, the spectre of the AS band promotion brief hung over several of the submissions with music being a favoured location for the website's content. Original images were not used well and there was a general lack of imagination and flair in the work on offer. Too many candidates just didn't seem to know enough about their chosen text and the application of the necessary software. Web work was often overmarked.

Radio

Once again there was very little radio work this session. One centre that did, though submitted the work on a combination of USB stick and Hi8 cassette, both proscribed formats.

Cross Media

Some groups included a complete pop video as part of a cross-media package with CD covers, tour posters and magazine double page spread but with little radio promotion, though. Where there was a group of three or four this worked well but some individual candidates or pairs struggled with such a variety of texts, especially when the pop video could be counted as an acceptable A2 submission on its own. On the other hand, the quantity and substance of artefacts produced in other centres was insufficient for A2. Centres would be advised to examine more closely the fashioning of cross-media projects and ensure that there is a parity of work between these and single media production. The only other example of cross-media subject matter was film promotion and the same word of caution applies to the production of film trailers which can also be seen as a project in their own right. The film packages tended to be much less effective than the music promotion and one or two came dangerously close to the thriller genre. In some cases the cross media brief was poorly executed because candidates worked mostly in print. Their cross media element was a 'teaser trailer' in Flash, which was merely the name of their film, a tagline and 'coming soon' in text, or a My Space page without hyperlinks because web design software wasn't available to them.

Critical Evaluations

Most of these were presented in a clear logical manner and it was pleasing to see some centres making a determined effort to have candidates focus explicitly on theoretical issues when analysing their production. It was also good to see a reduction in tacked-on references to Todorov and Propp this session! Other candidates' evaluations were overmarked by at least a level, when they failed to use the appropriate medium specific terminology or to have much discussion of theory or real media contexts. Some candidates are not writing about their AS brief in the introduction to their Critical Evaluation; others do not refer to audience feedback.

Assessment

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

There was also overmarking of construction by a number of centres, especially where level 3 work was pushed into the level 4 band. Conversely, there was often an undermarking of some level 2 constructions which were marked by centres as a level 1.

Administration and presentation of work for moderation

Most Centres were efficient in sending work for moderation, but a significant few missed the deadline for sending mark sheets or waited too long before responding to sample requests. Work should be ready by the same deadline as the MS1 and centres should save the work onto disc or to print out etc BEFORE the sample request arrives. Centres are also reminded that, where there are 10 or fewer candidates, they should send all work with the MS1 (and the centre authentication form) before the deadline. If candidates have been withdrawn or are absent then the MS1 should also be completed accordingly and the appropriate copies sent to the Board and Moderator.

Yet again, a few centres sent work or mark sheets with no postage or insufficient postage. Other centres put too much work in each sack - some sacks weighed nearly 11kg and the moderators found these very difficult to lift and work with. Work for Foundation Production and Advanced Production should be sent in separate parcels

Centres were generally far more efficient in sending the mandatory Authentication Forms this session but a few still do not seem to realise the significance of this form – if it is not sent, then candidate marks will be reduced to Zero. This is a QCA instruction. One further issue worth considering by centres when signing their centre authentication forms, is that of candidates who complete their production work outside their institution – the centres concerned need to consider carefully how they can verify that the candidate's work is their own.

Again some centres failed to present work in the appropriate format: many centres submitted moving image work on CD-R instead of DVD or VHS and others did not put work online for the duration of the moderation period or failed to provide the moderator with a URL. Several DVDs only played on PCs, not DVD players. The only acceptable formats are outlined in the Specification (Revised Edition p60); as has been repeated in most sessions, it is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that they have set their internal deadlines early enough to be able to solve any potential technical problems and create the work for submission in the required format.

The only acceptable formats are outlined on p60 of the Specification:

- audio work may be submitted on either CD or cassette (**not** mini disc etc)
- video may be presented on either DVD or VHS (**not** CD Rom, VCD, mini DV etc)
- web work **must** be accompanied by a live URL as well as printouts or on disc
- print work may be **no larger** than A3.

No other formats can be accepted; centres need to ensure early on in their planning process for this unit that they are equipped to present their chosen medium in the required format. More centres indicated names of candidates who worked together on a group production. Discs and other artefacts need to be labelled too, though, as they obviously get taken out of their cases for viewing! Most centres sent DVDs with clear menus but some did not, which made the identification of candidates' work for moderation problematical. All artefacts need to be labelled with the centre number and candidate's name; DVDs need to be chaptered and the on-screen menu on DVDs must be in a legible font size. (That is to say, the font size of DVD menus must be large enough for moderators to be able to identify **individual candidates** with ease.) In terms of folders, best practice is to put hard copies of print-based immediately after the cover sheet at the front of the candidate's portfolio, not dispersed throughout the file.

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

Advice to teachers

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

2734 Critical Research Study

Administration Issues

More than in any other past session there was a most worrying increase in examples of the use of inappropriate notes: there were some examples of typewritten notes but of greater concern were notes that were complete answers that were then directly copied. In these cases the scripts are forwarded to the appropriate authority as examples of malpractice and candidates risk being awarded a mark of zero.

Centres should be aware that if a candidate has no notes to submit a letter of explanation from the centre must be forwarded with the cover sheet and script to the examiner.

There are still centres that are not fulfilling the requirements for the cover sheets by not ensuring that they are correctly filled in and signed. Some cover sheets were completely blank apart from a single signature from either the student or teacher.

The cover sheets must be signed by both the candidate and the supervising teacher. The topic being undertaken must be recorded on the cover sheet together with the specific area of study. On the reverse of the cover sheet details of media texts used, such as specific television programmes or films should be recorded and below this a list of sources for research.

Overall Performance of Candidates

The main issue across both questions is that many candidates fail to define the terms of their focus. This does hinder their response quite severely. A prime example of this is where candidates address the issue of violence in the media and effects on children. Nearly all the responses failed to discuss different types of effects and failed to consider what they themselves mean by *“television violence”* jumping from Tom and Jerry to ManHunt in a single paragraph. There were also too many unsupported assumptions in responses addressing advertising, particularly when discussing adverts featuring women. For example a common topic is *“How is the negative influence of the idealized representation of women in ads being challenged?”* and then candidates fail to question their own hypothesis and argue from a singular line that all advertising featuring women have a negative influence. These are just two examples but this approach is very much prevalent. In addition, too many candidates seem to have little or no understanding of concepts such as realism, representation, stereotyping and narrative. There is an expectation that these concepts would have been covered at AS in a robust way that will allow candidates to apply these terms with ease to their own focus.

It is unfortunate that many candidates did not apply their reflection or evaluation fully to the research they had done. Many students could have achieved higher marks if they had evaluated their methods retrospectively. This continues to be an ongoing issue. Often candidates would state that they had constructed a questionnaire and then talked very generally about the strengths and weaknesses of the method finishing with an example of one the questions they asked more often than not inappropriately phrased or leading. Candidates would have been better advised to evaluate the effectiveness of their own questions rather than just simply stating the pros and cons of the method – many more candidates would have been able to reach Level 4 with this approach. It was apparent that successful Centres had built in time and support for candidates to undertake pilot studies of their questionnaire, evaluate the effectiveness of their questions and re-draft. This was good practice. However, there were far too many candidates that did reflect on the method but failed to discuss **how** it informed their own progress and research. At times, it seemed as if they had rote learned the advantages and disadvantages of research methods but when it came to using this knowledge in their own research design, they

failed to take any of it into account. In general little real analysis and evaluation is taking place. It is a shame that many candidates are unable to apply analytical skills to a specific source. Centres should be advised to guide candidates in reflecting retrospectively and apply to own work. Other difficulties included over reliance on outdated inappropriate theory or anecdotal evidence and conjecture.

From some candidates there was a lack of clear explanation or rationale behind the demographics in candidates' primary methods. Questionnaires and focus groups are still being quoted with very little detail on respondents and with an uncritical acceptance of whatever they said. There was a continued trend of family and friends being used as respondents with very general or leading questions. There still remains a common presumption that primary research, however poor, is somehow more valid than secondary research and a concomitant lack of reference to anything other than websites, newspaper and magazine articles and [perhaps] one textbook. Books are an endangered species with few candidates quoting more than one. Many refer to them as strange, alien and rather difficult objects which are usually out of date, "bias" and therefore of little relevance.

Once again many candidates made no reference to any media theory at all. Those who did usually remained within the comfort zones of the Hypodermic, Uses and Gratifications and Laura Mulvey (still going strong after more than thirty years). Frequently these theories were quoted with little relevance or understanding.

Encouragingly, the range of hypotheses was much wider this session. Studio Ghibli is still making a strong showing in World Cinema while the Dove campaign is again a popular entry in Advertising. World Cinema answers predominantly compare or examine the effect of Asian cinema on Hollywood and again focus too heavily on Hollywood. The range of TV Drama responses is broadening and psychologically loaded responses on children and violence/obesity continue to be popular along with diatribes against size zero. Bandura/Bobo has made a comeback in many centres - usually with no evaluation.

There was extensive reference to Wikipedia but now the pendulum seems to have swung in entirely the opposite direction with this internet encyclopaedia pillared for being entirely unreliable. Web referencing should also include the full URL and the date the researcher accessed the site— this is particularly the case with content that can be easily edited.

Of concern also is the fact that some Centres are teaching this paper. In one Centre all of the candidates' focus groups seemed to have been held by the teacher in class together. Apart from two candidates all of the candidates chose Women and Film and nearly all had the same focus films. This especially hindered a few candidates who had chosen a very different focus e.g. Horror but still spent several pages discussing Jane Campion and *The Piano*. Further, a few candidates stated "*as a class we watched a series of films*" and "*we were given a photocopied booklet*".

It was disappointing to see that a large proportion of candidates were not carrying out actual case study analysis but instead sticking to a broad overview of the topic they had chosen, which in most cases was linked to an over-general hypothesis or statement that they then carried out research for. This is where teachers can play a huge part in guiding (not teaching) a candidate towards a valid and specific hypothesis that is neither too far-reaching nor too narrow.

It is also, unfortunately, very clear that too few candidates are given examination practice. In some centres candidates were unable to be specific about much of their own research and references were lacking where it was clear from Q2 responses that research had taken place.

Social networking sites and internet forums are continue to be popular places on which to place survey questions and many candidates set up their own blogs. Some candidates are able to articulate the particular strengths and weaknesses of this method extremely well. Vox Pops also

made an appearance in many candidates' work with varying degrees of appropriateness and success.

Question 2

Most candidates are able to discuss findings with some measure of success and to engage with some relevant issues. Many, however, simply describe/ present their findings with minimal discussion and argument. In such cases it is difficult to identify how much the candidate has actually assimilated. The best responses synthesise a range of primary and secondary findings to demonstrate real understanding and develop a strong argument.

Individual Questions and Common Misinterpretations

Topic 1 Advertising

This topic was generally answered well. There was some interesting research undertaken into Coke and ideology and men's fragrance advertising and masculinity. There were a few answers that lost focus: one candidate analysing advertising in women's magazines but unfortunately most of the response involved discussion and analysis of nothing more than front covers. Some other responses failed to achieve higher marks as they were more an investigation into celebrity and lifestyle magazines with little or no mention of advertising. There were also problems with the size zero debate with many candidates moving away from the topic with most of the approach talking about models that did not advertise the textual examples chosen by the candidates.

There were some good responses on Nike and many candidates were able to discuss brand awareness. There was one particularly good response on celebrity advertising that could easily have moved off topic but was incisive and objective in its consideration of audience. Audience consideration was the main failing with far too few candidates considering a variety of audience theories and target groups. The old adage of grouping the audience as a passive mindless mass willing to buy anything endorsed by a celebrity because *"they think they will be able to play football like Thierry Henry if they buy the trainers"* was far too frequently expressed with no discussion.

Topic 2 Children & the Media

This is still a popular topic with a very wide range of responses and most generally answered well. Violent effects of computer games featured prominently as did food advertising and obesity in young children. Unfortunately, the weaker candidates are still unable to walk an objective line arguing from a one-sided limited view relying on the Bob Doll to support their own argument. Those candidates that were objective managed to produce a comprehensive and reflective study. More candidates are providing age bands now and this is well noted.

Topic 3 Community Radio

Very few candidates attempted this topic and most were handled reasonably well. One or two of the best discussed the rise in popularity of community radio accessed through the internet and how podcasts had enabled mainstream stations to develop a sense of community through radio. One good response looking at how a once pirate station (now a commercial station) still meets the needs of its community. It effectively broadened its discussion into competition and funding considerations.

Topic 4 Crime & the Media

This has become one of the most popular topics. Many responses dealt with moral panics concerning the effects of representations of crime in the media especially violent video games and gun crime but often theories were vaguely defined and applied. Overall the representation of gun crime proved difficult for many candidates – either due to a lack of objectivity or an over reliance on discussing music effects on young people. The stated focus in this topic would often have been more appropriate to Topic 2. Candidates who looked at computer games failed, in the main, to discuss representation of the crime – although this was implicit in places. Some good responses included public perception of crime. The Madeleine McCann case is still being researched by a significant number of candidates the best responses exploring the differing representations of the case in different newspapers and/ or other media texts.

Topic 5 Politics & the Media

There were very few responses to this topic, but most were handled very well. A few candidates considered the cult of celebrity in the representation of politicians by the media: some including references to the US Primaries. Other good examples considered the question of UK bias in reporting on the Palestine/Israel conflict and whether social satire undermines politicians. There were a few excellent studies of the media impact on the London mayoral elections and the US Presidential Primaries.

Topic 6 Sport & the Media

There were some interesting responses on branding. The main problem appears to be candidates researching too broad/narrow a focus or an ill phrased hypothesis that was difficult for the candidate to address. For example: *“To what extent is the media killing the British footballing traditions?”* This had the basis for some strong research into representations and ideology. Unfortunately, the candidate almost immediately lost themselves due to the phrasing. This was a common problem in sport and media particularly the footballing focus questions. Perhaps, critical analysis flew out the window in favour of passion of the game? There are still too many responses looking at the use technology in sport and the effect on the game. The better candidates were able to discuss interactive technology and audience pleasures. Some weaker candidates simply discussed the effect of goal-line technology such as Hawkeye on the game: this is not an appropriate focus.

Topic 7 Television Drama

This is a very popular topic and it was apparent that the students were able to access relevant academic theory and discuss this effectively. Many candidates studied soap operas, crime and hospital dramas; the best of these exploring some form of debate e.g. a British v US institutional context or differing representations of a particular social group. Some of the very best responses had researched the historical development of the Police drama, addressing representations of the police over time and linking these to social issues and attitudes to law and order in society. It is encouraging to see that many candidates now seem to access older texts through clips on YouTube. A word of warning needs to be given to candidates who are relying too heavily on work undertaken at AS where: some candidates opted for sitcoms and responses read like responses to 2731. This is definitely not to be advised.

Topic 8 Women & Film

This is a popular topic this session and there was a range of focuses as in the past – some studies of directors and actors and many representational studies. Some candidates considered the effects of thin/ attractive actresses on audiences with little focus on film. There were a few weak responses on romantic comedies. These mainly failed due to an over generalisation and potted history approach. [See also general comments above.]

Topic 9 World Cinema

More candidates attempting this topic than in previous sessions – with varying degrees of success. Question focus tended to be on Japanese cinema: Manga, Anime, Horror with some strong responses on French New Wave. It is still important to ensure a clear hypothesis/ area for investigation and debate. Some candidates researched interesting options such as the strongly emerging Nollywood [Nigerian cinema] or Chinese cinema but unfortunately did not move beyond basic description of some films. There were many effective studies of Bollywood and Asian cinema although these are rarely linked to national identity or auteur theories and primarily focus on representational issues. 'Urban Realism' of texts such as *City of God* is increasingly being researched. There were many responses offering comparative analysis to western cinema and Centres should be advised to guide candidates carefully when choosing a suitable focus, because candidates often lose focus on the topic and refer almost exclusively to the western films to which they compare their chosen texts. This has been a common weakness in these responses. Examples such as the 'comparison of Studio Ghibli to Disney films' or 'how martial arts films have influenced western film' often discuss Disney, Tarantino or *The Matrix* at the expense of their chosen focus. There is a lot of scope within this topic to discuss the wider context but candidates must not lose sight of the main issues.

Advice to Teachers

The report as a whole is essential reading. However key elements are bullet pointed below:

The cover sheets must be signed by both the candidate and the supervising teacher.

Should a candidate have no notes a letter of explanation from the centre must be forwarded with the cover sheet and script to the examiner?

Do not leave students to their own devices when developing their original ideas.

Give substantial assistance to students in choosing specific areas of study and formulating a problematic or hypothesis.

Where possible avoid students addressing identical specific areas of study and choosing exactly the same texts as case studies.

Teach the methodologies of research the basics of research,

Support students to ensure that they present a balance between academic theory, serious and popular criticism, textual analysis, institutional and contextual analysis and audience studies.

Make clear the difficulties with over-reliance on Wikipedia with no reflection on its reliability.

Make sure that candidates choose people for their questionnaires and/or interviews/focus groups on the basis of their appropriateness and not simply from their own media studies class.

Report on the Units taken in June 2008

At the outset encourage students to establish that “this is what I want to find out” rather than “this is what I think” and then insist on proving it regardless of appropriate research.

2735 Media Issues and Debates

General

This is the second summer session for the new format of this unit. Candidates are required to answer two questions in two hours. Examiners feel that this format is working well, and that most candidates are making full use of the time and are exploring questions in some depth. There was a sprinkling of rubric errors, mainly from candidates who offered more than the two answers required of them.

With some exceptions, examiners were generally pleased with candidates' performances in this year's examination. Questions seemed to stimulate candidates, and there was ample choice. Evidence of good teaching and learning across centres was plentiful.

The main criticism of candidates' responses in this examination this year, as ever, centred on those who fail to address the specific question, and offer a generalized answer, offloading their knowledge about a particular topic without due regard to the task in hand.

One examiner reflected the view of many in the following observations: *"There is a gap between theoretical knowledge and demonstrable understanding because of a refusal to fully apply the knowledge to specific case studies and media texts. What students generally aren't able to do is deal with the specific requirements of the question within the knowledge frameworks which they have clearly acquired. This strikes me as a skills gap on the part of students - the ability to solve problems under pressure is a fundamental skill applicable in a wide range of situations, but I don't feel that students realise that this is essentially what an exam is - a problem solving exercise. Nor have the majority of students been adequately skilled-up with regard to dealing with the question presented rather than one they wish was there. Very clearly in a large number of cases students are essentially providing answers to this year's questions but are designed to more adequately fit on to papers sat in previous sessions. Teachers and students need to strike a balance between being adequately prepared for the exam through exam practice and being adequately prepared for the exam by being able to apply knowledge to problems presented. More willingness to engage directly with the questions set should enable more students to achieve higher grades in this unit."*

Individual Questions

Section A Broadcasting

Music programmes on television

Niche audiences and television's creative potential were the topics for questions in music programmes. This has been a slow-burning area of study, though the evidence this year suggests its increasing popularity. Some examiners feel that the question is done badly by many candidates, and often elicits a series of historical/chronological commentaries that bear close resemblance to material found on certain websites. 'Songs of Praise' this year was a surprisingly popular choice of case study – one can only wonder at the groans and looks of disbelief in classrooms around the country as teachers outline the delights in store for a particular series of lessons.

The X Factor, Britain's got Talent, and a collection of 'karaoke'-style prime-time wannabe shows were used as evidence- in-chief for the case that music television can appeal to mass audiences. Genre channels targeting micro audiences were the usual counterpoint. With regard to the second question, one examiner commented: *"The best answers acknowledged the*

creativity and production values behind 'slickly edited pop videos' in addition to audience gratification and the power of marketing. Videos by Kylie, Jamiroquai and ColdPlay were used to illustrate this point. Many students approached this question by giving a history of music programming since the 60's, illustrating how shows have been creative in response to changing taste and music consumption patterns."

Broadcast News and Current Affairs

This was the most popular area in the Broadcasting Section. Candidates were asked to consider the effect of audience retention on news reliability, or the problems presented by scheduling issues. Most candidates dealt at least competently with these questions. An understanding of news values is a reasonable starting point in this topic, though far too many students over-emphasise the importance of Galtung and Ruge, implying that those two researchers determine the news agenda on a daily basis. Galtung and Ruge merely analysed traits in news selection. Their work does not act as a template for the modern newsroom – far from it. Their main work was done over 40 years ago, in an analysis of foreign news for a Peace Studies research paper. Candidates who claim that news editors check the Galtung and Ruge list to see how many news values an event ticks before including it in the latest bulletin are way off the mark. It is high time for many centres to revisit their schemes of work in this topic. *'What is news? Galtung and Ruge revisited'*, by Harcup and O Neil might be a useful starting point. The irony of the situation is that this research is most often mentioned because it is easy to understand. G and R labeled it as 'unambiguity' in one of their news values.

Too many candidates ignored the 'Broadcasting' heading of this section, and used newspaper case studies.

On the positive side, one examiner noted some excellent responses by candidates whose case studies included a comparison of the populist 'Ann (Widdecombe) versus the hoodies – a Tonight with Trevor McDonald Special' alongside the more detached and objective 'Dispatches' analysis of the ASBO label.

Contemporary British Broadcasting

This is not a popular section. Most candidates who attempted one of the questions in this area felt more comfortable discussing modern technology than discussing regulations. One examiner noted that the 1990 Act is often the only Act referred to by candidates – there are others to be considered.

As with the Broadcast News and Current Affairs section, a surprisingly large number of candidates answered this area by referring to print products. Some gave answers with material that would have been much more relevant to Questions 17 and 18 (Regulation and the British Press).

Section B Film

Contemporary British Cinema

Candidates were asked to consider success in the British Film Industry, or to consider whether young audiences are attracted by the style and content of British films. Shane Meadows ought to be delighted with Media Studies A-level. The limited box-office appeal of his films is in no way reflected in these answers. 'This is England' was a runaway success in terms of frequency of mentions, and appreciation. Meadows' other films also featured highly, as did 'Bullet Boy', 'Kidulthood', the films of Ken Loach and the usual romantic comedies such as 'Notting Hill'.

Report on the Units taken in June 2008

With regard to the first question, one examiner commented: *“The best candidates considered different types of success, not just monetary, and how financial success and critical success did not necessarily go hand-in-hand in British Cinema. Candidates had been taught well about the finances behind British Cinema.”*

Another examiner highlighted the view presented by one candidate that ‘The Full Monty’ offered an idealised view of the UK as it didn’t have any racism.

The Concept of Genre in Film

This was the most popular area in this section. Candidates were asked to consider the uniqueness of films (‘unique’ seemed a problematic term for some candidates), or the blending of generic conventions in film-making.

An examiner observed: *“A popular case study was the film ‘Soldier Blue,’ which was seen as a reflection of the feminist movement of the early seventies (with its strong female protagonist) and as a reaction to the revelations about the My Lai Massacre. Analysing films in their political and sociological context was a popular and successful approach. Once again, gangster, horror, westerns and science fiction were the most used generic case studies – although the sub-genre of ‘zombie’ films was a popular choice this year. Romero’s remake of the 1978 film ‘Dawn of the Dead’ was compared to the original with students pointing out the instances of generic hybridity in the new film with its mix of American noir conventions, rock fusion soundtrack; and pack of high-speed zombies, which one student likened to a Big Brother crowd baying for the latest evictee’s blood.”*

Another examiner said: *“In both cases, there was an emphasis on films which were clearly from the teacher’s repertoire, in many cases well outside the student’s frame of reference. It was disappointing to see an over-reliance on a few ‘classics’ like Psycho and Stagecoach and a lack of engagement with contemporary cinema, particularly on the hybrid question.”*

Censorship and Film

Candidates were faced with questions that asked them to consider the effectiveness of the classification and censorship system, or the effects of sex and violence in films on society. Although a number of examiners commented on the exclusively non-contemporary case studies used by some centres, there were some very good answers in this section.

An examiner noted: *“Those who know how the BBFC works nowadays to certify and advise rather than censor and ban did best. They discussed the BBFC’s concept of “harm”, the various laws which the BBFC have to take note of, and contemporary certifications. Many used a historical approach, which worked well when a contrast was built up, but too many think nothing has changed since the 1970s (from which their “current” examples often derive)..... The weakest candidates had heard only of the hypodermic syringe theory which they accepted unquestioningly. Others who had heard of Uses And Gratifications just threw it in as a catch-all with no understanding; the name to drop.”*

Section C Print

The Magazine Industry

This was a popular area of study. Candidates were asked to consider the value of magazines to our culture, or to consider the factors that contributed to a magazine’s success. There were some good, well informed and well argued answers. However, too many candidates rely solely on textual analysis for this section. At worst, they offer detailed analysis of a couple of front

covers. At very worst, front covers of magazines that have ceased to exist. The topic asks students to consider the magazine 'industry' – knowledge of institutions is an essential component of this area. Pressures of competition, falling sales, the growth of the internet, and the various mechanisms that media companies have for adapting to or making use of these changes and developments ought to be considered by candidates aiming for high grades. One examiner noted: *“Most candidates seem to have completely unrealistic ideas as to the size of circulation figures. Some centres are using worksheets and prepared answers which are way past their sell-by dates: their candidates claimed to have analysed recent editions of Smash Hits and Just Seventeen.”*

Another commented: *“Although there were very few weak answers, there was a distinct lack of institutional and ideological knowledge demonstrated.”*

Generally, examiners commented that the first of the two questions was rarely chosen, and misunderstood by some who attempted it. Others found it very difficult to disagree with, or suggest an alternative to the view proposed in the quotation that magazines are a cheap and worthless feature of our disposable culture. The second question was far more popular, and generated some well informed answers.

Local Newspapers

Relatively few centres tackle this area. Candidates were challenged by questions that asked how a local newspaper could best serve its community, and how gloomy the outlook for the local newspaper industry is. A few centres encourage their students to investigate their local newspaper, though weaker candidates confine themselves to superficial textual analysis of one or two editions, coupled with some fairly generalized and unsubstantiated observations about local communities. Good answers in this area ought to consider issues such as the frequency of production and its effect on news content, the general state of the local newspaper industry nationally and its appeal, and the strategies being used to embrace new technologies, compete with changing markets and create new audiences/readerships. An edition of a local newspaper is a good starting point, but **only** a starting point in this area.

Freedom, Regulation and Control in the British Press.

Candidates were asked to consider to what extent the freedom of the British press should be protected, or to consider the concept of self-regulation. The convoluted quotation from the (retiring) Chair of the PCC that prefaced the second question caused most candidates to choose the first. Many examiners commented that responses were generally pleasing. Candidates generally understood the difference between statutory constraints and self imposed ones, and had plenty of current and recent case studies to illustrate their views. More than a few candidates suggested that the government should put their collective foot down and curb the excesses of the snooping journalists by introducing harsh laws to protect individual privacy. A few, though not many, considered the contrasting philosophies put forward by Articles 8 and 10 of the ECHR. Those two articles are an ideal way to introduce this topic.

Case studies abound, and most centres are engaging their students with current and relevant issues in this area – much more so than in the film and magazine sections. Of all of the questions offered by this examination paper, this is the area where the case studies tend to be the most 'current'.

General Advice to teachers:

- This is a synoptic paper that covers all media concepts covered during the AS/A2 course. Textual analysis should be undertaken alongside institutional and audience research.

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- Students should be encouraged to explore their case studies in some depth. A few case studies done well is usually a better recipe than many case studies glanced at superficially.
- Encourage students to explore the concepts via their case studies; be aware that some students, during the examination, will offer a confused and unconvincing essay if they rely on half-understood theory. Conceptual understanding serves students well. Theory for the sake of it is unnecessary.
- Check that schemes of work are not out of date. The media changes fast. Every examination session, examiners report that some centres are giving their students outdated, often erroneous information.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE (Subject) (Aggregation Code(s))
June 2008 Examination Series

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Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
2730	Raw	120	99	89	79	70	61	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2731	Raw	90	68	61	55	49	43	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2732	Raw	90	64	57	50	43	36	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2733	Raw	120	99	89	79	69	60	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2734	Raw	90	69	62	55	48	41	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2735	Raw	90	70	63	56	49	43	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0

Specification Aggregation Results

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

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

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

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3860	13.5	39.4	67.9	87.4	96.5	100.0	16072
7860	12.5	43.5	77.3	94.9	99.6	100.0	12177

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:
http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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