GCE

Media Studies

Advanced GCE **A2 H540**

Advanced Subsidiary GCE **AS H140**

Examiners' Reports

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Advanced Subsidiary GCE Media Studies (H140)

EXAMINERS' REPORTS

H140/H540 Introduction

The January session comprised a mixture of first-time candidates for each of the four units along with a significant number of re-sitters.

For the Foundation Portfolio, close to half of the cohort was made up of re-sitters, many of whom did not appear to have substantially improved their work; the evidence suggests that they need to be motivated quite strongly to make a dramatic difference to their previous mark and that the best course of action for many candidates would be to start again from scratch with an entirely new project. There was some excellent work, but there were a number of issues which are raised in the report for this unit which need attention for future sessions.

For the Audiences and Institutions examination, the proportion of re-sit candidates was much lower, with those who did re-sit having presumably been the beneficiaries of revision advice and preparation. Overall performance was in line with previous sessions on this unit.

The Advanced Portfolio comprised almost entirely first-time candidates and there was some outstanding work at the top end, with the overall standard being maintained.

For the Critical Perspectives exam, around one third of the candidates were re-sitting; many did not appear to have had any support in the run-up to the exam, which is perhaps not surprising for students who would have left school last summer. Of the first-time entries, the general standard was better, with centres having a greater understanding of the demands of questions 1a and 1b in particular. However, it is still very hard to achieve highly sitting this paper, which is designed as a terminal exam, before the course is complete; usually candidate performance drops significantly on one part of the paper because they will not have had time to have covered everything by January. Centres are advised that June is the ideal time to enter.

Overall, the signs are that centres have taken on board advice from INSET and from the online resources and that the new specification is becoming established with a greater level of understanding of its demands- both technical and theoretical.

G321 Foundation Portfolio

Introduction

There were 1,285 candidates from around 140 centres entered for this series. A significant proportion of these were re-sitters from the summer. The magazine task and the film opening option accounted for almost all candidates, with only a handful of centres undertaking the radio or web tasks. Blogging was the most frequently used format for presenting research, planning and evaluation, with a very small number of centres still using the option to present research and planning on paper.

Administration

In many cases, samples were despatched promptly and administered in such a way that moderators were able to complete their work efficiently. However, there were unacceptable delays in the despatch of work from a significant number of centres and issues around the organisation of candidate submissions which caused unnecessary extra work for moderators. This included parts of candidate work being missed out of packages, work not labelled with candidate names and numbers and blog URLs which were supplied as hard copy and had to be typed in manually and were often wrongly spelt. In some cases VLEs were used which were wholly inappropriate for this kind of project, with dozens of files to be opened individually, some in inaccessible formats such as .exe, .pub or .psd.

Centres are reminded that a blog hub is essential for moderation (and also for the teacher managing the unit) and that the only acceptable file formats are those which are universal across platforms such as jpeg and pdf. As a rule of thumb, centres are advised to check access to candidates' work themselves before they submit it for moderation; if they struggle to access it, so too, will the moderator! In general, AS re-submissions would be better on separate blogs from A2 work and all blogs, PowerPoints and DVDs need to be clearly signposted so that it is clear which bits of the evidence constitute research and planning, which evaluation and which construction, as frequently this was not at all self-evident. Those centres sending paper-based research and planning are reminded of the need for selectivity as mentioned in previous reports as there was still a lot of material such as multiple questionnaires, heavy folders and copies of research material (especially whole magazines) which was completely superfluous to the moderation task, for example, candidates only need to supply a summary of the results of their questionnaires and a blank copy of the questionnaire used. Every questionnaire that has been answered doesn't need to be sent in.

Standards of marking

Some moderators reported that re-sit centres had acted upon advice from the summer reports when submitting amended and improved projects. However, there were a number of examples of work where it appeared there had been no changes since the previous entry. What was especially alarming in these cases was that centres were often marking the unchanged work much more highly than the moderated marks the candidates had received in the summer.

However, apart from the minority of cases highlighted above, in general, centres are becoming more accurate in their assessment of work and getting closer to agreed standards, but there were still a significant number of centres where the marking was well outside of the national standard, which has been demonstrated at INSET events and through exemplar materials available on both the OCR website and the GetAhead blog (http://getaheadocrmedia.blogspot.com/). Centres need to send representatives to INSET (especially those that have yet to attend an INSET) and to use the online resources to help establish consistent standards. There is still a reluctance to place work in level 2 (basic) where

the candidates' grasp of conventions and mobilisation of skills is clearly relatively weak, which results in the moderation process reducing centre marks overall.

Quality of comments on coversheets varied considerably; at best they made use of a combination of specification criteria exemplified by reference to the work submitted and at worst they were almost non-existent. A tendency to simply list the specification criteria for a particular level needs to be resisted, as this often tells the moderator little about where these criteria are evident in the work. Centres also need to ensure their comments on the cover sheets align with the marks they have given a candidate, for example, if describing work as 'proficient' on the cover sheet, the work shouldn't be given a mark in the Level 4 mark band, reserved for 'excellence'.

Centres are also reminded that for all three elements of the marking, differentiated assessor comments are needed when candidates are working in a group, with each candidate being assessed on their own individual contribution to the group outcome.

Research and Planning

This element needs to be seen as an account of the journey that the candidate has undertaken in the process of producing the final product. In order to justify marks, there needs to be evidence of all stages the candidate has gone through. This need not be a 'neat' account; indeed the best work often shows very clearly the stops and starts of a project and the changes in direction that the work has taken. This is best exemplified by regular ongoing updating, from the very outset of the project through to its conclusion and even beyond with feedback from audiences. Clearly, the blog format is well suited to this approach and moderators were pleased to see blogs with upwards of 50 posts- some with over 100- which articulated in a dynamic fashion the progress and process. It is possible to use PowerPoint successfully for this task, though the programme is perhaps less suited to being a formative tool.

Where research and planning is presented by the whole group, there needs to be clear signposting regarding who has done what, which might be through tagging posts or slides or done by the teacher on the coversheets.

The quality of research and planning evidence has improved, but most centres would benefit from showing a clearer relationship between initial research into "real" texts and the candidates' constructions. There is a disparity between *planning* materials submitted for video, which generally include a range of materials such as storyboards, recce reports, scripts, etc, and print where only the best centres present a full range of flats, photographs, before and after editing, colour charts etc. Research material does need to involve some degree of ongoing reflection if it is to be credited at level 4; much of the material seen was still rather vague and often generic (eg the same magazine covers analysed by all members of the class). Candidates need to concentrate on researching real media products that are actually relevant and reflect what they are trying to produce. In magazines, there would usually be some focus on front covers, but rarely was the double page spread even considered prior to construction. Likewise in film there was rarely evidence at all of title analysis in research or planning of their placement. There was still far too much emphasis on the questionnaire as the prime method of audience research; this rarely related to the final product and could be replaced by more focussed thinking about who target audiences actually are (eg looking into why similar films have certain target audiences) rather than imagining what classmates might buy.

Much of the research and planning and reflection thereon can be directly fed into the evaluation tasks; for example, time spent taking the preliminary task seriously pays dividends when it comes to question 7 of the evaluation. Generally candidates tend to cope with the evaluation question about conventions and have researched into similar products, but research into a potential target audience tends to be very poor as is understanding of institutions.

Construction

Once again this series, this was the area where centres tended to be too generous in their marking. Expectations are high for production work for which candidates have had several months to practice and to master technology and conventions, so level 4 should not be seen as accessible for anything less than excellent work. The best candidates took what they had learned from their research and applied it to their construction; some work eventually placed in the lower levels looked as though the candidates had never watched a film or read a music magazine before. As has been emphasised at INSET, coursework needs managing and the learning needs scaffolding; candidates need the opportunity to make mistakes and to reflect on this work as part of the process so that their final work reflects the best outcome possible.

Magazines

The best work made excellent use of appropriate software such as InDesign, showing evidence of close study of appropriate real examples of covers, contents pages and double page spreads and showed real proficiency with layout, photography and written style.

Images were best when thought had been given to pose, expression, props, lighting, costume and setting and when subsequent use of image software enhanced the photos appropriately. Too often, however, candidates relied on poor quality images resulting from snapshots, as opposed to portraits. It is a difference worth considering for high level marks. Magazines depend on images for communication; snapshots often communicate just that - a snappy, rushed and amateurish approach. There is also a tendency to rely upon too few models and seeing four original images as being *all* that is required, rather than the absolute minimum. Candidates need to be steered towards the conventions of real magazines, where they will see that more than one artist would appear on the contents page for example.

Layout was a particular issue with many double page spreads, often because of the use of inappropriate software such as Photoshop, which treats text as images, not offering the potential for columns, which are essential for magazine work. Integrating text and images is a particular problem, as is sizing of fonts, leading and kerning, which cannot be solved without the proper tools. Frequently basic conventions were missing, such as a barcode, price, even a masthead, and there was a lack of a clear sense of branding between the three elements. Contents pages should give the impression of a whole magazine rather than of a pamphlet with only a few pages. In some cases, it was hard to reconcile the material in terms of genre, with the impression being of a 'lifestyle' magazine rather than a music magazine.

Film Openings

Though in some cases, the film openings were well done, many suffered from the same issues identified in previous series. Titles in general are improving, but some work still lacked awareness of the institutional conventions of titling, with just cursory attention to titles. Given this is half of the task (*the titles and opening of a new fiction film*), it is crucial that adequate attention is paid to this area. Soundtracks likewise still tend to be limited to just a music track, with no attention to diegetic sound. Camerawork was often far too limited, particularly lacking in close ups and with insufficient attention paid to framing. Lighting was often a problem, with inadequate sources producing grainy footage.

There were still too many opening sequences which tended to resemble trailers and once again the usual stalk n'slash incidents in the woods- with white masked strangers popping out from behind sofas and trees. Candidates should be advised against the use of such storylines as generally they reinforce the sense of amateurism rather than creating a believable professional product. Such scenarios are rarely done well and appear more like early experiments rather than finished pieces. Candidates need to work on narrative and building an enigma; many of them still wanted to condense and conclude the story in the opening two minutes, which of course misses

the whole purpose of film openings. Centres who worked creatively and imaginatively on the use of titling and the use of sound were much more effective than those who focused on trying to create a potted story.

Radio

Only two centres attempted this task. There was a real sense of actual ***local*** news, and appropriate research and planning into real local news and topical issues had been carried out. However, the candidates appeared unfamiliar with the software they used and really struggled; broadcasts tended to rely on voiceover with only the minimal uses of effects and music. Outside broadcasts and interviews were clearly just scripted "flat" responses that just felt like a continuation of the presenter in the studio; this made the product feel very unreal; candidates need advice and practice at using effects appropriately. Several had considerable "dead air" and generally did not use the appropriate elements in order to make the products believable or professional in any way.

Website

The web brief was problematic as the few candidates who attempted this task had used web-based templates which were limited in their functionality, basing their sites around themes which were very uninspiring. The use of templates in these cases meant that the websites didn't end up resembling their real world counterparts.

Evaluation

Centres are growing in confidence regarding the expectations for this component, with some imaginative work making good use of the potential of a range of media. The best work clearly addresses the seven set questions and offers a range of tasks to challenge the candidates. The evaluation should be seen as quite a big component, as it is worth 20 marks; where a significant chunk of time is devoted to the tasks and preparation throughout the project for the areas to be addressed has taken place, this tends to yield dividends. Where the evaluation appears to have been offered as a 'bolt-on' component, responses were often very rushed and lacked any kind of depth or skill.

In general, there is still a tendency to be over-generous in the marking of this component. The specification states clearly that it should not be seen as an essay and that responses should make creative use of the media in which they are produced. Blogs again seemed to work most successfully, though some video and PowerPoint work did make use of interactive elements. In some cases, candidates simply read an essay to camera, which was pointless and in other cases the seven questions appeared to have been disregarded in favour of some general points about the project.

A minority of centres produced extremely effective evaluations, which often incorporated several methods, such as recorded interviews, director commentaries and blogs; their strengths lay in the ability to incorporate video, audio, images and text, often linking with other media such as YouTube.

When group video evaluations are used candidates need to introduce themselves clearly at the start of the video. The teacher will know who each candidate is when they are marking the work but unless the candidates introduce themselves at the start the moderator will not know who is who, which makes judging centre marks on individual contributions more difficult.

For future practice

- meet all deadlines and support candidates with full comments on the cover sheets.

- do not let candidates undertake tasks for which the centre is not equipped

- ensure all work is in universally accessible formats: pdf, jpeg.

- check that everything works, is accessible and is where it should be before sending to the moderator,

- if using blogs, set up a hub. There is a quick guide to this linked to the Get ahead blog.

- remember this unit is 50% of the AS level and that the evidence should reflect this; if candidates did one blog post a day on a project lasting three months, that would be 90 posts; it is very rare to see anything like this even for group projects.

- ensure that work is marked in the correct levels; not every centre will necessarily have *any* candidate achieving level 4.

- be selective in the research evidence- bulky materials like questionnaires and magazines used for research are unnecessary – summaries of this kind of material are more useful.

Advice

- ensure that relevant real media examples are studied carefully as part of the research process.

- candidates should be advised to show how their research feeds into their production

- ensure that full evidence of the planning process is articulated by candidates

- support the work throughout the project- do not give candidates long periods of unsupervised time without feedback on progress

- give enough time for evaluation tasks to be completed properly and for candidates to have the opportunity to be creative with these

Please see the blog at http://getaheadocrmedia.blogspot.com/ for links to examples of candidates' work and advice on frequently asked questions. Also check the support materials and 'frequently asked questions' on the main OCR website at http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/gce/amlw/media_studies/documents/index.html.

G322 Key Media Concepts (TV Drama) and G323 Key Media Concepts (Radio Drama)

There were 5,489 candidates for G322, with 2 candidates for G323. There were no reported problems with either the TV drama extracts **Hustle** or the Radio Drama, **Dog Dazed Afternoon**. These extracts enabled differentiation through the examination of the key concept of the representation of gender and class and status respectively. Given the small number of entries for Radio drama this report focuses on the unit G322. In this report, there is reference to and repeated advice from the previous Principal Examiner reports. Overall there was evidence that the questions differentiated well in terms of responses, with some candidates producing excellent work.

For question one, the majority of candidates addressed the technical features of camera shot, angle and composition and mise en scène well, with some fluency at times. There was also plenty of evidence of candidates being able to reach the higher end of the marks available. Overall there was evidence of improved analysis of sound and editing, with candidates engaging with how meaning is constructed through the microanalysis of the technical features and able to link this to the representation of gender. Candidates responded with a variety of interpretations, most valid and with varying degrees of sophistication and/ or exemplification.

Question two enabled suitable differentiation of candidate responses and some excellent responses were seen in relation to the media areas studied, in particular for film, music and videogames. However, sometimes film case studies were dominated by institutional biographies and a failure to really get to grips with the set question. For example, there was an overreliance on Working Title films and historical texts, such as Four Weddings and a Funeral and Notting Hill. Centres are reminded that the specification states that candidates need to study contemporary examples, for examination purposes that means from the last five years.

Candidates who had been well prepared with specific case study material and well rehearsed in the key conceptual areas of Institution and Audiences could offer sustained, excellent arguments in relation to the question set. On the other hand, there was evidence of some candidates who struggled to understand *how* to apply their case studies, for example, candidate responses at times often lacked any institutional discussion of ownership in terms of production and/or exchange. Many candidates had underdeveloped arguments on the exchange of media products, suggesting that centres need to ensure that all concepts are fully covered in preparation for the exam.

There was some evidence of improvement in the time management of the exam paper. Centres do need to ensure that candidates spend an appropriate amount of time on each question, given the equal weighting of marks.

Finally, as indicated by the mark scheme for this exam paper, the use of media vocabulary is a very important part of the exam at AS level. The mark scheme indicates that 10 marks are available for the use of terminology for each question. Good practice suggests that candidates should be keeping a vocabulary list of technical language for both questions. During this series it was noted by the exam team that the use of media vocabulary had been better than previous series.

Comments on candidate responses to Question 1 – Television drama

The extract provided candidates with the opportunity to *negotiate* their own reading, which they could justify through analysis of the four technical codes. There were a number of different

interpretations provided by candidates; most of these were entirely valid. There was a good range of technical examples for candidates to analyse.

As noted in previous series, it is important that candidates move from description of key technical areas to analysis of *how* representations are constructed. This enables candidates to achieve higher marks for their responses. Candidate responses which did not link the technical analysis to representation often lacked focus with a common misconception being to discuss class, rather than gender.

Candidates tend to structure their responses in one of two ways for question one. Some began by addressing the concept of representation in the extract and a discussion of the representational differences between the male sales assistant/manager and the poorer, older female character and then introduce the affluent, younger and elegant female character, comparing this further with the representation of gender in the gentlemen's club. Candidates would then analyse these examples in a chronological approach to the extract, whilst integrating different technical aspects, for example, combining the analysis of camera composition with sound.

On the other hand, and a slightly more popular approach, would see the candidates address the technical areas one by one.   Stronger candidates could provide an integrated analysis of the extract through analysis of key examples identified. These candidates explored *how* the technical features could be applied using a combination of the technical features. Weaker candidates could list many technical aspects, with varying degrees of accuracy, but struggle to say anything meaningful about the representation of gender.

Candidates should be advised to keep introductions brief and to avoid theoretical introductions and/ or historical contexts to television drama; analysis of the extract itself should begin straight away. On occasion in this series, candidates offered quite general textual analysis and these responses often lacked a focused discussion of gender and thus penalised themselves from gaining a level three or four mark for EAA.

The mark scheme enables credit to be awarded to candidates in three different categories: Explanation, Analysis and Argument (20 Marks); Use of Examples (20 Marks); and Use of Terminology (10 Marks). Under use of examples, candidates cannot reach level 4 (16-20) when only three technical areas are discussed. This mark scheme is able to credit answers which have different strengths, and in this series, the marking of candidate papers revealed this flexibility in its application. It is advisable that centres make the mark scheme available to candidates for the summer series so that they are aware of how the work is assessed. This could also be used for the marking of timed assignments in the classroom and for the marking of mock exam papers.

Comments on the 'micro' aspects of Question one on Television Drama

The following comments are selected examples points and use examples to assist centres with the delivery of the topic and to help advise on candidate answers, it is by no means an exhaustive list.

Representation

Most candidates were able to discuss differences in the status of gender within the sequence, though only a very small number of candidates were able to develop their answer further by showing how the audience were positioned in relation to these representations.

More confident candidates were able to analyse the ways in which the extract attempted to position the audience in relation to the sales manager and the female clientele, the second male in the shop and the cross cutting to the gentlemen's club and as a result were able to explore the

nuances of gender representation. These stronger responses showed a good grasp of the changing ambivalent nature of the representation of women and men, for example, either commenting on how the female protagonist played up to gender stereotypes or the centrality of this performance to the ongoing hustle. In relation to masculinity, candidates identified the stereotypical inability of men to multitask. Most candidates made reference to the sales manager's character (David Walliams) as being feminised and confident candidates asserted that the second male character in the shop was able to dominate Walliams' character as he was constructed as more stereotypically masculine – chewing gum, open shirt without tie, use of male colloquialisms – for example reference to 'bird' as stereotyped slang. However, many candidates formulated a much simpler version of gender representation with arguments such as 'women like shopping', the men in the club represent gender because 'men like drinking whiskey and smoking'. Weaker candidates often relied on the use of binary oppositions in discussion of gender representation, rather than take this opportunity to explore a range of representations offered by the extract.

The majority of candidates attempted to formulate an argument about the representation of gender in the extract with the vast majority moving beyond the minimal descriptor for EAA. Candidates that scored less well tended to make points about the representation of gender in an isolated fashion rather than linking their points as part of a coherent analysis or argument.

Camera Shot, Angle and Composition

Overall, this technical feature was well addressed by the candidates. Most candidates used appropriate media vocabulary, commenting on shot composition, analysing the high and low angled shots in the extract and commenting on the 'hand held' camera techniques during the search for the ring. The tilt up of the camera on the woman's dress was commonly misidentified as a pan but generally a wide range of terminology was accurately used. More able candidates were able to link the composition and the framing to the representation of gender by discussing the apparent significance of the hustler in the background of the frame, when the sales manager was speaking to the less affluent female character introduced at the beginning of the extract. Many candidates were able to comment on the direct mode of address by both male and female characters, commenting upon its unconventionality and function in linking the male and female hustlers. Candidates also commented on how the shots of the direct address to the audience conveyed control of the situation and therefore represented a form of dominance in character relations.

Weaker candidates were able to describe key shots used in exemplification, but would often lack explicit links to how these shots assisted in the construction of the representation of gender. These candidates would also tend to focus on just identifying the narrative flow of the extract through the naming of the shots.

Mise en scène

The majority of candidates discussed this area with confidence. The extract itself was rich in mise en scène that contributed to representation. The contrast of the affluent clothing boutique, with the gentlemen's club was the setting most compared, at times in a sophisticated way. Candidates made most use of the accent, performance of characters and it was pleasing to see many candidates making reference to lighting with more able candidates confident in using terms such as high key, artificial and low key. Most candidates were able to discuss how the characters' appearances linked to gender characteristics.

More able candidates could contrast the gender representation of different characters through the mise en scène and how power and status is represented. Candidates are also advised to look for the range of representations within the extract with more able candidates commenting on each character's apparent gender and how that held some status within the scene, for example of the way in which the female hustler held equal if not more power than males in the

scam. The representation of the cockney male was contrasted to the more proper sales manager, who candidates often pointed out, was well spoken, tailored and legitimate.

Weaker candidates are still wedded to simplistic colour analysis and ignore all contradictory evidence to claim that characters dressed in white must be 'pure and innocent' while characters dressed in red are either 'passionate' or 'in danger', for example. This often appeared in discussion of the representation of the female hustler. This 'binary' approach needs refining by centres in relation to debating how meaning is constructed in an extract and it is suggested that comparing and contrasting different elements of representation deserves more attention in the classroom.

Sound

The analysis of sound was better than in previous series; for example, candidates attempted to link music with the representation of the characters, looking at how it was used to underscore characters' actions. The use of terminology was generally better than previously in this area.; centres seem to be heeding the advice that an analysis of the dialogue is not sufficient.

Most students were able to differentiate between diegetic and non-diegetic sound and to demonstrate that the soundtrack was closely linked to our understanding of the protagonist, though few went further by discussing how the sound mix and sound effects were used. Most candidates were also able to use terminology confidently and could describe the tempo and use of music, for example, the manic use of jazz music with the female shopper. Often weaker candidates showed confusion with technical terminology, referring to ambient sound which was not heard in the part of the sequence they referred to, or simply getting diegetic and non-diegetic sound the wrong way round.

Editing

As previous series, this technical area proved to be the most problematic for candidates and the one technical area of analysis that was often omitted in responses. Those that did cover it were able to make meaningful links to representations by showing how the editing created particular viewpoints with which we are encouraged to identify or how screen time indicated the shifting relationship between characters in the sequence, for example through the discussion of rule of thirds. Most candidates made reference to the pace of editing to reflect the frantic situation and actions of the characters in the extract, for example in describing the affluent female shopper and the confidence she exudes in the hustle. Many candidates could identify the use of transitions; shot reverse shot and cuts to aid continuity and the use of cross cutting between the two situations to enhance tension. Many candidates identified the editing transitions, though the use of the term 'jump cut' was not accurately applied and candidates often misidentified the wipe transition as a 'swipe'. Only a minority of candidates interpreted the function of the wipe as highlighting the juxtaposition between a female and male environment. The most able of candidates even interpreted the editing through the comedic style imbued within the extract, highlighting that candidates can be articulate and imaginative with the analysis of editing.

More able candidates demonstrated the ability to link the use of editing to the representation of characters, such as the use of long and short takes to represent power and the use of eye line matches to reinforce a sense of dominance.

However, many candidate responses seemed to be very limited in address of the issues of editing and all too frequently editing was absent from candidate responses – which again, does not enable candidates to reach a level four on the marking criteria for the use of examples. Weaker candidates often omitted any discussion of editing or offered quite simplistic accounts of how editing was used, for example in the use of the shot reverse shot sequence between characters. Many candidates identified the types of transition without discussing how these were

connected with representations, in particular the use of wipe transitions or freeze frames. There was little sense of the way in which the editing created a perspective from which the sequence made sense and most candidates confined themselves to discussing the pace of cutting.

This series has shown that with the right preparation, candidates can engage with the nuances of editing under exam conditions, with evidence that candidates are able to discuss crosscutting, eye line match and ellipsis in an extract. As in the previous report, the advice offered to centres is to encourage as much practice on the concept of editing as possible and how this assists in the construction of representation. Centres should begin by identifying editing techniques and encourage candidates to apply these to a range of examples in class and importantly, test them on this.

General Comments on Question 2

The majority of candidates addressed the issue of production more than that of exchange. There was plenty of evidence of well-prepared answers. The best responses were able to show how the ownership of media companies determined the approaches that were taken to individual media texts and discussed advantages and disadvantages to all types of institutions. A few candidates misunderstood ownership to refer to audience ownership of media hardware or content which was clearly not appropriate. The fact that there were several centres where candidates attempted to answer the question without any kind of institutional knowledge, focussing exclusively on texts, suggests that there are still misconceptions as to the demands of this section of the specification.

The most popular media areas studied were film, music and videogames, the least were magazines, newspapers and radio. Below are selected comments and examples of candidate performances for the question two topic areas. Those candidates who fared less well would only produce a response which either focused on a single case study which struggled to address the question set in terms of media ownership, production and exchange or would often write 'all I know about' the media area that they studied.

As stated in the previous PE report, the advice that can be offered to centres is to refer to and use the questions posed in the specification on page 19. They should ensure coverage of key institutional concepts such as digital media, synergy, cross media, convergence, media technologies and audience consumption; this will aid candidates in their conceptual understanding of institutions and audiences. It is also necessary for candidates to address the question set, rather than offer a general address of institutional practices across the board and centres should teach at least two specific case studies for question two in their chosen media area to allow scope for all possible questions and a sense of the diversity of media case studies .

It is advised that centres ensure appropriate preparation for this section by covering audience as much as institutions. Whilst individual candidate research on their own chosen examples is encouraged, centres need to ensure that this research is supported within a framework which prepares candidates for the demands of the exam.

The following comments on each media area are a summary and not exhaustive of the range of issues that emerged in candidate responses.

Film Industry

This was by far the most popular media area addressed by candidates, with a significant number of candidates using Working Title & Universal as case studies. The use of these case studies had a varying degree of success; for example, some weaker answers used a case study of Working Title films from 1994 with almost no reference to contemporary issues of production, distribution or exhibition. Candidates seem to have far more knowledge of production than any other phase of film, but at times this led to naive answers, which ignored both the exchange of media texts the role of film audiences.

The most common approach was to compare the production processes of major studies with those of smaller UK companies. In particular, Universal and Warner Bros were common case studies, in comparison with Working Title, Film Four and Warp. Many candidates looked at the success of big US studios and their blockbusters, such as Avatar, The Dark Knight and Harry Potter, comparing them to hit formula 'rom-coms' or to independent productions like 'This is England'.

Candidates referred to Paramount and Universal, and the issues of horizontal integration and vertical integration, in terms of media ownership and on occasion market dominance and how this affected the types of media texts produced. Those that were equipped with a comparative study of an independent company were able to really engage with the question and consider an element of debate. 'Slumdog Millionaire' was a popular example of a small film reaching a global audience through differing factors rather than expensive marketing and synergy. It was noted that one centre had good success comparing Slumdog Millionaire and Avatar by extending their case studies and investigating the ownership, production and exchange of these films in detail whilst referring to other films and the effect of new technology.

Many candidates struggled with more complicated institutional issues surrounding film ownership and funding, leading to some misunderstandings and simplistic responses. In an examination candidates need the skill to adapt their case study knowledge and understanding to the demands of a specific question. Simply knowing the history of an institution and understanding its current position within a particular industry is not enough to secure a high mark. In this series some candidates ignored the question and simply regurgitated their case studies (too often around digital technologies and initiatives) without actually relating any of it to media ownership.

The logical step for this question (and one which worked well in answers) was to use a large institution and examples in conjunction with examples from an independent institution (or one which is not global). The approach of contrasting two institutions led to some very good responses. This is to be encouraged as it provides candidates with more options to formulate a response to the set question.

Music Industry

This was another area that was handled well by candidates where most were able to engage with the issues in the question. Sony and Universal were popular case studies of major labels that have dominance of the music market and the best answers were well supported with contemporary evidence. Again discussions of synergy, horizontal integration and vertical integration were popular and the cross platform nature of music promotion was well referred to. Independent labels and the rise in choice and diversity were also well explored with labels such as Ghost Box and Domino Records being popular choices. The role of audiences and web 2.0 in breaking the dominant hold of the majors was also explored by more able candidates; as was the rise in production software and distribution methods via MySpace and YouTube. These were important areas of discussion given the context of the set question. A case study of EMI worked well where candidates had a clear focus on ownership and were able to write more broadly on exchange in the music industry, for example, with the rise of peer-to peer file sharing.

Candidates then argued that that they were the hardest hit of the four major record labels as the company was not part of a larger conglomerate and lacked the benefits of diversified interests which in larger conglomerates can help to absorb any losses made by record labels by using their other arms as support, for example, through synergy and cross media interest. It was also noted that the issue of piracy emerged in plenty of candidate answers, discussing a new 360-degree business model with record companies identifying alternative revenue streams such as tours and merchandising.

Weaker candidate responses were unable to respond to the question set and merely recited pre prepared case studies. But on the whole, responses on the music industry were done well.

Newspaper Industry

There were few responses to the Newspaper Industry. Newspapers elicited a mixed bag of candidate responses with some of the better candidate answers comparing NewsCorp with the Guardian Media Group, including their respective online presences and policies. Some of the stronger candidates could comment upon how relatively few newspaper titles dominate British news consumption. Typically, students writing about newspapers looked at the strategies employed by News International products and were well informed about recent changes to online editions. These were frequently compared to The Guardian or The Independent. Weaker candidates who tackled the newspaper industry tried to draw comparison between the Guardian and the Sun without bringing ownership, production or exchange into their answers. There were many instances where candidates made errors such as citing the Mail, Express and the Independent as 'Murdoch' newspapers.

Candidates need to show more knowledge of the extent of interests of companies such as News Corporation, rather than just referring to 'The Sun'. At times candidates lacked a wider perspective on news production and the weakest of candidates would make assumptions about the all-powerful media moguls who own and control news, without any version of institution and or audience. There was some encouraging discussion by candidates on the exchange of news, particularly through the use of digital technology, such as the iPad and the use of online newspapers, but these were relatively rare.

Magazine Industry

Publishing companies such as IPC and Bauer were most popular in candidate responses, alongside the study of the media texts Zoo, Nuts, Grazia, Glamour, FHM and Monkey magazine.

There was an improvement this series in candidate responses to question two. In particular, centres seem to have heeded the advice that candidates need to address the set question and this was evidenced by a number of candidates who could discuss ownership and exchange, particularly in reference to e-versions of magazines. On the other hand, weaker candidates did not actually grasp the question and tried to compare two magazines such as Cosmopolitan and Tatler without placing their analysis within the demands of the question; these answers lacked a focus on ownership, production and exchange.   Bauer was a popular example of an institution and discussion of Grazia was a popular choice of text, the challenges of the industry were examined in some better responses where candidates considered the growth of celebrity gossip blogs and twitter etc as a challenge to gossip magazines. Better candidates were able to link magazine production, with development in digital technology and how audiences consumed these.

Online magazines and subscription models were also worth exploring but very few candidates discussed smaller companies such as online Monkey who encourage UGC and use blogging to engage audiences. There was still evidence of misapplied theory (often audience theory) to the set question, candidates at times were obsessive in trying to explore the impact that magazines

have in terms of uses and gratifications for audiences and in making reference to the theories of Mulvey and Berger, which were not really relevant to the question. Centres should avoid an abstract theoretical approach to teaching magazines as it tends to lead to irrelevance in candidate responses; candidates need to concentrate on the institutional and audience context in terms of production and consumption and do so by exploring companies and the types of text produced.

Radio Industry

There were a few responses to the area of radio during the January series. Of these, candidates' responses often did not address the set question. There was an evident lack of focus in these responses on the issue of ownership, production and exchange. The issue of exchange was better addressed by candidates than that of ownership, which tended to focus on a history of radio as a form of public service broadcasting, which was often misconceived. Candidates were often only prepared with one case study, such as Radio Five Live, Radio 1 or Radio 2. Centres are advised that in the teaching of radio as a media area, commercial examples should be covered alongside PSB. This will ensure a wider range of examples and issues can be discussed. Candidates were informative on the exchange of radio texts and the role of digital initiatives, such as the iPad, DAB radio and how twitter and facebook were used by radio as interactive technologies with which audiences could engage.

Video Games Industry

More able candidates could explore video games better this series, as most candidates appeared to have studied the area from an institutional perspective and recognised the benefits the impact of big corporations, franchises and discussion of exchange. There was evident discussion of video games companies, such as Rockstar and EA games, across platforms including Playstation, X box and Wii technologies

Frequently discussed examples included Medal of Honour, Grand Theft Auto: Vice City, Black Ops & Wii Sports, which all helped anchor the responses. Stronger candidate responses discussed the oligopoly of the games industry and the dominance of certain media texts in terms of licensing. These more able candidates could also discuss the Rage gaming engine and the need for companies to have vertical integration and the fact that companies albeit sharing platforms, use different software to target different audiences. Candidates discussed exchange and the attractiveness of interactivity and connectivity to live gaming for the audience. Wii Sports and Braid (by indie developer Jonathon Blow) were contrasted but this was limited by too significant a focus on advertising at the expense of production and/or exchange as required by the question. Confident candidates were able to discuss the production, focusing on the technological developments of new game engines to create a realistic game world. Candidates commented on the huge cost of such developments. A large number of candidates were also able then to discuss exchange and the ability of audiences to download or stream software through new services such as Gaikai or Onlive; both of which negate the need for a physical product.

Advice offered for the summer exam series:

Question 1

- encourage candidates to link analysis of the technical features of television and radio drama to the key concept being examined
- ensure that all the technical elements are covered and that a discussion of the key concept takes place
- revise the whole range of representations that may be examined
- provide plenty of discussion and application of analysis to sound and editing
- avoid lengthy contextual introductions
- assist candidates with the structure of their note making

Question 2

- candidates need to address the question set
- encourage candidates to use a wide range of contemporary examples
- cover all the possible issues of an institution and its audience
- avoid abstract theoretical perspectives

G324 Advanced Portfolio

Principal Moderator's report for G324 January 2011

This was the third series for this unit and there were 1966 candidates from 94 centres. 27 candidates were re-entries.

Moderators were pleased to see that most centres have got to grips with the idea that this portfolio unit requires work to be submitted entirely in digital/electronic format. As with the last series, where Centres grasped fully this method of working, candidates and assessors alike found the process and outcomes dynamic, with high levels of engagement for all parties. Unfortunately, for a number of Centres this has happened less successfully as they have tried to squeeze the legacy specification methods of working into the demands of the current specification, for example by producing copious amounts of Word files and then presenting those electronically which isn't in the spirit of the new specification.

The following report has been compiled with considerable input from the whole team of moderators.

Quality of administration

Centres appear to have worked well with the OCR Interchange system; MS1 mark sheets and samples were submitted promptly by most centres. Most centres also remembered to send the Centre Authentication Form CCS160, without needing to be prompted and the majority used the new assessment coversheets. The electronic versions of the coversheets also appear to have improved administrative accuracy – in most cases where there were clerical errors the coursework coversheets had been the paper versions, completed by hand. Most centres did include a teacher email address on the front of the coversheets. This was extremely useful and made the moderation process much more efficient: where there were issues with centres' submissions, such as missing CCS160 forms or DVDs that wouldn't play, moderators were able to contact teachers directly and responses were extremely prompt, which enabled moderation to progress smoothly. However, some centres do need to take more care with the completion of coursework coversheets, checking that candidate numbers are on all sheets; that marks are added up accurately; and that there are comments for all areas of the assessed work on the back of the coversheets. It would also greatly help the moderation process if centres wrote on the front of coversheets the names and candidate numbers of candidates who have worked together in groups.

Work from centres was generally far more consistently despatched, arriving as slim packages containing completed paper-based assessment coversheets for the sample candidates (on which is written a URL for the central hub address from which the moderator can reach any blogs, VLEs, Wikis etc), an MS1, CCS160 and a backup DVD (appropriately menued for navigation to individual candidates' work). However, centres are advised to ensure they send work to the address on the sample request email in future series as this will be the most up-to-date and accurate address; some work in this series was sent to the wrong moderator.

Best practice from centres included detailed assessment comments, clearly labelled DVDs and CDs, blogs with central hubs and named blogs with Candidate numbers etc. Many centres provided one DVD with all their moving image work on which was labelled and menued clearly with candidate names and numbers; as always, this was helpful as it didn't involve a constant changing of DVD for each candidate. The best administration from centres was where one blog hub address was supplied with coursework coversheets and all production work was uploaded

to blogs, so negating the need for DVDs to be submitted and covering letters explaining how candidates work could be accessed online. There were far fewer issues with privacy or password settings preventing moderators from accessing candidates' work this series.

Some centres sent corrupted discs, but were usually quick to respond with new copies. More significantly, there were a substantial number of format problems, such as Publisher files and large wmv files on CD-Rs. Neither of these is acceptable: image work should be in universally readable PDF or JPEG formats; moving image work should be on a DVD which can be played on domestic DVD players.

On the whole, however, this series Centres seem to have obviously 'got to grips' with the specification to a greater degree: although there were still some very difficult VLEs to navigate, with dozens of separate files for every candidate (often seemingly numbering in the hundreds for some centres!) and each file needing to be opened separately, the best practice were modelled more on the blog format and these worked very well. On the other hand, vast swathes of Word documents either on disc or even embedded in blogs or to be opened from VLEs were completely against the spirit of the specification. Although blogs continue to work best for the presentation of all work, some Centres managed to get iWeb websites to go onto their school network and made these accessible to moderators; these were not without hitch but they looked effective and were in the spirit of the specification.

Centres' comments on coursework coversheets varied in length and quality. Some were extremely detailed, making it clearly evident how the marks had been awarded; however a few centres just copied the criteria from the specification, with no comments indicating *how* the candidate had met the criteria. Centres should avoid this in future and write comments which clearly *apply* the criteria. Also, despite being repeatedly commented on in the Chief Examiner's reports, a significant number of centres do not outline exactly what an individual candidate's contributions were to a group production; in order to support marks awarded, centres should detail what specific contributions were made. This is particularly important where group research and planning and evaluations have been submitted.

Research and Planning

Research and planning was similar to previous series: candidates frequently spent substantial time planning the main production but hardly considered their ancillary tasks. Some good practice was seen came where the candidates had presented their pre-production material with a director's commentary. It was often concise, to the point and again in the spirit of the specification. Most successful planning evidence was presented through blogs, and was clearly updated regularly, indicating the candidate's journey through the research and planning process; but there were also a handful of centres who managed to make PowerPoint work for their candidates, with the use of image, sound video and links producing almost as dynamic a mode of presentation as blogs – however successful PowerPoints were a comparative rarity for this element.

Production work

The most popular set brief remained the music promotion task, closely followed by the film promotion task. There were also a significant minority of documentaries and newspapers.

The best music videos combined performance and narrative to good effect, with a variety of camera work used creatively and with appropriate editing. Marks awarded by some centres for this aspect were over-generous in that the lack of synchronicity of visuals and audio – a crucial aspect of performance in music videos – wasn't reflected in the marks awarded. Some productions would also have clearly benefited from a greater variety of shot types and distances,

particularly on the performance aspect of the video. There was also one centre that still seemed confused as to what a music promo is, creating music *adverts* in a rather old-fashioned 'Richard Clayderman' style (*...only available by mail order...*) featuring about 6 different tracks sung with an acoustic guitar.

Digipaks were by far the most problematic aspect of this submission. Some centres have done appropriate research and clearly established the form and conventions of the genre resulting in appropriate production work. However, a substantial proportion of submissions were conventional CD designs; and a considerable number were for the release of a new single, not a new album. A couple of centres misinterpreted the brief and submitted conventional DVD covers for a collection of music videos. One candidate justified the decision to produce a CD cover for a single rather than a digipak design for an album by saying that it would give greater prominence to the chosen track. Centres undertaking this brief need to ensure that the requirements of the brief are met fully and ensure appropriate research is conducted. There are numerous free templates for digipak designs available online which candidates could use to inform their work. Designing a digipak implies that at least 4 panes will be submitted.

Many magazine advertisements were also lacking in understanding of the conventions of this genre: it is conventional for the front cover of the CD to appear in advertisements for a new release, so creating audience awareness of the product and what to look out for in the shops.

Brief two was also popular, with candidates submitting film teaser trailers, accompanying posters and film reviews. The best teaser trailers showed excellent understanding of the genre, being short in length and consisting of numerous shots that were tightly edited. However most teaser trailers submitted appeared to be conventional theatrical trailers, rather than teaser trailers, and were quite long. A number of trailers also followed the narrative of the film which demonstrated a lack of understanding of how trailers are constructed and work. Film poster ancillary tasks were generally successful, showing good understanding of conventions and incorporating visuals and text appropriately. Film reviews were the weakest aspect overall. While layout was generally appropriate in most cases, the use of over large font sizes for the body text of the review was problematic.

There were a number of local newspaper submissions, with accompanying posters and websites or radio advertisements. Overall production of newspapers tended to be weak. In a very small number of cases this was partly accounted for by the use of inadequate software programs used in their production, such as Publisher. The lack of text in articles, though, was the biggest problem as this lead to the use of inappropriately large font sizes in order to fill the space. Centres undertaking this brief are advised to ensure candidates write articles of substantial enough length in order to ensure they have enough text to fill the pages. One centre did not seem to notice cut and pasted articles or even giant chunks of gobbledegook used to fill the column inches, as if the content did not matter! Very few centres sent hard copies of print work, instead making it available online. Where this was the case there were far fewer issues with the size of these. Posters for local newspapers in this series were generally stronger than they have been in previous series, in terms of demonstrating effective understanding of conventions. Radio advertisements were problematic in terms of sound levels in particular. Websites were much more successful. Where these were produced candidates had made use of freely available templates online to produce extremely effective websites – but it should be noted that the use of templates in Web ancillaries is fine as long as the content is original and the templates are customised to create an original final piece.

In fact, websites tended to be seen largely as ancillary tasks, rather than main tasks, and were more accomplished than previous series; moderators saw far fewer examples of designs rather than working pages. Use of templates is not advisable for the main website task.

In many cases it would appear that candidates put a great deal of effort into the construction of the main task, but ancillary texts did not reflect the same degree of technical construction. In a

small number of cases candidates' work relied heavily on the use of found images.   The specifications clearly state that all work produced must be original, produced by the candidates themselves. Where this was not done, centres did not address this in the marking of work, awarding inappropriate high level 3 and level 4 marks. In one case the centre referred to the *manipulation* of found images in the comments; but this does not constitute original work. Another problem with many texts – especially the music promotion and film tasks, together with their print ancillaries - was the lighting. Candidates seemed to spend so little time (or had little knowledge of) the importance of the lighting and composition of images in their principal shoots that they were left with sub-standard original material to work with.

Evaluations

Evaluations were better structured than in previous series, which the majority of candidates directly answering the set questions. There is still an issue around the appropriate use of the chosen presentation format. Some still submitted very long, very text-heavy slideshow presentations and some offered text-only blog posts. While candidates overall did address the required four questions, the level of detail in responses was not always as strong as marks suggested. In particular, consideration of how the three texts worked together as a package tended to be quite superficial, as was audience feedback, in many cases. The presentation of responses was the weakest aspect of candidates' work and in many cases this wasn't adequately addressed in the awarding of marks. As has been detailed in previous Chief Examiner's reports, candidates whose responses are limited to essay style prose, whether on a blog or PowerPoint presentation illustrated by some still images, do not demonstrate excellence in the use of digital technology in the presentation of their work. As a result the awarding of level 4 marks is inappropriate. The same is true of candidates who were filmed in a single shot reading their written answers to the questions.

Best practice made creative and varied use of digital technology in the presentation of work, using such things as video, audio, PowerPoint and freely available presentation software online such as Prezi and Scribd. The best approaches encouraged candidates to make the question determine the best format for the presentation of ideas. For example, the question about the use of existing conventions was well 'answered' in a short video comparing stills from existing media and the candidates' work, succinctly labelled. The new technologies question was effectively answered by candidates using a 'making of' documentary. The feedback question was well answered by director's commentary style videos, sometimes with picture-in-picture clips to show how feedback had been used as part of the creative process. Filming or recording audience feedback was excellent practice; as was the use of social network sites to gain a wide variety of audience feedback. When all of these techniques were presented via ongoing blogs, the responses were often at their most creative and informed best. Some centres submitted evaluations as PowerPoint presentations on disk. While this is an acceptable format for presentation, candidates did not always exploit the use of this technology, such as by incorporating video and audio clips and hyperlinks.

Assessment

Overall the assessment criteria were applied over-generously by centres. In particular centres were awarding inappropriately high marks for research and planning when evidence to support the marks awarded was lacking. Planning marks were often hard to justify given the limited evidence available - centres often praised the organisation of candidates and their ability to stick to deadlines but their blogs suggested otherwise!

Production work was most frequently over-marked, for example an alarming number of music videos were given level 4 marks despite having inaccurate lip sync. Framing and the pace of editing were two particular issues that meant work was over rewarded. Teaser trailers generally

should be exciting and fast paced, for example. The comments on coversheets were mostly helpful, especially where centres offered a balance between level descriptors and more personalised observation - a copy and pasted list from the specification is not a useful comment!

However marks awarded for the evaluation aspect of the component were often over-generous for the reasons mentioned above.

Summary

- Centres need to read the specification carefully to ensure they are meeting the assessment criteria, especially in terms of digital/electronic presentation. Centres should ensure that their candidates are given full opportunities to use digital technology for planning, research and evaluation – the presentation of these elements should be media-rich, making the most of the opportunities offered in terms of the digital technology used
- Meet all deadlines and support candidates with full comments on the cover sheets
- Do not let candidates undertake tasks for which the centre is not equipped
- Ensure all work is in universally accessible formats: pdf, JPEG
- Check that everything works, is accessible and is there before sending to the moderator
- If using blogs, set up a hub. There is a quick guide to this linked to the Get ahead blog, below.
- The marking scheme needs to be used in conjunction with exemplar materials in arriving at judgments about the levels and marks for each category

Please see the blog at http://getaheadocrmedia.blogspot.com/ for links to examples of candidates' work and advice on frequently asked questions. Also check the support materials and 'frequently asked questions' on the main OCR website at http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/type/gce/amlw/media_studies/documents/index.html.

G325 Critical Perspectives in Media

General Comments

There were 387 candidates entered for this January series. The level of difficulty was appropriate but some candidates were not well prepared to answer all three questions and this is often the case where candidates are taking this synoptic paper for the first time some six months before the majority of entrants for the unit.

There was a marked improvement in the level of responses, in comparison to the previous two series. It is difficult for candidates to sustain the required level of theoretical engagement for level 4 marks over the three sections and some centres had clearly prepared candidates well to write about ALL of the concepts and areas of activity that might be required for questions 1a and 1b in relation to ALL of their coursework, so that they were able to respond to the specific requirements of the questions. As has been previously stated in examiner reports, at training events and on the OCR blog, the fact that there is one A2 examination only, and a part of that is related to coursework, mean that the level of expectation from examiners is high in relation to theoretical conviction and so a level 4 candidate will need to sustain this conviction over the span of the three responses – theorising a specific aspect of their own production processes, analysing their own outcomes using a specific key concept and discussing a contemporary media issue with the use of a range of theoretical arguments.

As in previous series, many of the candidates who achieved higher overall marks for the paper chose to answer section B first.

Section A

The question on digital technology appeared to support candidates in finding a range of examples and the better answers reflected critically on the difference digital technology actually made to creative outcomes. This was the strongest set of responses since the introduction of this unit, with the better answers dealing with well chosen examples which ranged across hardware, software and online activity and began to connect these to discuss how they synthesized. The higher achieving answers related clearly candidates' decisions to the creative potential of digital media. Less accomplished responses tended to fall into two categories – those that were confused about digital technology itself (often simply describing the use of the camera) and those that merely listed examples of technology used without sufficient analysis of how these affordances led to particular kinds of creativity that might not have been possible with analogue processes or with non-technical activities. Where candidates were able to document a journey over time, either in terms of more advanced use of technology or simply making more use of technology in A2, the higher mark bands were accessible. This was extremely difficult for candidates who were only able to speculate on future A2 work as they had not yet completed their coursework – examiners cannot credit this kind of response in a synoptic paper. Level 4 answers typically defined creativity, with references to theoretical work on this much-debated and contested area (for example, Gauntlett, Buckingham, Craft, Csikszentmihalyi, Readman) and then went on to 'apply' these definitions to their own use of technologies with a range of specific examples – from how web 2.0 platforms allow the consumer (arguably) to become the producer to identifying particular uses of software such as Final Cut or Dreamweaver that allowed candidates to achieve outcomes that were not possible with simpler software such as iMovie (in the case of video editing). Either, or both, of these approaches allow examiners to award higher marks as long as there is sufficient evidence of critical reflection and evaluation – for which a 'model' like Kolb's cycle might be helpful.

Narrative was handled fairly well by most candidates, often applying one or two 'classic' theoretical models from formalist / structuralist approaches to their own work – character types,

equilibrium and disruption, action and enigma, semiotic codes and 'the gaze'. The choice of text to analyse is very important in question 1b and in some cases examiners were surprised with the choices made in this regard (for example, writing about a film in 1a and a magazine in 1b). Some made a brave stab at applying the theory to print based texts, but tended to fall back more on semiotics or genre. Whilst there is no reason why a magazine or a website cannot be a rich text for narrative theory, it would seem more straightforward at A2 level for candidates to make use of the plethora of theories of film narrative at both micro (edits and continuity decisions) and macro (storytelling and culture) levels. Many candidates were able to accurately reference narrative theories – Propp and Todorov, Barthes, Levi-Strauss, Goodwin and Mulvey were well described, with some very strong analyses of radio news work and of film trailers and openings. Level 4 answers were those that successfully related these theories to elements of candidates' own texts. Weak answers were often just an account of "how we made it" but stronger answers were able to apply some critical distance. In some cases there was even too much theory (with unsupported references to Fiske and Adorno) with little, if any, analysis of their own (in cases not yet completed) coursework.

Once again, time management was a factor and it is crucial that candidates devote the same total time to section A as to B as both sections carry equal marks.

Section B

The majority of candidates chose Contemporary Media Regulation, Media in the Online Age, Media and Collective Identity and Postmodern Media. Only one candidate each dealt with Global Media and We Media respectively so there is little comment that can be made on those topics.

Contemporary Media Regulation – this was a very popular topic and there was a high level of engagement with issues of protection and democracy, but there were some common lapses. Many film and TV references were too dated – even one historical reference would suffice, with all other examples from within five years of the time of writing. Other media areas tended to be answered with a more contemporary flavour, so centres are advised to be careful not to over-use dated (if 'classic') case studies for film and TV. As always, the James Bulger case was usually poorly handled with insufficient attention given to the complexity of this case and a lack of justification for its use in the context of an answer on contemporary media regulation. Centres are strongly advised to use this case as a historical reference in the context of Martin Barker's work on how it was constructed as a 'moral panic', not as an example of media effects and thus as 'evidence' for the need for regulation. Regulation of computer games, with case studies, was often handled well. The difficulties of regulating the internet were tackled, with some success by many and the stronger candidates dealing with the 'weightier' political issues around wikileaks and democracy / security as well as the more straightforward debates around piracy and child protection, but too often candidates addressed the issue briefly, explaining how difficult it will always be to regulate the internet, and leaving it at that. There were many superficial observations around the press 'not being regulated' and for this reason the regulation of the press was often the weakest part of these answers. Examiners were, once again, surprised that the Byron Report – a hugely significant contemporary example – was rarely mentioned. In addition, centres are reminded that candidates need to balance their understanding of contemporary issues and examples with a discussion of academic theories of effects, audience and participation that inform their engagement with the debates in question. Whether there needs to be more or less media regulation depends on the view one takes on the relationship between media and society and there is a long history of research and theory – from Chomsky to Hall to Livingstone to Jenkins - that must be understood at A2 level if candidates are to answer the questions from an informed intellectual position.

Media in the Online Age – this was the weakest topic with a general lack of theory – see the comments on regulation, the same applies. At the very least, centres are advised to look at the recent debates between Jenkins, Buckingham and Gauntlett – all of which are free and accessible online, in the context of claims made by the likes of Gillmor, Leadbetter, Wesch and Shirkey – for a more academic approach to the difference the internet has made to media. A lot of the answers were a set of opinions and 'everyday' observations about iTunes, piracy and social media, but in some cases some sustained case study work on music was well supported with a range of examples. For this topic in particular, candidates would be well advised to 'audit' their answers to consider how much of them could have been written by a person with a keen interest in media but without the knowledge and understanding from an A Level course in the subject.

Media and Collective Identity – there are various approaches that can be taken to this broad and open topic. One centre allowed students to choose their own focus, having given them broad guidelines and plenty of discussion/study of the concept. Many of these were excellent and demonstrated that there is no need for a centre to urge all its students to do the same set of case studies. Ono the other hand, one centre did the opposite and in many cases the responses (on the representation of immigrants) were also exceptionally good, working across press coverage from today and the 1960s (Enoch Powell), the film Ghosts, Facebook and self-representation. In all the level 4 answers, appropriate theories of cultural identity, representation, ideology and interpretation of media meanings were utilised and a convincing critique was offered bearing due witness to the complexity of the relationship between media and identity. Analyses of the media representation of Islam are topical and often feature a high level of personal engagement but the stronger answers are those that manage to apply theories of audience, cultivation, 'othering' and democracy / participation to the discussion. Critical distance is very important in this regard.

Postmodern Media – to answer well on this topic, candidates need a clear grasp of the theoretical ideas and a range of contemporary examples. This time around, candidates seemed to do the (more difficult) first part better – so the weakness was in the dated nature of many examples, perhaps due to the availability of writing about these (for example, Madonna – where Lady Gaga would be more appropriate, or Scream). Perhaps surprisingly, then, it seems that centres are generally finding it easier to 'translate' the complex intellectual material of postmodern theory to A2 level but more difficult to engage with media from the last five years. A sensible approach might be to start with a 'template' such as Merrin's 'Baudrillard and the Media' and then give candidates the task of finding contemporary material that seems to 'fit'.

General comments for section B – this advice is repeated from previous reports. Most candidates managed to comply with the obligation to make at least one reference to the past and one prediction for the future and all managed to discuss more than one medium. However, if anything, the past is TOO prominent and centres are reminded that examiners will be expecting the majority of answers in section B to be dealing with media from the last five years, hence its title - 'Contemporary Media Issues'.

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