



**General Certificate of Secondary Education
June 2012**

Media Studies

48104

(Specification 4810)

Unit 4: Responding to a Media Brief

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on the Examination are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2012 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

Overview

For many centres this was their second year of assessment for Unit 4, although there were also a number new to the unit. There was a clear improvement in practice this year, although all the points made in the report for 2011 also apply to some of the centres for this year.

The level of independent learning amongst the higher ability students was very impressive and encouraging. There was a genuine focus and motivation from some students and they were fully engaged in the tasks.

The Brief

The majority of centres fully embraced the brief, which this year was ‘Promoting Healthy Lifestyles’, issued on behalf of the (fictional) organisation One Step 21. Many students picked up on this group with enthusiasm, designing creative logos and using it as the lynchpin of their campaign. There were some centres, however, where no students mentioned the group at all; this is a curious omission as the group is the commissioning body for the campaign. Some students successfully adopted a ‘hybrid’ or collaboration model, with One Step 21 working in conjunction with another, often student-devised, organisation. In some cases this merely involved a One Step 21 logo on the poster or an ident on the infomercial or public information film.

One centre had contextualised the brief to meet the demands of the local health authority and produced a campaign aimed at that clients’ needs, an excellent example of making the brief fit local needs and making it ‘real’ for the students. In most centres the students were obviously encouraged to focus the brief on their own chosen issue within the overall umbrella of ‘healthy lifestyles’ which is very much in the spirit of the unit. Students should be encouraged to pursue their own lines of enquiry wherever possible in order to fully engage with the brief. The unit is designed to encourage a diverse range of approaches. One centre had students who interpreted the brief in terms of a better environment equating to a healthier lifestyle and a persuasive rationale was offered to support that interpretation.

Research, Presentation and Planning Portfolio

The RPP portfolios showed a greater consistency across centres this year, suggesting that many had accessed advice from AQA in one form or another: last year’s Principal Moderator’s Report; Feedback sessions on the new Double Award; Unit 4 CPD; or thorough reading of the Teacher’s Guidance that is downloadable with the brief. Despite this there were still a handful of centres where folders contained very little research and planning. Worth 50% of the marks for the unit, the RPP portfolio is expected to be a substantial body of work.

In the research section of the folders, the best work saw students complete generalised research into possible foci for a healthy eating campaign before narrowing it down into their selected issue. For low-mid ability students the generalised research was not narrowed sufficiently meaning that there was a huge jump to the selected focus, often without any directional explanation. There were more examples this year of relevant primary research, with results collated in a variety of ways but, for some, this was completed too early in the process before the focus had been determined. In the best folders primary research included focus groups, contacts with relevant charities/professionals and a particularly interesting experiment where one student created video diaries in response to the effect of drinking only slimfast shakes as directed within their extreme weightloss programme.

Secondary research into the issues chosen by students made up the bulk of some weaker RPP folders, often with pages of printed material with no explanation of how they were used in developing the campaign. However, in most of the cohort secondary research was well-focused and its relevance was explained to some degree.

Planning still needs to be evidenced more systematically by students in order to show the developmental process. However, in relation to last year there was more evidence of drafting. Some students had clearly planned their campaign, but were lacking in terms of documentation. Often there was planning evident for only one of the two media platforms. Rarely was the development of ideas explained clearly and often the production work suddenly appeared after the research. The best folders showed all of the steps clearly for each section, eg looking at and analysing logos, drafting sample logos, analysing, commenting and collecting feedback on the logos and then developing a final one. This showed that a thorough planning process had been followed.

Where students had worked in groups there was still some sharing of planning and research, although the specification and the brief both state that it must be individual work.

There were many folders where research into existing media forms was not detailed enough to support the students' later production work, leading to a lack of verisimilitude in the production work, as students were not aware of the conventions to be used.

The presentation to the client ranged from well-researched, well-presented work along with quality feedback from the teacher or client, to a lack of any thought or preparation given to the task. Some centres seemed to treat it as a hoop to jump through rather than a key part of A03 with feedback that should inform the final stages of planning. The best presentations linked the research to the campaign in terms of the ideas, target audience and media forms chosen; the feedback was acted on by the students in developing their final production work.

One centre had worked with the Big Lottery Fund and a representative from that organisation provided detailed feedback on both the treatments and the finished campaign. The identification of the client wasn't often so explicit and in many cases was unacknowledged (usually the teacher). This lack of client identification and input came back to haunt students when they were writing their evaluations, as they were not able to reference client feedback in terms of the campaigns' success or otherwise.

Production

There was some very creative production work and a good range of work was seen across the whole selection of media platforms. Although the brief is for a campaign, it is very pleasing to see that centres and students are thinking beyond advertising, and producing other forms such as factual magazine features, radio interviews, support group websites and TV documentaries. Some schools necessarily offer a limited choice of media while others are able to allow students to make their own decisions across a wide range of platforms. Some of the least successful centres perhaps restricted students too much by dictating the media form as well as the medium itself – not all students bought into the choices made and productions were less convincing as a result.

As stated before, more research time looking at the codes and conventions of the media forms that students intend to use would be of benefit when it comes to production. This was particularly obvious where students had created production work that was a little different - radio shows, TV news and documentaries. Encouraging students to recognise and analyse wider campaign work across a range of media forms would be helpful.

Websites were generally quite straightforward but unfortunately often lacked engaging content for the target audiences. Many failed to use any original images or sometimes original text at all. This is a potential plagiarism issue. Often in these cases, students had also relied too much on online templates (eg Wix). Such web-building sites can be useful as long as students take ownership of the design. Otherwise there are very few media skills to assess. The best websites not only developed a number of relevant pages, with embedded student-created content, but also included forum and comment pages where students had asked a number of others to contribute 'in role'.

Some centres also allowed the use of found images in print productions, with very little or no manipulation. It is expected that students will set up and use their own images, and in doing so will show a wider range of skills for assessment. Within the planning section, students doing print and website work would be advised to include their original images, whether 'found' or not, so that the extent of manipulation can be seen. Although print products were generally more impressive than other media forms, with some quite sophisticated posters and magazine front pages/double page spreads, it seemed that for some students the print work had been considered easy and less time was spent on it than on their other media form, to the detriment of creativity.

There were a refreshing number of centres using radio as a credible medium. Radio adverts were very successful but for phone-ins, interviews, etc students could be encouraged to take a more natural approach to presenting, as it is clear that they are reading from scripts rather than sounding like they are conversing. Although the script planning was beneficial, more time spent practising delivery would also have been useful. Some audio productions were technically effective but a large number had issues with sound quality and levels. There were examples where they had clearly been recorded in a busy classroom where students could be heard in the background, making it difficult to focus on the main voices.

Some of the most creative work was produced in moving image forms. TV adverts (infomercials) were a popular choice. However, some of the dramas that were acted out within them were overlong and the ubiquitous school location made suspension of disbelief virtually impossible. Where the school was genuinely the focus it worked better. Another successful form was the short documentary or soft news feature, although some students created hybrids of adverts and documentaries that followed the conventions of neither.

There were also a few examples of video games which demonstrated a creative and original approach.

There were fewer problems this year concerning the volume of work required for Unit 4. Centres had taken on board the advice to use the guidelines for Unit 2 Assignment 3 for each of the two media forms. Problems, where they occurred, were usually where group work had been undertaken. The advised quantities should be increased accordingly for group work. In addition, some students had personally only worked in one media form although their group had worked in two – each student needs to contribute to work in two media forms.

The incidence of hand-drawn print work in some centres was worrying, as all production work needs to be fully realised. Similarly some centres submitted websites as printouts or powerpoints – they need to be accessible on a standard web browser, either online or on CD-Rom.

Some production work did not really fulfil the needs of the brief. Students should be reminded of the original brief from time to time, and the feedback from the presentation is one good point at which to do this. The synergy expected from a linked campaign was at times

somewhat problematic to determine in some students' folders. Where it was present it was very effective.

In some centres production work was over rewarded with no recognition of the limitations of many of the artefacts, as there appeared to be no reference to existing codes and conventions by students or by those assessing the work.

Evaluation

Evaluations were generally marked accurately and it was pleasing to see self-reflection present in the majority. The lack of client feedback, however, often meant that only target audience feedback could be commented on, where such evidence was given at all. In some cases, evaluations that consisted of merely describing the process, with no reference to client or target audience were over-rewarded.

Although word count was generally better adhered to, there were still some centres that routinely ignored the suggested word limit and their students' responses could not be described as concise and cogent. Others had clearly benefited from editing their responses to meet the guidelines, making the language and focus more precise. Writing to word count is a media-industry skill, and so should be a focus for media learning.

Presentation of Work for Moderation

Centre submissions and individual folders were generally better presented than last year, with many different successful folder formats. A4 'presentation' folders, and A3 scrapbooks seemed to be particularly effective. Some schools provided clear instructions with regard to accessing student work which was located on shared media such as DVDs or online – in these cases a central index (a printed sheet or online hub) aided moderation. Cover sheets were usually detailed and accurate.

However, there were still some examples of poorly organised folders where research and planning was mixed up, where there was no clear indication of progress and where, in some cases, it was impossible to clarify which elements were production and which were planning. In some cases group production work was placed in one candidate's folder, with no explanation in other folders or overall, making it difficult to locate. There were several centres where individual contributions to group work were not made clear either on the cover sheets or elsewhere. In order to accurately moderate centre marks, it is important that each student's contribution can be fully assessed.

Although centres had clearly taken on board a lot of the feedback from last year, there are still many centres presenting production work in inappropriate formats. Moderators use a wide variety of computers and other equipment and centres should ensure that their work is presented in universal formats, or moderators may not be able to access it. Moving image work should be presented on DVDs playable in a domestic DVD player, audio work on CDs or as mp3s, website production should be accessible within a standard web browser either from an online URL or from a CD-Rom. Print productions should be printed in colour (where applicable) without annotation for the production element of the folder.

Best Practice

There was some really good work with full and detailed folders, tracking ideas as they developed, with exciting production work as the outcome.

In the best centres moderators saw:

- logical presentation of the development of ideas and of the three sections of the unit
- originality, creativity and independence of thought
- a real sense of engagement with the brief and students taking ownership of their work
- a strong local focus to the research and the production work
- strong engagement with the client, who gave helpful formative feedback
- a consistent sense of a specific target audience underlying decisions made
- students explaining their choice of media form with reference to both their intended message and their target audience
- production work that used appropriate technology and codes and conventions convincingly
- evaluations cogently argued using evidence from client and audience feedback, within the given word limits.

