GCSE

Media Studies

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J526**

Examiners' Reports

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Media Studies (J526)

EXAMINERS' REPORTS

Chief Examiner's Report

Introduction

This was the first year of entry for all three units of this new specification for the majority of centres. There was some impressive work from centres which had fully embraced the new specification, making excellent use of the two new controlled assessment units and setting high standards in their teaching of the new Textual Analysis and Media Studies Topic Examination. These centres are to be congratulated on their good practice.

It was particularly pleasing to see the way that centres rose to the challenge of planning, teaching and assessing the new B321 controlled assessment unit. Centres based the work on the exemplar tasks in the specification, but designed and developed a wide range of interesting, appropriate tasks, which enabled their candidates to demonstrate their understanding of media language and representation very effectively.

The majority of centres tackled the new Media Studies Topic examination on Radio and/or TV Comedy very well; however, in some cases there was room for improvement. The following detailed reports by the Principal Examiner and the two Principal Moderators have been written in order to help centres to identify good practice and potential areas for improvement.

The INSET programme for 2010-11 will also support centres in the delivery of the specification.

B321 The Individual Media Studies Portfolio

General Comments

This was the first year of entry for this unit for the majority of centres. Centres are to be congratulated on rising to the challenge of planning, teaching and assessing this controlled assessment unit for the first time. The work submitted was generally of a good standard; some portfolios were exceptionally good. The best practice was when centres were well organised and confident in their delivery of the course and therefore allowed their candidates to choose texts and production exercises that engaged their individual interests. In some cases, one or two texts were selected by the centre, and candidates were allowed to select one text of their own choice. With careful planning and supervision by the centre, the work produced using this approach was of a superior quality.

Centres are reminded that a minimum of two existing media texts must be studied for the analytical assignment. A small number of centres asked their candidates to compare an actual media text with their own production exercise, thereby duplicating work that was required for the evaluative commentary.

The contents of the portfolio

Three distinct sections are required for the portfolio:

- the analytical assignment
- the production exercise
- the evaluative commentary, together with evidence of research and planning material.

Each of these sections should focus on media language and representation, the two concept areas that are being tested in this unit. Best practice was demonstrated where there was a clear thread linking all the tasks together and candidates referred back to the analytical task in their evaluation of the production exercise.

Organisation and the recording of marks

Most centres submitted samples that were well organised and presented, with clear labelling of each section of the portfolio. A few centres sent work that was confusing and poorly organised, making the centre very time consuming to moderate. Cover sheets were mostly carefully filled in, while teacher summative comments were detailed and thorough, making the reasons for the allocation of marks clear. The small number of centres that did not fill in candidate numbers or made errors on the cover sheets made the moderation process more complicated than necessary. It is important to check that the total mark on the cover sheet matches the actual mark submitted by the centre to OCR.

Assessment

The majority of centres succeeded in applying the assessment criteria accurately to their candidates' work. Inevitably some adjustments had to be made to a few centres' marks, particularly as this was the first year of entry for most centres. Most adjustments were made where marking was over-generous, often at the top end, where work that fitted Level 3 criteria had been assessed at Level 4.

Some centres overmarked the planning and evaluative commentary, even when there was little or no evidence of planning submitted. Evidence of planning needs to be included in order to achieve Levels 3 and 4.

Teacher summative comments and annotation

- The summative comment boxes are for teachers, not for the candidates.
- Centres are advised to use the assessment criteria and relate them to the specific candidate's achievements when writing their summative comments.
- Centres are advised to give additional information to help support the marks, such as whether the candidate used original photography or found images.
- Annotation on the work is expected, in order to make it clear to the moderator how the marks have been allocated.

Packaging and presentation

Centres are reminded that it is expected that they submit work in hard copy. Moderators cannot fully appreciate the work involved when looking only at a computer screen. Work should be no larger than A3 size, and placed in card folders for ease of access. Centres are requested not to use three sided plastic folders (see p.14 of the online specification).

Tasks

A few centres used the exemplar tasks suggested in the specification, but the majority of centres developed their own tasks very successfully. Centres were inventive in devising effective analytical assignments and production exercises. There were some really interesting tasks set and it was clear that centres on the whole had tried very hard to match the tasks set to the abilities and the interests of their candidates.

It was helpful to moderators when the task set was clearly set out in detail on the cover sheets. In a few cases the stated task on the cover sheet did not match the actual task submitted by candidates, and their intentions had to be inferred from their evaluations rather than being clearly stated.

The analytical assignment

The majority of the analytical assignments were submitted in essay form, although a few centres chose to offer PowerPoint presentations, with varying results. In some cases, candidates used images and symbols very effectively in their PowerPoint presentations. Where centres sent the print version of the PowerPoint, together with the electronic one, this was very helpful to the moderator. Almost all the assignments were word processed, although there were a small number of centres submitting hand-written samples. The specification does state that the work should be word processed (see p.9 of the online specification).

There was an excellent range and variety of assignments. Most centres set tasks which tested their candidates' knowledge and understanding of media language and representation, together with their ability to use of technical terms and medium-specific terminology accurately.

Some clearly focused teaching led to some excellent pieces, in which candidates were able to put forward sophisticated arguments, thoughtful interpretations and confident comparisons. Texts were well chosen on the whole, and candidates showed a strong sense of personal engagement. Some of the most successful assignments used stills from a film or music video to display significant examples from the text and to reinforce the analysis; this was an excellent idea, and extremely helpful to the moderator. In a small number of cases, the still images were used as "props" and were therefore of less use. Analysis was of a high standard on the whole; where candidates had relied too heavily on descriptive and narrative detail at the expense of analysis, this was recognized by centres and reflected in their comments and marks.

As this is a comparative assignment, best practice was seen where candidates selected points of comparison as they discussed the particular area of representation focused on, rather than only comparing texts in a brief paragraph at the end.

A small number of centres did not seem fully aware of the purpose of the analytical assignment: to test their candidates' understanding of media language and representation. These centres rewarded their candidates for detailed analyses of the effect of the generic codes and conventions or how texts targeted an audience although there was little discussion of representations and how they were constructed.

The Production Exercise

There were some excellent examples of the production exercise, particularly in the print medium. Centres had structured their courses carefully so that the production exercise was a coherent part of the portfolio, and reinforced their candidates' knowledge and understanding of media language and representation.

For example, a very effective exercise was where candidates were asked to produce two advertisements for the same product, which offered very different representations of men and/or women. Candidates who attempted to produce a range of exercises, such as a radio advertisement, a storyboard and a digital video advertisement were less successful than those who had focused on one specific medium.

There were many examples of creative design, imaginatively presented, observing the codes and conventions of the chosen genre. Many candidates were completely at ease with the technology they had used, and were able to manipulate images and design text in extremely effective ways.

Where original photography was used, centres had high expectations of their candidates, enabling them to demonstrate "excellent presentation skills" and "a sense of creativity and stimulation employed in targeting a specific audience" (from the assessment criteria for the production exercise, p.47 of the online specification). The use of original images resulted in a much higher standard of presentation and a greater sense of engagement. A number of centres submitted very successful mixture of original and found images.

A small number of centres submitted hastily drawn advertisements or storyboards. These were less likely to demonstrate careful planning and made it harder for candidates to emulate the forms and conventions and demonstrate the candidates' understanding of representation.

Examples of successful tasks

Topic 1: Documentaries

- Compare how documentary makers have represented 9/11. Produce a two minute documentary.
- Compare 2 documentaries on Madonna's adoption process in Malawi. (This provided challenging and interesting subject matter for the candidates.)
- Compare the representations of climate change in An Inconvenient Truth and the Great Global Swindle. Create two DVD covers that show different representations of one issue.

Topic 2: Film Genres

- Compare the representations of age in two contemporary British films.
- How is England is represented in Notting Hill and Billy Elliott?
- Produce a travel advertisement for England.
- How does Tim Burton represent women in his gothic fairy tales Edward Scissorhands and Sleepy Hollow?
- Create two posters for a new gothic film, demonstrating an understanding of the genre and its representation of women.
- Compare the representations of teenagers in Donnie Darko and Napoleon Dynamite.
- Compare the representations of disability in two films.
- Produce two film posters representing disability.
- Compare the representations of boys and young women in the family comedy films St Trinians and Son of Rambow.
- Compare two Western films from different eras.
- Produce two posters typical of a particular era.

Topic 3: Popular Music

- Compare the representation of Brittany Spears over time.
- Produce a CD front and back cover.
- Compare the representations of age in 2 music videos.
- Discuss the representation of women in two music videos.
- Compare the representation of ethnicity in two music videos, using Madonna's Like A Prayer and another music video of your own choice.
- Produce CD covers for different genres of music, such as Country vs. Break Beat. This gave candidates clear forms and conventions to follow whilst allowing them to evidence their understanding of producing a product for a specific audience.

Topic 4: Celebrity

- Compare the representation of David Beckham in a range of different media.
- Compare the representation of a celebrity of your choice in two types of media text.
- Produce the front cover and contents page for a new celebrity magazine.

Topic 6: Soap Opera

- Compare the representation of teenagers in Eastenders, Coronation St or Hollyoaks.
- Produce a magazine article on a new character in a soap of your choice.

Topic 9: Advertising

- Discuss the representation of women in advertising across the decades.
- Produce two magazine advertisements, one contemporary and one from the 1950s.
- Compare one past and one contemporary advertisement for Fairy Liquid.
- Produce a billboard for a new washing up liquid aimed at men.

Topic 10: Video games

- Compare female characters in the video games Tomb Raider and Assassins' Creed.

The evaluative commentary

These were generally well tackled by candidates. There was often implicit rather than explicit reflection on the production exercise, but this was generally accurately reflected in the marks allocated by the centre.
The best evaluative commentaries explained how the candidates had used media language to construct representation in their production exercises and referred back to work that had been done in the analytical assignment.

Many centres used print outs of PowerPoint presentations for the evaluative commentary. This allowed for the inclusion of interesting images and screen grabs, used to illustrate decisions made or to account for research conducted. There was a strong sense of enjoyment and engagement in these PowerPoint presentations.

Some centres had devised a check list for their candidates, based on the details in the specification (p.13 of the online specification). This offered candidates guidance through this element of the portfolio, leading to some thoughtful evaluations, without being too restricting.

The inclusion of audience research and feedback was helpful in allowing candidates to evidence who their target audience was and to reflect on how effectively they had addressed that audience. Screen grabs and annotations of their production helped candidates to analyse their texts and to reflect on the production process.

Evidence of research and planning

Many centres presented just the appropriate amount of research evidence, together with sufficient planning and drafting evidence to make a judgement for moderation purposes. In examples where good research and planning took place the standard of the production and the planning & evaluative commentary where improved.

A few Centres simply offered summaries of the process with no actual evidence, which went against the spirit of the specification. Where too little material was included, it was harder to be able to work out the candidate's own input.

In a number of cases, it was difficult to distinguish between the final product and earlier drafts. Centres are requested to identify the final outcome, the evidence of planning and research, and the evaluation, by using labels, dividers or an index to separate the work. It is good practice to encourage candidates to annotate drafts of work, explaining decisions and revisions.

It is not necessary to include every completed copy of a questionnaire in the appendix to the production exercise; one sample copy, together with an analysis of the findings is appropriate.

Conclusion

There was a very interesting, lively variety of work seen for this unit. Candidates had engaged with the texts and the concepts. The majority of centres supported the assessment criteria and ensured that their candidates successfully fulfilled the requirements of the three sections of the portfolio. Centres are to be congratulated for the successful planning, delivery and assessment of this unit.

B322/B323 Textual Analysis and Media Studies Topic

This was the first large entry for this examination and teachers and candidates are to be commended for the quality of the responses. Candidates showed excellent engagement with the textual extracts, a commendable range of case studies for question 4, and what appeared to be excellent preparation for the exam.

Changes to the examination format

Centres should note that the format of the exam will change very slightly with the January 2012 series as the paper adapts to online marking. The questions will be laid out in a 16 page booklet in such a way that spaces will be allocated for the answer to each question and part of question. The two explanations required for question 1 will each have their own space, as will each of the four bullet points for question 2. The order of bullet points will also change slightly so that the bullet point that most candidates find more accessible will be moved to the end, to make it easier for candidates to write more for this media language element, should they wish. It is hoped that allocating space according to the number of marks available for each question will prevent candidates writing too much for questions 1 and 2 and not enough for question 3. Candidates will be allowed to write on additional sheets, but it is hoped that Centres will recommend that they try to stay within the space allocated for each question, as this would represent good examination technique for the vast majority of candidates. Many responses for the present examination started with an often quite lengthy preamble that rephrased the question and stated the importance of generic conventions or media language, for example, in very general terms. Better responses started with the answer to the question; this strategy will be particularly advantageous in the new examination format as it might avoid over-long answers (on camerawork, for example) that use up too much time in the exam and unbalance the answers.

B322 Textual Analysis and Media Topic (Moving Image)

Question 1

This was generally well-answered, with less evidence of hopelessly over-long answers than in previous series of this exam. Only a few answers described aspects of the text with little attempt to explain how this reflected the action adventure genre, or were thin with little more than a statement of particular conventions. Most candidates showed a sure grasp of action adventure conventions and could use examples from the extract that illustrated them.

Most candidates could cite the presence of a hero and villain, the conflict between the two, the heroine's underdog status, the exotic setting, and the danger the setting represented. Better answers used terminology – especially 'generic convention', 'protagonist', and 'antagonist' – and gave some detail from the extract to exemplify their argument. Many answers discussed more than two conventions and were not penalised for this.

Many candidates thought that they had to separately discuss 'characters' and 'events' and this often led to repetition – the formulation 'characters and/or events' is used only in order to avoid using a term – 'narrative' – that might be inaccessible to some candidates. Some only wrote about character and did not comment on narrative – this was only a problem if the candidate struggled to discuss two generic conventions under 'character'. Many answers that covered both 'events' and 'character' improved in quality when they moved on to 'events', so candidates might be best advised to start there.

Many candidates used the conventions listed in previous versions of the mark scheme, but others made good use of simple formulations such as: 'heroes and villains', 'speed and motion', 'suspense and jeopardy', 'conflict and combat', and 'spectacle'. Many also discussed the significance of the villain as Chinese, and therefore a foreign character, removed from the British heroine.

Some candidates tried to apply theory such as Todorov and Propp in this question, which often detracted from the answer. Candidates can achieve full marks in this exam without quoting any theory, and many weaker responses were undermined by their attempt to apply theory.

Question 2

This was again generally well-answered, if sometimes at a length that left little time for questions 3 and 4.

Candidates should be reminded that the question is asking for answers to concentrate not on generic conventions, which are covered by question 1, but on media language elements and their connotative effects. Some otherwise excellent answers laboured generic elements unnecessarily, explaining at length, for example, how the fast paced editing and cross-cutting during the fight scene which created excitement and thrills (valid example plus valid connotative effect) was a generic convention (unnecessary generic explanation).

Better responses were balanced between all four bullet points; unbalanced responses usually gave detailed analysis of soundtrack and camerawork (often at great length) but paid less attention to editing and mise-en-scène. Better answers concentrated on visual editing for the editing bullet point and did not confuse camera work and editing.

Most candidates found the **soundtrack** easy to analyse, usually citing the tonal changes in the music, the dialogue between Lara and her Greek helpers, and the sounds of shots and of the temple collapsing. Several responses noted the temporary absence of sound as a precursor to events. Many made reference (not always accurately) to diegetic and non diegetic sounds; better candidates used this terminology as part of a wider connotative analysis of particular examples, rather than simply listing whether a sound was diegetic or non-diegetic – a common fault in weaker answers.

Camerawork was similarly accessible. Many candidates cited several of the following: the long shot use as an establishing shot at the beginning of the scene; the close up on Lara's face to show her reactions to finding the orb, the arrival of the antagonists, or being shot; the use of a Dutch tilt; the use of high angle and low angle shots to define power; the use of shaky hand held camera; the tracking shot following the falling orb; the underwater tracking shot of Lara swimming. This was the strongest part of the response by far – candidates were clearly confident in the use of a range of media terminology. Many weaker candidates claimed to see extreme close ups (there were none in the extract) describing the shot of the antagonist as he comes out of the water as an ECU which 'expresses emotion'.

Editing, as usual was often a candidate's Achilles heel, but many cited one or more of the following: the slow pace of editing during the exploration of the cave at the beginning of the scene; the increase in editing pace as the antagonists arrived; the cross-cutting between Lara finding the orb and the antagonists' arrival; and the shot-reverse-shot during the fight.

Better answers concentrated on purely editing techniques that did not overlap with other bullet points. Many responses referred to CGI, better answers explaining its use as part of the post production editing process and stating this in addition to one or more of the points listed above. Examples of CGI effects cited by candidates were not always clearly CGI (the falling down temple, for example) and it appears to be more difficult for a candidate to spot when a CGI effect is used than it is to discuss the pace of editing, for example, so they might be better advised to concentrate on this aspect of editing. Some weaker answers relied on aspects of the soundtrack as evidence of editing, not always distinguishing between ambient sound and post-production sound effects, or discussed 'the falling down temple'.

Better answers clearly separated their responses to camerawork and editing and did not leave it to the examiner to decide which was which.

Many candidates misidentified 'jump-cuts' (there were none in the extract) – this term is nearly always misused by candidates.

Some answers relied on very general descriptions of editing, such as 'there was continuity editing' or 'there was match on action', and thus often failed either to give a specific example or to explain connotative effect.

Mise-en-scène was again accessible, many citing: the setting of the ancient temple; the low key lighting; the differences in the costumes; Lara's make up and hair do; the weaponry. In yet more bad news for Russell Crowe, not one of the candidates found Angelina Jolie lacking in sexual attractiveness, in stark contrast to the many disparaging comments about Russell's appearance in the January 2011 examination extract .

Candidates sometimes struggled to discuss connotative effect for mise-en-scène or only made links to generic conventions (exotic location, for example).

Question 3

Responses to this question were generally less successful than those for questions 1 and 2, but many candidates could comment on the representation of a female action heroine (though rather fewer could spell 'heroine').

Many of these answers were very short for a 20 mark question.

Better answers discussed how Lara both challenged gender stereotypes but at the same time reinforced the male gaze with what many candidates referred to as 'her curves' (better answers discussed her 'objectification'). Some answers compared her character productively to other 'Girls with Guns' and discussed how this showed that the representation of femininity was changing. Many answers discussed the stereotypical use of 'foreign' villains; better answers discussed how the Chinese are represented as 'others' in the extract (for its implied Western audience) and are used to connote the threatening 'unknown'. Some with admirable genre knowledge compared them to Fu Manchu villains. Some answers argued convincingly that the 'friendly but flirty' Greeks fitted another national stereotype. Many answers looked at the Greeks as the damsels in distress and discussed the superior female and the male hand maidens that need to be rescued. Some answers discussed Lara's 'stiff upper lip' Britishness, and the equation of heroism with youth and lack of disability.

Unusually for this paper, some answers were able to use theories – such as Laura Mulvey and John Berger – in a productive manner.

The question asks for a discussion of stereotyping and any other relevant representation issues. Some candidates failed to use the word 'stereotype' or 'stereotypical' and were thus confined to the Level 1 mark band, unless there was clear indication of understanding of the concept.

Many answers discussed 'stereotypical heroes and villains' in a way that was confined to generic conventions and characterisation. Candidates should be reminded that genre and narrative are covered in question 1, and question 3 is asking for a more wide ranging discussion of media representation issues. Answers that were confined to analysis of characterisation often only demonstrated understanding of the narrative ('the hero is stereotypically agile and quick-witted, for example) and were restricted to Level 2 of the mark scheme. However, many such answers touched upon the way that Lara Croft's character challenges gender stereotypes and thus could reach Level 3.

Better answers showed that candidates had carried over what they had learned about representation issues in their B321 unit and could apply this learning to any text. Some better answers discussed representation issues at the beginning of the answer, then tended to slip into analysis of characterisation in their textual exemplification, but this was credited when placed within the context of representation analysis.

Pre-prepared answers on 'representation in the media', however, proved much less successful, particularly where candidates seemed to be expecting a strong male protagonist. Candidates must focus on the extract and use it for detailed exemplification.

Question 4(a)

Question 4(a) asked for a detailed discussion of how and why one programme was scheduled on one or more channels. Responses to this were mixed.

Better answers concentrated on one scheduling event, stated the day, time and channel, and discussed both the 'how' and 'why' parts of the question.

Some well constructed answers ensured they covered 'how' and 'why' by using a two part format: (1) Why that channel? (2) Why that time and day? There were some very strong answers in terms of target audience, ethos and regulation with a very concise awareness of remit (not exclusively BBC). The better answers delved into hammocking and viewing trends/flow. The best responses looked at programmes and channels with a distinctive ethos or demographic (such as E4 or BBC2),

Weaker answers often concentrated on the 'one or more channels' part of the question, so 'Friends' was traced from its initial airing on American TV through to Channel 4 and E4, or 'Only Fools and Horses' from its original showing to its present day repeats, or 'The Simpsons' from its start on BBC2 then to Sky and then onto Channel 4. This approach often left little time for detail on the 'how' and 'why' of scheduling. Better answers, if discussing a programme stripped across different channels, concentrated on one scheduling strategy on one channel.

Some candidates appeared to be expecting a question asking for two programmes and seemed to run out of material part way through their answer, often resorting to discussion of audience pleasures that was better suited to 4(b)

The scheduling details of some programmes were not contemporary. Candidates commonly discussed the scheduling of Friends on Channel 4 from 1994, or even the scheduling of Fawlty Towers from 1975. Such answers often lacked the detail of contemporary examples.

Most answers concentrated on the channel and time a programme was scheduled, the day of scheduling was less often seen as significant and sometimes not even mentioned.

Programmes that proved successful include: Gavin and Stacey (an example where following its movement across BBC channels usually worked well) Scrubs, Friends, QI and Have I Got News For You.

Question 4(b)

Question 4(b) was generally answered well. Nearly all candidates appeared comfortable with the idea of audience pleasures and the main differentiators were the range of pleasures covered, the quantity and variety of textual exemplification offered, and the overall sophistication of the answer.

Better candidates chose their case studies wisely (choosing different formats or programmes with different target audiences), and gave a range of pleasures that were exemplified in detail from different episodes of the programmes they had studied. Less successful answers answered question 4(a) again and/or gave a vague description of the programmes and their presumed target audiences with often a one or two word nod towards the audience pleasures they offered, the presence of the latter allowing them to creep just into Level 2.

Some candidates concentrated on differences in humour as an approach to this question, but the more successful answers usually incorporated a wider range of audience pleasures, such as 'familiarity' (for long running series), 'escapism' (for programmes that offered a strongly-defined self-contained fictional world), 'identification' (for programmes with strong and diverse characterisation), and 'narrative resolution'.

Some answers listed pleasures with minimal textual exemplification and thus lost marks. This was a common fault among those candidates who, often (but not always) unwisely, chose to apply uses and gratifications theory. Most failed, for example, to give any textual exemplification for 'social interaction' which requires a sophisticated level of understanding to exemplify effectively. There is no need for any explicit media theory in order to gain full marks for this question.

Some candidates concentrated on differences in scheduling and target audiences to the detriment of addressing audience pleasures.

Some candidates appear to have confused generic conventions with generic pleasures, and instead wrote about '4-6 main characters and a central meeting place', for example.

Successful combinations of programmes included:

'Friday Night Dinner' and 'Come Fly With Me'
'Harry Hill's TV Burp' and 'Friends'
'Gavin and Stacey' and 'Harry Hill's TV Burp'
'Scrubs' and 'Never Mind the Buzzcocks'
'Little Britain' and 'The IT crowd'
'The Simpsons' and 'Outnumbered'
'Scrubs' and 'Outnumbered'
'Friends' and 'QI'
'Friends' and 'Have I Got News For You'
'The Simpsons' and 'QI'

'Friends' nearly always worked well for audience pleasures but not so often for scheduling. Some candidates found 'Benidorm' difficult to comment on in terms of audience pleasures, but easy to comment on for scheduling. 'The Inbetweeners' is a popular option and one that few candidates appear to find 'boring' (the kiss of death in this question) but weaker candidates sometimes struggle to explain its pleasures. Analysing programmes with more edgy or subtle or transgressive humour generally appeared to be difficult for weaker candidates; examples included 'Come Fly with Me', 'Peep Show' and 'Celebrity Juice'. However, despite this, 'The Mighty Boosh' often worked well for both scheduling and pleasures.

Candidates who appeared to have been given a completely free choice of texts produced as a rule more generalised and less exemplified answers.

A few candidates chose programmes, such as 'Glee', that were not productive in exhibiting comedic pleasures.

B323 Textual Analysis and Media Topic (Print)

Question 1

This question generated some very good responses. Most candidates gave good exemplification and media terminology, and were able to focus on the 'lifestyle' genre rather than women's magazines in general. Popular conventions included: the layout of the front cover (especially the positioning and gaze of the female model), the many uses of direct address throughout, the range of topics in the contents, the use of 'real life stories', and the role of the editor's letter. Many were able to explore these conventions in detail explaining their connotative effect and using appropriate media language in doing so. Some compared the magazine with other magazines they had studied, such as 'Elle' or 'Marie Claire'.

Some weaker answers confused 'lifestyle' magazines with 'women's magazines', mistakenly identified the cover model as a celebrity (remarking on the publication's celebrity endorsement), or mistakenly identified the magazine as 'seasonal', attributing its pink colour as connoting summer.

Some candidates wrote too much for this question and ran out of time later in the exam.

Question 2

There were many very good answers with balanced responses addressing all the four bullet points.

A few answers drifted between bullet points, and then made very little reference to language. Whilst typography and language were generally well answered, layout and colour proved more difficult. At times, description took precedence over connotative effect.

Layout was probably the weakest part of this question, with some very general comments from candidates – merely stating what was present on the page with little attention to its organisation – and a lack of terminology. Many candidates resorted to describing what was on the front cover of the magazine; stronger answers were able to discuss the layout ratio and how the layout looked cluttered yet still appealing to busy women. The use of the model's gaze dominating the front cover was identified by many as a way of building a relationship with the audience.

Typography was well answered. Many responses were able to discuss the various font styles and sizes used throughout the magazine and some used the correct media terminology when doing so The only weakness here was the confusion between serif and sans serif and the 'formal' or 'informal' appeal. A proportion of candidates were unable to spell 'sans serif' correctly, but there was a general confidence in being able to distinguish this style of text from serif typefaces. Weaker responses were often limited to boldness of text.

Use of language was definitely the most well-answered section to Question 2. Even the weaker candidates were able to discuss the use of direct address and the conversational/chatty tone of the editor's letter or examples of coverlines with some good use of terminology. Some simply reiterated their response from question one.

Use of colour was, again, well-answered. Colours were identified and linked to the tone of the magazine. Many identified a particular house style and the use of bright pink in the editors letter to make the letters 'stand out' from the background Some candidates struggled to use terminology when answering on colour and failed to develop a discussion of the connotative effect of the use of colour other than the pink being a typical 'girly' colour used to attract that audience.

Question 3

Question three of the print paper appears to have been more successfully answered than its counterpart on the moving image paper. Most candidates were able to identify key issues of the representation of femininity with some confidence. There were some strong responses that recognised the stereotypical representation of women striving to look good, staying young and healthy, managing money, and being a good cook. Some commented effectively on the exclusively white representation, the exclusion of those with disabilities, and the heterosexual feel to the magazine, and the depiction of the aspirational domestic world. Stronger candidates discussed how white, beautiful and healthy were stereotyped as a norm. The better responses were able to discuss the notion of absence from the text but these were few in number.

Some candidates tried to analyse the positive and negative representations, arguing that there was a negative representation of women and that cooking, cleaning & gardening were chores and not legitimate interests.

A few candidates did not seem to understand what the question was asking for and used the question as an opportunity to give their own views about female stereotypes and wider issues of sexual discrimination within society, without referring to how people and lifestyles are represented in the extract, or critiqued the representation of females in the extract then explained what women were really like.

Some very weak answers failed to use the term stereotype which limited the response to level 1. However, though some candidates struggled with this question, there were better answers from weaker candidates on this question than on B322 and there were few answers that simply described the text without any reference to it being a constructed representation.

Many responses tended to be very short for this question.

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Weaker answers often concentrated on the 'one or more channels' part of the question, so 'Friends' was traced from its initial airing on American TV through to Channel 4 and E4, or 'Only Fools and Horses' from its original showing to its present day repeats, or 'The Simpsons' from its start on BBC2 then to Sky and then onto Channel 4. This approach often left little time for detail on the 'how' and 'why' of scheduling. Better answers, if discussing a programme stripped across different channels, concentrated on one scheduling strategy on one channel.

Some candidates appeared to be expecting a question asking for two programmes and seemed to run out of material part way through their answer, often resorting to discussion of audience pleasures that was better suited to 4(b)

The scheduling details of some programmes were not contemporary. Candidates commonly discussed the scheduling of Friends on Channel 4 from 1994, or even the scheduling of Fawlty Towers from 1975. Such answers often lacked the detail of contemporary examples.

Most answers concentrated on the channel and time a programme was scheduled, the day of scheduling was less often seen as significant and sometimes not even mentioned.

Programmes that proved successful include: Gavin and Stacey (an example where following its movement across BBC channels usually worked well) Scrubs, Friends, QI and Have I Got News For You.

Question 4(b)

Question 4(b) was generally answered well. Nearly all candidates appeared comfortable with the idea of audience pleasures and the main differentiators were the range of pleasures covered, the quantity and variety of textual exemplification offered, and the overall sophistication of the answer.

Better candidates chose their case studies wisely (choosing different formats or programmes with different target audiences), and gave a range of pleasures that were exemplified in detail from different episodes of the programmes they had studied. Less successful answers answered question 4(a) again and/or gave a vague description of the programmes and their presumed target audiences with often a one or two word nod towards the audience pleasures they offered, the presence of the latter allowing them to creep just into Level 2.

Some candidates concentrated on differences in humour as an approach to this question, but the more successful answers usually incorporated a wider range of audience pleasures, such as 'familiarity' (for long running series), 'escapism' (for programmes that offered a strongly-defined self-contained fictional world), 'identification' (for programmes with strong and diverse characterisation), and 'narrative resolution'.

Some answers listed pleasures with minimal textual exemplification and thus lost marks. This was a common fault among those candidates who, often (but not always) unwisely, chose to apply uses and gratifications theory. Most failed, for example, to give any textual exemplification for 'social interaction' which requires a sophisticated level of understanding to exemplify effectively. There is no need for any explicit media theory in order to gain full marks for this question.

Some candidates concentrated on differences in scheduling and target audiences to the detriment of addressing audience pleasures.

Some candidates appear to have confused generic conventions with generic pleasures, and instead wrote about '4-6 main characters and a central meeting place', for example.

Successful combinations of programmes included:

'Friday Night Dinner' and 'Come Fly With Me'
'Harry Hill's TV Burp' and 'Friends'
'Gavin and Stacey' and 'Harry Hill's TV Burp'
'Scrubs' and 'Never Mind the Buzzcocks'
'Little Britain' and 'The IT crowd'
'The Simpsons' and 'Outnumbered'
'Scrubs' and 'Outnumbered'
'Friends' and 'QI'
'Friends' and 'Have I Got News For You'
'The Simpsons' and 'QI'

'Friends' nearly always worked well for audience pleasures but not so often for scheduling. Some candidates found 'Benidorm' difficult to comment on in terms of audience pleasures, but easy to comment on for scheduling. 'The Inbetweeners' is a popular option and one that few candidates appear to find 'boring' (the kiss of death in this question) but weaker candidates sometimes struggle to explain its pleasures. Analysing programmes with more edgy or subtle or transgressive humour generally appeared to be difficult for weaker candidates; examples included 'Come Fly with Me', 'Peep Show' and 'Celebrity Juice'. However, despite this, 'The Mighty Boosh' often worked well for both scheduling and pleasures.

Candidates who appeared to have been given a completely free choice of texts produced as a rule more generalised and less exemplified answers.

A few candidates chose programmes, such as 'Glee', that were not productive in exhibiting comedic pleasures.

B324 Production Portfolio in Media Studies

Introduction

For the majority of centres this summer was the first full entry for Unit B324 and entries were up sharply from the previous summer session.

Unit B324 represents 30% of the final GCSE qualification. This Unit offers candidates the opportunities to demonstrate their skills in Research and Planning, Production, and Evaluation and their understanding of the key concepts of audience, institution, media language and genre. It is often seen as synoptic Unit bringing together elements first seen in the other Units. It is expected that Centres will 'play to their strengths' and choose tasks for which they have the resources and expertise to deliver and which also appeal to their candidates (page P27 s5.3.2e of the online specification).

All of the set briefs were attempted by candidates this summer. There was a clear range of work this summer with examples of excellent work including:

- Print magazine extracts where candidates had researched and written personal material for an identified audience, used appropriate original imagery, used appropriate software to manipulate the images, and suitable DTP software to assemble the page layouts.

- Imaginative print advertising campaigns where candidates had demonstrated photographic flair, manipulated the images using appropriate software, and laid out the advertisements using the relevant conventions (for billboards a 40cm x 20cm aspect ratio worked well).

- Music videos that moved beyond simple miming alone, and explored aspects of style and narrative to engage their audience.

- A variety of approaches to the television productions which included – TV documentary, sitcom, children's animation and reality TV.

- Some film openings showed a creative flair on the part of candidates, and were presented in a variety of genres – subjects included suspense, comedy, supernatural, crime, secret agent and horror.

- Radio magazine extracts which were well produced, and included topics such as general lifestyle, sport, health, celebrity and local events.

- It was pleasing to see working websites submitted on disk, with all the individual components appearing in the upload folder. Subjects for the entertainment website included a 'what's on' approach, and music artist with background, image gallery and future events.

- The cross media brief also gave candidates the opportunity to bring together a number of media as part of a coherent promotion package, including examples of CD covers, websites, posters and video adverts.

Notable good practice was seen this year in centres where candidates had been instructed to prepare a research summary (in some cases a 'pitch'). The discipline provided by this approach proved useful in informing subsequent planning and improving the quality of the finished production.

The 12 set briefs in the Specification were successful in offering a range of viable choices for most centres. Some centres made changes to the briefs in such a way that they became difficult to moderate in terms of the Specification assessment criteria. It must be remembered that for Unit B324 centres must follow one of the set briefs as described in the specification (p18, 19 of the online specification). The briefs offered in this unit are not 'exemplar topics' like those available in Unit B321 and must be followed exactly as they are set out in the specification.

Portfolio Evidence

Where candidates had provided separated sections of their portfolios for 'Research and Planning', and 'Evaluation', they were able to demonstrate that they had met the requirements of the specification clearly. In the best instances they had also provided a 'Contents' list with page numbers, which brought discipline to their approach, as well as helping the process of moderation.

Centres need to ensure that candidates **separate** the presentation of 'Research and Planning' from the 'Evaluation' in their candidate portfolios (pages 20-21 of the online specification). These elements occur at different times, and each has its own particular concerns. For instance, audience research would be expected to feature in both Research and Planning, and the Evaluation; however preliminary research and planning work would concentrate on identifying a target audience and their issues; whereas post production evaluative research would use audience feedback to inform candidate interpretations. The 'Research and Planning' element and the 'Evaluation' element are assessed separately, and each has its own specific assessment criteria (pages 58-60 of the online specification).

Teachers need to refer to specific pieces of evidence in a candidate's portfolio when completing coversheets, making sure they have referred to the appropriate Assessment Criteria (pages 50-60 of the online specification). For example, to attain the higher mark levels in the Evaluation there is an expectation that candidates will be able to move beyond simple over prescriptive 'question and answer' format determined by their Centre and demonstrate analytical skills and a degree of personal reflection.

The portfolio itself needs to be presented in **three sections** for each candidate:

- Research & Planning (plus an overall Appendix)
- Production itself
- Evaluation

The Appendix can contain items such as drafts, research sources, and shared materials.

For 'Research and Planning' and the 'Evaluation' centres are advised to check the specification carefully for the list of criteria that illustrate each of the mark levels for these two different elements (pages 58-60 of the online specification).

Authentication and Group Work

Clear teacher comments / candidate descriptions provide essential background information in the process of assessment, as well as making it easier for the moderators to verify the centres submitted marks.

Centres **must** be able to authenticate candidates' work. Centres that do not complete the required centre authentication form for this unit will have their results held until the exam board has received the required documentation. (page 30 s5.4.4 and page 28 s5.3.4 and s5.3.5). Candidates must identify and credit their sources in all cases and not claim found work as their own.

The only shared element in this unit is the production itself.

It is important for candidates and Centres to identify, where appropriate, the individual's contribution when working in a group. Each candidate is assessed upon their own individual contribution even when working in a group. Teacher's need to use the coversheet boxes to help differentiate an individual's contributions to the moderator. If individual contributions aren't outlined it can make it more difficult for a moderator to support centre assessment decisions.

Centres are also reminded that the maximum size for a group is 5. Group sizes any larger than this **are not allowed.**

Evidence of research, planning and the evaluation should be individual to each candidate. Each candidate needs to present their work in a separate portfolio for moderation.

Centres need to instruct candidates clearly about the individuality of their portfolios, **and** the need to identify their sources.

This summer some centres submitted group portfolios for 'Research and Planning', and/or 'Evaluation'. This is in contravention of the clear instructions in the Specification (pages 17-18 of the online specification), and is impossible to moderate. There were also instances of teachers submitting Evaluation marks with comments, but no candidate evidence at all. Moderators need to see evidence of all three assessed elements in this unit otherwise they are unable to support centre marks. Centres are reminded that the formats for Evaluation include podcast, therefore oral evidence for Evaluation can be provided if required.

Formats for submission

There were some problems for moderators when they were unable to access candidate work because electronic/digital work was not offered in standard formats. Moderators will not have access to all of the many proprietary software formats which candidates may use to create their work, such as QuarkXPress™, Adobe InDesign™ and Microsoft Publisher™. Candidate work needs to be exported to a universal format, for example print magazines should be submitted as PDF documents if submitted electronically. Audio should be playable on a domestic CD player or made available in mp3 format, and video should be playable on a domestic DVD player or if supplied on a CD/DVD-Rom it should be in a standard video file such as *.mpg or *.mov.

This principle also applies to portfolio work as well as production work if submitting work electronically. The variety of word processor packages and various versions of MS PowerPoint and MS Word software require Centres to check that their material can be accessed on other computers than their own before submitting. One way of cutting down on problems is to make sure PowerPoint and Word documents are saved in the most compatible file type eg the *.doc file type for MS Word – not *.docx. There have been some problems this session with fonts, font sizes and pagination on work supplied to moderators. Some centres have found that using OpenOffice.org is a useful, free way of checking that material will be accessible for moderation. All documents submitted in electronic format MUST be in a standard universally accessible form (there is a list in the online specification pages 62-63).

The best way to offer all digital print material (production and evaluation) is PDF.

If exotic fonts are really considered necessary, they can always be converted to images (eg JPEG) for inclusion.

Resources

Resources should be taken to include technology **and** expertise. There have been excellent examples where Centres have trained their candidates in the choice and use of software prior to its application in an assessment context. However it has also been clear that in some cases, candidates have been left to find out about software with minimal support, and at times their achievement has reflected this.

Centres can obtain further support by attending INSET courses and consulting the OCR website, where exemplar material and additional advice will be given in due course.