

OCR Report to Centres

June 2013

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It is also responsible for developing new specifications to meet national requirements and the needs of students and teachers. OCR is a not-for-profit organisation; any surplus made is invested back into the establishment to help towards the development of qualifications and support, which keep pace with the changing needs of today's society.

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

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

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Media Studies (J526)

OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

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B321 The Individual Media Studies Portfolio

General comments

The work submitted for this unit was generally of a high standard; some samples were very impressive indeed, exemplifying excellent practice.

As always, the best work was seen from centres which selected their topic, texts and production exercises to suit the expertise of the staff and to engage their candidates' interests. It was pleasing to see that centres are now more confident in developing their own tasks and giving their candidates some element of choice in the portfolio as a whole. This ensured that the candidates could demonstrate an excellent level of understanding and engagement and produced very impressive portfolios, while meeting the assessment criteria.

Examples of successful tasks are given below, in order to help centres ensure that they make the best choices for their candidates.

Centres are reminded that a minimum of two existing media texts must be studied for the analytical assignment. The element of comparison between the two existing texts is essential for candidates to achieve the higher levels.

Where centres are new to the specification or uncertain, they are advised to use the exemplar tasks suggested in the specification, or in the OCR textbook. Popular topics every year include Advertising, Film Genres and Popular Music, but moderators saw successful examples in all the available topic areas this year.

The sections of the portfolio

Centres are reminded that three distinct sections are required for the portfolio and that these should be presented in the following order:

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

Evidence of research and planning

There are still a number of centres which submit little or no evidence of research and planning. The assessment criteria for the Evaluative Commentary on pages 31-32 of the online specification highlight the importance of research and planning as part of the portfolio. The expectation is that evidence of these is provided for the moderator.

Key concept areas

Each of the three sections of the portfolio 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 coherent approach to the portfolio, which meant that all three tasks were linked and candidates were able to refer back to the analytical task in their evaluation of the production exercise.

Organisation and the recording of marks

The majority of centres submitted portfolios which were well organised and well presented, with clear labelling of each section of the portfolio. However, there were still some centres which sent work that was disorganised; for example, with the comparative analytical assignment conflated with the evaluative commentary, making the centre very time consuming to moderate. There were also a number of clerical and transcription errors, which also held up the moderation process.

Centres are reminded that it is essential that cover sheets are correctly filled in, with candidate numbers and a detailed breakdown of the marks awarded. Marks should be checked, as should transcription from the back of the cover sheet to the front. It is also vital to check that the total mark on the cover sheet matches the mark on the MS1 before sending the work to the moderator.

The topic and tasks must be clearly set out in detail on the cover sheets. In a few cases the topic on the cover sheet was devised by the centre; this is not acceptable, as centres must select their topic from the list of options on pages 9–11 of the online specification.

Centres are reminded that the use of three sided plastic wallets is not permitted, as this holds up the moderation process (see p.2 of the Controlled Assessment Submission Instructions).

Teacher comments and annotations

The best centres included detailed and thorough teacher summative comments on the cover sheets, making the reasons for the allocation of marks clear, and making reference to the assessment criteria. They also offered detailed, helpful annotations on the work itself; this made it easier for the moderators to support the marks awarded.

Centres are reminded that it is essential that hard copies of the cover sheets, with detailed summative comments, are sent to the moderator, and it is expected that hard copies of the work, together with detailed teacher annotations, are also sent.

Centres are to be congratulated for the increased use of original images this year, enabling the candidates to demonstrate their creativity, originality and technical skills. There were still a few centres which relied entirely on found images, and this is to be actively discouraged.

Assessment

The majority of centres applied the assessment criteria accurately to their candidates' work. There were some adjustments made, particularly where centres were new to the specification.

Where centres overmarked the comparative analytical assignment, this was usually because the work was underdeveloped and lacked a detailed discussion of the ways in which the technical elements constructed particular representations. At the same time, there were a few centres which were over-hesitant about rewarding their candidates with high marks, even when the work clearly merited it, and contained impressive independent thought and insight.

The analytical assignment

In the analytical assignment there was a tighter focus on the challenging concept of representation this year. There has been an appropriate shift toward consideration of **how** representation is constructed through the analysis of particular aspects. For film and television this meant looking at particular scenes rather than the whole text; this helped avoid a narrative response which can be a characteristic of candidates in the middle and lower ranges. Paying attention to media language meant that candidates could consider **how** representation had been constructed rather than a summary of what that representation was, enabling access to Level 4.

There has also been a general improvement in candidates' ability to use technical terms and medium-specific terminology accurately.

Successful approaches included those which looked at material from the past and compared it to current representations. These approaches were almost always successful, but were particularly effective where candidates analysed the technical elements of camerawork, editing, sound and mise-en-scène, and where candidates were able to show some element of autonomy, perhaps in their choice of contemporary texts.

Music videos were a fruitful area for discussion of representation, as their brevity helps to ensure that candidates focus on the technical elements. In addition, they often offer explicit traditional or alternative representations of gender, race and class. An interesting assignment this year asked candidates to compare the representation of age in *Hurt* by Johnny Cash and *The Suburbs* by Arcade Fire.

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 annotations effectively in their PowerPoint presentations. Centres are advised to send the handout version of the PowerPoint, together with the electronic one, in order to help the moderation process.

The production exercise

There were many examples of impressively planned, highly creative production exercises, with excellent use of technology. The majority of 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.

Yet there were still a few cases where candidates were asked to produce a production exercise that bore no relation at all to the comparative analytical assignment. This made the candidates' task unnecessarily difficult and the work hard to moderate.

There were some impressive examples of the use of original photography, enabling candidates to demonstrate an "excellent sense of creativity and stimulation employed in targeting a specific audience" (page 30 of the online specification). The use of original images for magazine covers or articles, websites and advertisements were among the best responses and resulted in a high standard of presentation and a strong sense of engagement. A number of centres submitted a very successful mixture of original and manipulated found images.

There was still concern over those centres which relied entirely on found images. When an original image is used, candidates are likely to consider framing, shot length/angle, mise-en-scène and cropping. These considerations are often ignored when candidates use found images alone to make print advertisements, CD covers and film posters. In one case, a candidate submitted an existing film poster as if it were her own work. This example highlights the necessity of including research and planning material in the submission.

Some of the best work was seen from centres which encouraged a degree of autonomy in the production exercise. This resulted in candidates' strong engagement with the task and successful finished productions.

Centres are reminded that it is essential that the final piece/s are clearly identified for the moderator. In some cases, it was impossible to work out which was the final submission. Centres are asked not to include multiple drafts without comment or annotation. Careful, detailed annotation of drafts and the final outcome of front covers, film posters, DVD cases and CD covers was a feature in the more successful centres.

The evaluative commentary

The evaluative commentaries varied widely, with some centres ensuring that their candidates wrote about their use of research and codes and conventions and analysed the ways in which they had constructed specific representations in their production exercises. The more successful ones were able to reflect on their research and planning and show a clear understanding of the process they went through to produce their final piece. The centres that had completed the research and planning stage with care and precision tended to be the centres with the more detailed commentaries.

Reflection on the success of the exercise was sometimes very well tackled, but in other instances only touched on very briefly, if at all. Some centres had devised a check list for their candidates, based on the assessment criteria in the specification (pages 33–34 of the online specification). This offered candidates guidance through this element of the portfolio and led to some thoughtful evaluations, without being too restricting.

Many centres used handouts 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.

Evidence of research and planning

There were one or two centres that had no physical evidence of planning and research, but instead, had briefly broached the issues in their commentaries. Centres are reminded that this is not what is expected and that this absence of evidence made it more difficult for moderators to agree the marks awarded to the production exercise and the evaluative commentary. There must be clear, separate, physical evidence of planning and research and not just passing comments in the evaluations.

In examples where good research and planning took place the standard of the production and the planning and evaluative commentary were impressive.

Conclusion

There was an excellent variety of analytical and creative work seen for this unit. Candidates had engaged well with the texts and the challenging concept of representation. 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.

Summary of best practice

- Work in the portfolio is presented in the correct order.
- Cover sheets are correctly filled in with candidate numbers, topics, texts and titles; a detailed breakdown of the marks awarded; summative comments which refer to the assessment criteria and the specific candidate's achievement.
- There is detailed annotation on the analytical assignments, production exercises and evaluative commentaries, in order to make it clear to the moderator how the marks have been allocated.
- Clear evidence of the research and planning processes is included in the portfolio.
- There are good levels of skill in the production exercise, using technology and original photography
- Additional information to help support the marks is given, such as whether the candidate used original photography or found images.

Examples of successful B321 tasks 2013

Topic 1: Documentaries

- How is youth represented in *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding* and *American Teen*? Produce two DVD covers for new documentaries that show contrasting representations of young people.

Topic 2: Film Genres

- Compare how the British are represented in *Anuvahood* and *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. Create a theatrical film poster to advertise a new British film, showing two different representations of Britishness.
- Compare the representations of gender and social class in two social realist films: *Fishtank* and *Precious*. Produce a poster for a new social realist film.

Topic 3: Popular Music

- Compare the representation of gender in The Verve's *Bitter Sweet Symphony* and Beyoncé's *Run The World*. Produce a CD cover for a new artist from a genre of your choice.
- Compare how women are represented in two music videos: *Beautiful* by Christina Aguilera and *Stupid Girls* by Pink or *The Only Exception* by Paramore. Produce a CD front and back cover for a new artist.

Topic 4: Celebrity

- Compare the representation of Andy Murray in a range of different media. Produce the magazine front cover and editorial page for a new celebrity magazine.
- Compare the representation of Lance Armstrong in *The Guardian* and the *Bleacher Report*. Produce the front cover and contents page for a new celebrity magazine.

Topic 5: Sport

- Compare how male and female athletes are represented in the *Sunday Mirror*: "Golden Girl Nicola's a knockout" and "Mo's just too good". Design a web page for a sports person.

Topic 6: Soap Opera

- Compare the ways social and cultural issues are represented in two soap operas: *EastEnders* and *Waterloo Road*. Create a magazine article introducing a new character into your favourite soap opera.
- Compare the representation of young people in '*EastEnders*' and '*Hollyoaks*'. Produce a website page for a new character in a soap of your choice.

Topic 9: Advertising

- Compare and contrast the representation of gender in two Gillette advertisements. Design a radio, internet or print-based advertising campaign for a new product of your choice.
- Compare the ways in which men are represented in male cosmetic /grooming product advertisements from the 1960s to the present day. Produce a billboard advertisement for a new male cosmetic product.

Topic 10: Video games

- Compare how women are represented in video games: *Tomb Raider*, *Mario Brothers*, and *Mirror's Edge*. Produce a design for a new female video game character for a platform game and provide a design for the first three screens.

B322 Textual Analysis and Media Studies Topic (Moving Image)

This was the second summer examination using the answer booklet and the improvements noted last summer continued in this series – most candidates allocated their time appropriately over the four questions and answered all four questions, showing remarkable industry in the time allowed.

The change to the format of question one meant that fewer candidates wasted time trying to cover ‘characters’ and ‘events’ separately; more candidates simply covered two conventions then moved on.

Removing the reference to the genre in question two enabled many candidates to focus on the key issue for the question – identifying media language techniques and analysing their connotative effects – though some still wasted time repeating elements from question one.

Future papers will make explicit the instruction to provide two examples for each media language element in question two, as this is only implicit at present in the use of the word ‘examples’.

Question three is still often the least developed answer, but this is improving, helped by the addition of suggestions for possible representation analysis.

Responses to question 4(a) sometimes list a large – often very large – number of scheduling decisions, then either fail to be specific about which they are discussing in depth or fail to discuss any in depth. The format of this question will change in future papers to ask the candidates, in the form of a table, to provide one set of ‘day, time and channel’ data for the one programme or each of the two programmes they are to discuss.

Candidates should be advised:

- to continue writing to the bottom of the page if the answer continues on another page
- to clearly note at the bottom of the page if the answer continues on an additional sheet uses the additional pages provided in the answer booklet
- to give the question number if they continue on an additional sheet or use the additional pages provided in the answer booklet
- never to continue an answer on the page for a different answer (if running out of space they should use additional sheets)
- to hand in their notes to be destroyed by the centre.

Candidates who tried to discuss wide ranging theories by academics such as Stuart Hall often wasted time giving a potted explanation of the theory rather than analysing the extract. Candidates can achieve full marks in this exam with no reference to media theory.

The extract for the June 2013 examination was from *Hot Fuzz* from 1.27.55, as Simon Pegg’s character rides down the High Street, to 1.32.02 after he says ‘Hag!’ This proved an accessible extract with clear – though parodied – generic conventions, obvious use of media language techniques, and an engaging and unusual representational strategy. Some candidates thought that Nic Angel was the villain. This was not penalised, but did lead to some confused responses.

Question 1

This question was again answered well this year. Nearly all candidates were able to identify two conventions. Better answers discussed and exemplified two conventions of the action adventure genre as a whole, such as the hero-villain conflict, the violence of the gun fight, the underdog hero fighting against the odds, the gang of villains, the hero's plucky sidekick, and used terminology such as 'generic convention', 'iconography', 'binary opposition', 'heroic protagonist', and 'villainous antagonists'. Some candidates commented fruitfully on the hybridity of the extract.

Some less successful answers referred to media theory, particularly Propp and Todorov instead of identifying conventions within the extract. Some answers lost marks by failing to establish the heroic nature of the protagonist in the genre, instead proposing the presence simply of protagonists and antagonists as a convention. Occasionally an answer argued why the extract was *not* from the action/adventure genre and failed to establish the conventions that were present.

Question 2

This question was answered well, and better than last year. Most candidates showed a good awareness of the meaning of the four media language elements. Editing was often, but not always, the weakest element. The majority of responses were able to use medium specific terminology, particularly for camerawork and soundtrack.

Weaker answers had a tendency either to simply describe the use of particular techniques without consideration of connotative effect, or to write too generally without reference to specific aspects of the texts.

For soundtrack, many candidates commented on the use of spaghetti western style music to suggest forthcoming action, the use of a sound effect of the horse's hooves, the increase in musical tempo as the fight started, the pause in the soundtrack as the gun is thrown between the two heroes, and the exaggerated sound effects of the gun shots. Fewer candidates confused 'diegetic' and 'non-diegetic' this year, though this confusion was still common. Use of these terms did not always add to clarity or concision. A surprising number of candidates refused to use the term 'music', preferring 'non-diegetic soundtrack'.

For editing, many candidates commented on the use of a montage of the villagers showing their reactions, the shot-reverse shots used during the fight, the slower editing pace at the beginning and the fast-paced editing during the gun fight, and the use of slow motion. Some weaker answers offered unconvincing explanations of the use of special effects, or confused elements of camerawork with editing.

For *mise en scène*, many candidates commented on the use of the apparently peaceful country town setting, the contrasting costume between the heroes and villains, and how the hero's costume suggested power and mystery. Some candidates still seemed unsure how to approach *mise en scène* and gave very descriptive answers with no sense of connotative effects. This fault was especially common when candidates worked through long lists of *mise en scène* elements; candidates should be advised to pick two examples they can easily explain instead of running slavishly through a check-list. Many candidates struggled, for example, to explain the connotative effect of the lighting whereas costume was often well discussed.

For camerawork, many candidates commented on the use of whip pans, the close ups on the villagers' faces, the handheld camera in the fight sequence, tracking shots, the low angle shot of Nic Angel and the high angle shot of the teenagers.

Question 3

This question was much better answered in this session. The parodic nature of the extract seemed to aid representation analysis, as this supplied an already-critical stance towards the representations. Most candidates understood the concept of stereotyping. Many better responses considered gender and age, with higher level answers offering interesting arguments about counter stereotyping.

The list of suggestions proved very helpful. Some candidates started off at level two by discussing gender and generic conventions ('the hero is male as this is a stereotype of the genre') then found they had to adopt a more appropriate response with the elderly, the police, and the English country town. They were forced to think outside the genre to wider media representations and identified a range of stereotypes: the country town as 'peaceful', older people as 'kind and sweet' (in one memorable example as 'sitting in wheelchairs and sucking boiled sweets'), the police as 'lazy' or as 'following procedures and applying the law'. The candidate could then discuss the stereotypical and anti-stereotypical strategy of the extract, often linking this to the comedic effect of such a hyperbolic scene in an untypical location.

Some weaker responses to 'the Police' and 'the English village' suggested that they were typical or counter-typical solely in relation to 'uniforms and guns' or 'a church and village shops'.

Some weaker answers simply repeated generic conventions, exploring the generic typicality of 'heroes' and 'villains' without consideration of social stereotyping. Some very weak answers, for example, discussed the convention that 'villains are always foreign', noted that this did not apply to the extract, and failed to analyse the representations that were present. Such answers could reach level two if they used the concept of stereotyping.

Some otherwise well-written and insightful answers failed to make any reference at all to stereotypes. Such answers failed to progress above level one unless there was an implicit analysis of stereotyping, which would allow access to level two.

Some candidates appeared to misread the question and thought that they were being asked to comment on how the extract represented age, ethnicity, gender and so on, in terms of the number of characters in the clip.

Question 4(a)

Good answers clearly stated at the outset the day, time and channel for each programme, then spent roughly equal time on each of the three elements (but usually weighted slightly more towards 'channel' than the other two elements). Many candidates lost marks due to not giving complete scheduling information.

Better answers used terminology accurately – watershed, inheritance, stripping, channel ethos, PSB – applied to well-chosen contrasting case studies.

Better answers only picked one contemporary scheduling decision for each programme to analyse and did this in detail. They seldom picked very old programmes, discussed audience figures, or stated the date of first transmission (many that did failed to give a day, so lost marks) or the different permutations of any one programme on different channels (e.g. Gavin and Stacey).

Candidates with programmes that were scheduled in branded slots (e.g. a 'comedy zone') often scored more highly as they concentrated on scheduling, not vague assertions about what audiences might or might not be doing at any particular time on any particular day.

Many answers were vague about the channel. ITV1 has rebranded as 'ITV', but 'the BBC' is still not a channel. A large minority of candidates thought the BBC was an example of 'PBS'. Many candidates could refer to the BBC's mission to 'inform, educate and entertain' but struggled to explain how this applied to a comedy programme. References to requirements for British programmes and cultural reflection proved more fertile. Answers on BBC3 and E4 were often specific on channel ethos, but some very repetitive answers compared programmes on both these channels and suffered from lack of contrast.

Some very weak answers picked two programmes on the same channel.

Some answers discussed scheduling on American television, ignoring the requirement in the specification to consider only scheduling on British television.

Some candidates offered their choice of comedy in the form of an initialism throughout the answer; so, for example, NMTB was never actually written as *Never Mind the Buzzcocks* for the entirety of the response. At times the name of the programme was written in full at the start of 4a and continued only as an initialism through to Q4b.

Nearly all candidates wrote on texts that are clearly comedies, with only occasional reference to not clearly comedy texts such as *Power Rangers*, *Glee* and *EastEnders*. Use of the children's film *Mr Stink*, aired on Christmas Eve, provided little scope for a discussion of scheduling.

Question 4(b)

Much as last year, this answer may have been rushed, but nearly all candidates attempted it with some success. Many more candidates this year seemed able to name audience pleasures, but many were not backed up with information from their case study, which left the answers very list-like.

Better answers focused on pleasures. These offered a range of audience pleasures with a wealth of examples. Commonly cited pleasures were: different forms of humour; familiarity (often poorly exemplified); the positioning of the audience as superior to the characters; audiences relating to the setting, the characters and the narrative; escapism (explaining how the text offers this); narrative disruption and resolution; . Better answers briefly explained how a pleasure worked then concentrated on explaining and exemplifying how the text offered.

Some weaker answers gave lengthy discussion of conventions, or referred to Brechtian alienation devices (sometimes even in the German) with only tangential references to the audience pleasures that derive from these. (Many candidates insisted on citing 'schadenfreude' in German, despite the fact that they struggled to spell it and invariably translated it anyway).

Some answers analysed different forms of comedy in depth – slapstick, satire, verbal comedy, and so on – but lost marks as they failed to develop any other pleasures.

As last year, programmes with a strong narrative structure, such as sitcoms, worked better for a single text answer than panel or sketch shows, with stand-up comedy (e.g. Live at the Apollo) proving most difficult.

Some answers struggled to find specific textual exemplification for some pleasures – familiarity, relating to characters, escapism. Better answers always found specific examples for every pleasure. Some very good answers explored no more than three well-chosen pleasures in detail. Candidates who avoid very stereotypical examples (i.e. give examples different to those offered by most candidates using the same text) suggest a more detailed knowledge of the text.

Successful programmes for 4b included *Miranda*, *Blandings* and *The Big Bang Theory*.

B323 Textual Analysis and Media Studies Topic (Print)

This was the second summer examination using the answer booklet and the improvements noted last summer continued in this series – most candidates allocated their time appropriately over the four questions and answered all four questions. Question three is still often the least developed answer, but this is improving. The slight change to the format of question one in the answer booklet did serve its purpose: to reduce repetition in the answers.

Responses to question 4(a) sometimes list a large – often very large – number of scheduling decisions, then either fail to be specific about which they are discussing in depth or fail to discuss any in depth. The format of this question will change in future papers to ask the candidates, in the form of a table, to provide one set of ‘day, time and channel’ data for the one programme or each of the two programmes they are to discuss.

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Candidates who tried to discuss wide ranging theories by academics such as Stuart Hall often wasted time giving a potted explanation of the theory rather than analysing the extract. Candidates can achieve full marks in this exam with no reference to media theory

The extract for the June 2013 examination was from *Pride* magazine – the front cover, two contents pages and the ‘publisher’s letter’ page. This proved an accessible extract despite a possible lack of familiarity with the text. This issue was published just after a set of riots in England and the publisher’s letter engaged with these in an unusually serious way. This contrast with the more frivolous fashion and celebrity content proved fertile territory for analysis. The fact that the extract was once again a women’s magazine did, however, encourage some candidates to conflate the women’s magazine and the lifestyle magazine, which cost them marks in question one.

Question 1

This question was answered less well this year. Better answers discussed and exemplified two conventions of the lifestyle magazine genre as a whole, such as: hybridity of contents, the direct address to the audience; the use of a cover model dominating the front page; the sense of addressing the implied audience's lifestyle; the chatty editor’s letter; the aspirational tone.

Better answers explicitly stated that it was the variety or hybridity of contents that defined a lifestyle magazine; weaker answers simply stated several contents without linking these to conventionality.

Weaker answers often gave a sense of not applying a set of conventions to the text but instead describing it, often emphasising what made it a women's magazine rather than a lifestyle magazine. Other weaker answers described very generalised ‘conventions’, such as ‘there is a masthead at the top’.

Question 2

Most candidates understood what is meant by layout, but fewer answers could discuss connotative effect, many answers resorting to ‘makes it stand out’ or ‘makes it easier to read’. Successful answers often concentrated on symmetry of the front cover and the slightly more cluttered effect created by the placing of the images on the contents pages. Some answers made general statements about layout (e.g. ‘the layout is symmetrical’) without specifying which page they were analysing.

Typography was often answered well. Many better answers discussed the variety of serif and sans serif typefaces used and linked these to connotations such as a mixture of formality and fun. Many candidates analysed the strength of the font used for *Pride*. Weaker answers tended to generalisations, misidentified sans serif and serif fonts, or analysed a feature that contained contrasting typography (e.g. the Publisher’s letter) without specifying which part of the feature they were analysing.

Colour, as usual, was effectively analysed. Most answers linked pink to femininity and many could discuss the use of white, black and orange.

Language use was again well analysed and this was often the strongest part of the answer for question two. Only a few very weak answers failed to give specific examples; some limited their quotations to the words ‘you’ or ‘your’. Most answers gave examples of direct address, imperatives, and alliteration, and most could discuss their connotative effect – though weaker answers used alliteration, for example, as the effect.

Question 3

The majority of successful answers analysed the stereotypes of femininity used in the magazine and many explored how the magazine deliberately offered an alternative representation to some stereotypes of Black Britishness. Some explored norms of heterosexuality and the absence of visibly disabled people, older people and people of Asian origin. There were some interesting discussions of male sex objects. Many better answers noted the representation of successful Black career women and contrasted these to traditional housewife stereotypes. As usual, answers that adopted a critical stance towards the representations analysed more deeply.

Some weaker answers referred solely to the publisher’s discussion of stereotyping in her letter.

Some otherwise well-written and insightful answers failed to make any reference to stereotypes. Such answers failed to progress above level one unless there was an implicit analysis of stereotyping, which would allow access to level two.

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Better answers used terminology accurately – watershed, inheritance, stripping, channel ethos, PSB – applied to well-chosen contrasting case studies.

Better answers only picked one contemporary scheduling decision for each programme to analyse and did this in detail. They seldom picked very old programmes, discussed audience figures, or stated the date of first transmission (many that did failed to give a day, so lost marks) or the different permutations of any one programme on different channels (e.g. Gavin and Stacey).

Candidates with programmes that were scheduled in branded slots (e.g. a ‘comedy zone’) often scored more highly as they concentrated on scheduling, not vague assertions about what audiences might or might not be doing at any particular time on any particular day.

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Question 4(b)

Much as last year, this answer may have been rushed, but nearly all candidates attempted it with some success. Many more candidates this year seemed able to name audience pleasures, but many were not backed up with information from their case study, which left the answers very list-like.

Better answers focused on pleasures. These offered a range of audience pleasures with a wealth of examples. Commonly cited pleasures were: different forms of humour; familiarity (often poorly exemplified); the positioning of the audience as superior to the characters; audiences relating to the setting, the characters and the narrative; escapism (explaining how the text offers this); narrative disruption and resolution; . Better answers briefly explained how a pleasure worked then concentrated on explaining and exemplifying how the text offered.

Some weaker answers gave lengthy discussion of conventions, or referred to Brechtian alienation devices (sometimes even in the German) with only tangential references to the audience pleasures that derive from these. (Many candidates insisted on citing 'schadenfreude' in German, despite the fact that they struggled to spell it and invariably translated it anyway).

Some answers analysed different forms of comedy in depth – slapstick, satire, verbal comedy, and so on – but lost marks as they failed to develop any other pleasures.

As last year, programmes with a strong narrative structure, such as sitcoms, worked better for a single text answer than panel or sketch shows, with stand-up comedy (e.g. Live at the Apollo) proving most difficult.

Some answers struggled to find specific textual exemplification for some pleasures – familiarity, relating to characters, escapism. Better answers always found specific examples for every pleasure. Some very good answers explored no more than three well-chosen pleasures in detail. Candidates who avoid very stereotypical examples (i.e. give examples different to those offered by most candidates using the same text) suggest a more detailed knowledge of the text.

Successful programmes for 4b included *Miranda*, *Blandings* and *The Big Bang Theory*.

B324 Production Portfolio in Media Studies

Please Note: ALL Specification references are from the revised version April 2012, first entry 2014. <http://www.ocr.org.uk/Images/82322-specification.pdf>

Introduction

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. (See pages 15 and 25 of the 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, and a children's programme.
- Some film openings showed a creative flair on the part of candidates, and were presented in a variety of genres – subjects included suspense, supernatural, crime, thriller, war and horror.
- Radio work included magazine extracts which were well produced, and included topics such as general lifestyle, sport, health, celebrity and local events. There were also some scripted radio dramas with sound effects.
- 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 regional events focus.
- 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.

There were in some instances a disproportionately high proportion of 'found images' used in print based briefs (up to 100% in some cases). There needs to be sufficient use of original images, their selection, digital processing and export for use in DTP to allow the candidates to demonstrate their achievement as a number of the Assessment Criteria depend on this (see pages 33–34 of the specification).

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 (see pages 16-17 of the 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 (see pages 17–18 of the 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 (see Research and Planning on page 41, and Evaluation on pages 42–43 of the specification).

In some centres candidates had completed thorough primary audience research as part of their research and planning, using questionnaires, interviews or focus groups. They had collated, processed and interpreted it so as to inform the planning of their own projects. In other cases candidates had confined themselves to secondary research in a theoretical sense, leading more to assumptions rather than convincing conclusions.

Some centres had encouraged candidates to carry out post production audience feedback research, which had resulted in effective interpretation and reflection. Others had only offered assumptions based on the pre production work.

Assessment

Teachers need to refer to specific pieces of evidence in a candidate's portfolio when completing the Controlled Assessment Cover Sheets (CCS339), making sure they have referred to the appropriate assessment criteria (see pages 33–43 of the 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 articulate personal reflection. 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 (see pages 41–43 of the specification).

Some centres had made assessment judgements appropriately, applying the assessment criteria as intended. However, a significant majority had inflated the marks submitted, particularly in the Production element with little justification. It would be wise for centres to review the exemplar portfolios on the OCR website in order to better gauge the national standards expected for this Unit Specification: <http://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/gcse-media-studies-j526-from-2012/>

For some candidates the use of a template had helped them to organise their ideas; however it must be born in mind that sometimes prompt sheets, templates or writing frames can be seen as an end in themselves and thereby inhibit candidate achievement.

All centres are reminded of the changes in the specification for the 2014 entry. In particular Section 4.2.2 (page 26) makes clear what teachers can, or must not do in terms of assisting candidates (for example the ban on using templates, or feedback on drafts).

The sections of the portfolio

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

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

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

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. In the best instances comments were clear, related to the evidence submitted, the assessment criteria, and importantly were personal to the individual candidate. In other cases comments were either omitted completely, or were mere copies from the assessment criteria and did not advance the moderation process at all.

Centres must be able to authenticate candidates' work. Centres that do not complete the required centre authentication form for this unit (CCS160) will have their results held until the exam board has received the required documentation (see page 43). Candidates must identify and credit their sources in all cases and not claim found work as their own (see page 26). There were some instances where centres had permitted that situation to occur. The inclusion of source material in a separated Appendix would be less controversial (see page 17).

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. Teachers need to use the Controlled Assessment Cover Sheet (CCS339) boxes to help differentiate an individual's contributions to the moderator (see page 41). If individual contributions are **not 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 and planning, as well as 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 (see pages 15-16 and 41-43), and is impossible to moderate. 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; however, the assessment criteria remain constant.

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 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 specification on pages 59–60).

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

It would be good practice when submitting presentations (eg PowerPoint, Keynote, Impress), to provide an ancillary copy of the slides in PDF format.

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

Whereas some centres had submitted website work on authenticated disks as required, others had attempted submissions for website, or other briefs via URL using a variety of hosting websites, ranging from Centre based ones, to web hosting or template based sites including Weebly, Wix, YouTube and Facebook. Web based submissions are specifically banned from candidate work by OCR at GCSE, because of the problem of security of candidate work, and online exposure for Controlled Assessment (unlike coursework requirements).

USB memory sticks are not an acceptable way of submitting work: they are unreliable, affected by heat, knocks, subject to electronic interference, and prone to passing computer malware. DVD disks are easy to prepare, stable, reliable, and also cheaper.

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 consulting the OCR website, where exemplar material and additional advice will be available.

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