OCR

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A LEVEL

Moderators' report

MEDIA STUDIES

H409

For first teaching in 2017

H409/03/04 Summer 2022 series

Contents

Introduction

Our moderators' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Advance Information for Summer 2022 assessments

To support student revision, advance information was published about the focus of exams for Summer 2022 assessments. Advance information was available for most GCSE, AS and A Level subjects, Core Maths, FSMQ, and Cambridge Nationals Information Technologies. You can find more information on our [website](#).

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General overview/Introduction

Administration

Administration was generally good, with most centres uploading marks by the deadline. Some incorrect work was uploaded to the Repository; some material was missing from postal entries; some Repository entries sent work by post, but this was the exception rather than the rule. There were some clerical errors.

Many different approaches were taken to submitting the final work and the supporting materials. Some centres still followed the tried and tested model of using blog-hubs to administer candidate submissions and research websites or blogs, which really aided the moderation process. Some submitted via Google sites, which often had issues for opening, for some reason. Some centres had uploaded work via the OCR Repository; however, organisation of Repository submissions varied. Some centres uploaded very well-managed folders which were easy to navigate while others had bundled files together without a clear sense of order in labelling. Large video files are a particular difficulty for many moderators. If the Repository is used, it is helpful for work to be organised according to content (e.g. coversheets/ statements of intent in one .zip folder, final work/ links in a second and then any supporting material in a third). The most efficient use of Repository was the uploading of coversheets and URLs to blogs or other online platforms, which meant work was easily downloaded from the Repository.

The vast majority of centres submitted work in the specified format ("moving image, radio and print production work should be submitted in universal digital formats", Specification p31), following the best practice, which is for centres to upload work to a central hub providing live links in a digital format (e.g. MS Word or PDF file). If a link to a central online hub is not provided, a Word file or PDF submitted via USB and including live links to candidate work is also an effective means of supporting the moderation. A few centres provided a hard copy list of website addresses without offering a digital version, which led to frequent mis-keying of complex URL addresses.

A number of postal submission centres sent all material in hard copy. Several centres sent all their work as separate loose sheets, which risked papers getting in the wrong order.

There were some research blogs where work hosted on external platforms, such as Google Drive, were inaccessible due to password protection and some research materials and Statements of Intent were inaccessible due to candidates setting their own security protocols. A number of centres had password-protected every folder with an individual password, which had to be entered on every page navigated; a single master password would have sufficed. Other centres' work was not available to the moderator until the centre was contacted to unlock it. Several centres required moderators to sign into particular platforms or sites, or even sign up to external sites, which is clearly not appropriate. While work must be submitted in line with JCQ requirements, centres need to make sure it will be accessible to the moderator until the end of the moderation period.

Cover sheets were again completed to a variable standard. The best coversheets included clear, individualised, candidate-specific commentaries that referenced assessment criteria and cited examples from student work guiding the moderator to where these had been met. Less helpful comments lacked depth or detail and such an approach did not really help when identifying why certain marks had been given (something that was particularly evident with digital convergence). In some cases, comments suggested that work should be placed in a different level to that which the marks indicated. In other instances centres asserted that work was excellent/ sophisticated or had addressed "all the requirements of the brief and elements of the production detail" (a particular problem) where this was not the case. Such submissions suggested that external standardisation materials or support had not been accessed by the centre. A few centres simply quoted the assessment criteria without any context or exemplification, which suggests a misunderstanding of the purpose of the NEA coversheet which is to provide the centre with an opportunity to explain why and how the work has been placed in a particular level.

Coversheets of a couple of centres revealed they had misunderstood the marking requirements in relation to the magazine brief, marking the two sets of magazine products as Product 1 and Product 2

and the websites according to the digital convergence criteria. This led to marks which were significantly inaccurate. Centres must make sure that they fully review all the rubric relating to the NEA to prevent this kind of misunderstanding. Many coversheets did not include reference to unassessed participants, despite this being a requirement of the NEA submission. Most centres submitted research and planning, although some of this was very limited.

A significant number of centres did not indicate which two pages of the websites had been assessed (where more than two had been created) while others appeared to have assessed more than one of the linked pages.

Some centres did not include an email address for the teacher completing the cover sheet. While this isn't compulsory it does make things much easier for the moderator if there are any issues with a centre's submission as it means they can go straight to the teachers rather than going through the exams officer.

For this session only, prototype productions were accepted and a significant number of these were submitted. In most cases the supporting materials supplied by candidates and the centre's coversheet comments made the intentions clear. Some prototypes had very limited supporting material, usually leading to an over-marking by centres.

The guidelines clearly stated that where prototypes were submitted there should be supporting evidence provided by candidates, indicating how the product would be realised as a finished text. In some cases, this was done really well with, for example, detailed annotations of print texts and website pages and very detailed storyboards or animatics edited to the music track. In a significant number of submissions, there was no supporting evidence provided at all, only brief comments by the teachers on the cover sheets, which made it difficult for the moderators to agree the marks allocated.

Statements of Intent are also required from each candidate. Not only are they a compulsory element, but they are also essential documents for candidates to work through in order to focus their thinking about how exactly they will: address the brief; target their audience; include the production detail and create convergence between their two products. Candidates who did not submit a Statement of Intent must have 10 marks deducted, yet not all centres remembered to do this. SOIs varied hugely in quality. Some were incredibly detailed, going into great depth about how and why particular effects would be created and how these ideas linked to ideas explored elsewhere in the course (for example, theorists or specific products). The very best made clear links between the two main products and explained how digital convergence would connect the two. Many statements were unbalanced, with a lot of detail about the offline product but very little about the online, suggesting that these candidates saw a hierarchical relationship between the two. Some candidates submitted incomplete statements in which the website was not mentioned at all; that tended to be reflected in their production outcomes, with websites which were nowhere near the standard of their Product 1s. Digital convergence was sometimes only represented by a line or two; some candidates did not seem to fully understand what this element of the project meant and referred solely to social media rather than the broader intersections between the products.

As noted above, the logging of unassessed participants also varied. Some candidates scrupulously noted down what everyone they worked with had done and how they were directed. Mostly, participants were just named without any responsibility being identified but in many cases this section had not been completed – a significant omission which suggested that some centres have still not fully understood the reforms which have taken place in the assessment of media studies.

Interpretation of the Marking Criteria

It has been three years since centres have submitted NEA and so it was perhaps not surprising that the application of the marking criteria by a number of centres was not in line with the agreed national standard. In nearly all cases this was due to centres being over-generous (significantly so in some cases) with the marking of all three aspects of candidates' work.

This was particularly true where candidates did not meet the requirements of their selected brief or elements of the production detail. In some cases, the submissions by some candidates were significantly less that the brief required, such as only one magazine cover and contents page produced, only one web page, or an audio or audio-visual text well below the 3 minutes required. In such cases a mark in Level 1 is appropriate, but such work was often given marks in Level 2 or 3, something that it was not possible to agree with.

Centres are advised to make sure thorough internal standardisation is conducted before submission of final marks. This is particularly relevant where centres have work responding to three or more briefs. In some cases, it was difficult for moderators to agree with centres' orders of merit due to disparity in the marking of candidates' work when they had followed different briefs.

Standards varied substantially, from excellent work, rightly placed at the top of Level 5, to less successful submissions, mainly placed in Level 2-3, although some Level 1 work was seen. In general, quality was reasonably high (most of the work seen by this moderator was at least adequate, with the top and bottom Level 4 borders remaining particularly popular). As noted elsewhere, marking often seemed to be a little generous particularly at the upper end of the rank orders. This was mainly due to centres not considering where candidates had missed certain elements of the production detail, which precludes marks in Level 5 from being given, or where the quality of the work had perhaps not been fully factored in. There did not seem to be a particular pattern to this generosity, although marking of websites was perhaps a little more variable than that of the offline products.

Feedback on the Moderated Sample

The magazine brief was slightly more popular than music videos this session; followed by a few centres (or, more frequently, individual candidates within centres) opting for the television brief. A small minority of centres submitted radio work.

The quality ranged from excellent to limited – in general, the best work had clearly been supported by focused research, effective, detailed planning, attention to detail and an effective, sustained central concept based solidly on the requirements and details of the brief. Less successful work demonstrated little evidence that research had been applied or that effective planning had been undertaken, with some work being very simplistic and not reflecting a two-year course. Research and planning is not an assessed element but is a requirement as part of the submission and essential for successful productions. Although the majority of candidates undertook research and planning, detailed preparatory work was notably less evident than in 2019. Some of the best planning referred synoptically to other elements from the course, very much in the spirit of the qualification overall and demonstrating excellent practice. Where candidates had done this, work was generally more successful.

All briefs required the representation of at least two different social groups. Some candidates had clearly thought hard about this and planned productions very well, with their images and coverlines in magazines; characters in music videos and television productions; and presenters and contributors in radio. However, in a large number of productions this appeared to be almost an afterthought, or 'tick box exercise', with the token male or female being the most common.

Most of the preparatory material presented was either on codes and conventions, basic audience segmentation, institution or pre-production work. There was little analysis of representational issues other than a brief reference in Statements of Intent. Very few candidates, as an example, analysed the representational tropes, stereotypes, myths, connotations or cultural meanings attached to their own images or text. A few better candidates picked up on issues such as 'hetero-normativity' in the music videos. 'Real life' was rarely interrogated as a construct.

Magazines

The magazine work provided some very lively, informed and creative responses to the brief of 'real life' stories magazine, with thoughtful representations and careful consideration of target audience. A significant minority of the magazines were only tangentially related to the "real life stories" requirement of the brief. It would seem that many candidates focused on 'real life' rather than real life stories and as a result productions tended to be lifestyle magazines, with offerings focused on sport or music, for example. A number of candidates also ignored the specified target audience, actively addressing another audience of their own choosing, often quite a niche audience.

In the best examples candidates had achieved everything required by the brief, with some well-considered and appropriate photography being used and an overall design aesthetic being carried across both editions of the magazine, including the contents pages, and to the websites. Such magazines had clearly been inspired by existing examples from Bauer and captured a sense of verisimilitude. Most magazines understood the requirement to appeal to the target audience and there were some inventive approaches to this.

It was very common for moderators to see front covers which included images with no direct address and with a lack of coverlines, or with only one or two included. Font sizes were often either inappropriately small (for coverlines), or over large (for issue dates). In some cases, it was not clear which was the main coverline, usually signified by being the largest font on the cover after the masthead, and this didn't always anchor the meaning of the main image, which is conventional. In a small number of cases candidates included vertical coverlines and/or masthead, which is extremely unconventional.

In general, less successful magazines either missed key elements from the brief, did not adhere to the codes and conventions of the form or did not show understanding of genre. For example, some magazines were not aimed at the target audience (including stories or characters which would be of no interest to 16–25-year-olds). Others demonstrated a lack of consideration of the need for representation from two different social groups (several magazines were seen where models were of the same age, gender, and ethnicity). Some candidates did not place models in different settings on the cover, even when the backgrounds had been Photoshopped. A number lacked reference to the website, failing to draw attention to this either on the cover or the contents page (a call to action was specified in the brief); some magazines used QR codes with no context.

The most successful magazines linked the coverlines to the contents page; the less successful ones included little or no copy other than titles in the contents page, did not consider the leading and typeface for the coverlines or created small mastheads, which lacked impact. Some did not include the dateline on the cover and others did not refer to the fact that they were the first two editions, both of which were requirements of the brief. Some magazines had excellent front covers but had less effective contents pages. Indeed, contents pages tended to be the least successful aspect of candidates' work for this brief. Some contents pages duplicated text, stories or imagery/ models across both issues; it was very common to see pages which only contained four or five articles, which then led to the use of inappropriately large font sizes, combined with overlong text, sequential page numbers for articles, no sub-headings, little or no copy and poorly considered fonts.

Many contents pages would have benefitted from a greater number of images as well and page numbers on the photographs, anchoring them to the written contents. It was concerning to see work which was allocated a Level 4 or 5 mark which showed no understanding of how a column structure is used on magazine contents pages.

Music videos

The music video brief was the second most popular. Some very inventive pieces were seen, demonstrating excellent understanding. The best products showed that candidates had understood the specific requirements of the brief relating to the love song element, the representation of the target audience and the industrial context, which had been researched thoroughly before planning their own pieces. Candidates who produced a 'Pitch' for the video from the 'director' to the 'artist' or record company tended to do well. Location work was generally effective, although quite a few pieces were seen which were shot in centres, with little attempt to disguise the setting; this only really worked where candidate had built their narratives around the location.

Most of the videos seen by moderators were narrative-based with no performance. While this is acceptable, generally these did not allow candidates to demonstrate their skills to the highest degree as they were significantly lacking in a variety of shots and there was no consideration of, for example, editing to the beat of the track. It was also not uncommon for the narrative of the video to bear no relation to the lyrics or meaning of the song. The best videos incorporated performance and narrative and it was really pleasing to see a high degree of accuracy in lip synching. Some, though, would have benefitted from a greater variety of shot types in the performance aspect of the video.

Subjects of the narrative were usually a relationship breaking up or remembering a previous relationship. A few conceptual videos were seen, but these did not always fit the genre.

Most videos featured two social groups (although occasionally this was shoe-horned in with cameos at the end of the videos, not really in the spirit of the brief) and most did reflect the love song aspect.

Less successful music videos generally either missed key elements from the brief or did not adhere to the codes and conventions of the form. Some examples were: tracks that were not love songs or videos which did not explore the theme of love (sometimes centres went to quite inventive lengths to justify the choices which suggested that they themselves were not convinced); not mentioning the name of the band/ artist/ track at the start or end of the video; editing which did not match the pace or rhythm of the chosen track; narratives which lacked a clear through-line (for example, pieces which were effectively just characters wandering through the woods or hanging out in the city); pieces where performance footage was used in a perfunctory manner or where lip-synch was not fully effective; camerawork which did not demonstrate the level of skill, finish or excellence required for Level 5 marks to be secured.

In a small number of cases, it was questionable whether songs chosen could be said to be love songs; and some songs were clearly not 'radio edits' with explicit language throughout which was felt to be inappropriate for public examination.

A significant number of music videos did not refer to Universal and/ or did not direct viewers to the website. This clearly had an impact on marks, particularly for digital convergence.

Radio

Radio was a minority choice. While some productions heard by moderators had good, consistent audio levels and were generally well edited, many productions were lacking in content. It was not uncommon to just hear a presenter's voice for most of the 3-minute opening, with additional voice(s) contributing only a small amount. The use of a menu at the start of the programme, outlining the content of the show, would have also clearly established the magazine programme genre, but this was lacking in a number of productions.

Additional content such as station idents and jingles; sound effects; and audience interaction would have lifted the quality of productions making them more diverse and allowing candidates to really demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, as well as technical skills, to better effect. Other areas which were not so successful included: over-loud music beds that overpowered the speech track (although the use of music beds was not really conventional for the genre anyway); voices recorded at different levels; and "phone-ins" where the phoned-in voice was clearly in the same room.

A few misunderstood the brief, for example: placing the product in an independent music station; making it a segment of a music show; creating the 3-minute piece as the entire show rather than the opening. Other shows consisted of an interview with no introduction to the show (or the presenter) and no teasers for other content. In at least one case the website was solely for the radio station and did not mention the show at all.

Television

A fairly small number of submissions responded to the television brief. Some of these were excellent, with the conventions of E4 and the genre being met well. Interpretations ranged from pastiches of *Big Brother* to pseudo game shows and "fly-on-the-wall" style docu-soaps. The most successful pieces were carefully edited and captured the manufactured drama of the form, as well as the slightly absurdist humour which is a convention of the genre.

Others were lacking in content and variety of shot types and were not clearly the opening of programmes, as they often omitted a title and introduction, and in some cases E4 branding. Again, more thorough research would have been beneficial before candidates started planning their productions. Less successful submissions either did not capture the reality element of the brief (for example, a pure game show with no consideration of the real lives of the contestants) or pieces which used long, unedited takes (for example, of sporting practices) with a shoe-horned narrative. Very few of these shows mentioned E4 (even as an on-screen graphic) and hardly any included any reference to the website.

Other areas which were not so successful included: poor sound levels on dialogue; music overwhelming the dialogue; video being pixelated because of either being recorded at a low resolution or being recorded at night with low quality cameras; the absence of captions or on-screen graphics where these would be appropriate; overlong pre-show sequences focusing on adverts or sponsorship bumpers.

Online products

Online products were Product 2 in all four briefs. Some candidates managed to explore the cross-media aspects of each brief very well, with excellent links being made between products. Some candidates had clearly thought hard about website content and produced some very good podcasts and interviews, but it was common to see very brief 'moving head' videos or blooper reels which couldn't really be called bloopers, just not good takes.

Many candidates sampled had produced very unbalanced pieces, submitting excellent Product 1s paired with less successful websites. The two products are each worth the same number of marks, so it is essential that candidates spend sufficient time on the websites, that they include the required production details, sufficient content and that they are clearly convergent with the first product. The most successful websites were well researched and planned in order to create the level of verisimilitude required for the work to be marked in the higher levels. This is always true for all products, but this was particularly the case for websites, which sometimes looked very basic and did not fit the conventions of the Product 1 they were linked to - or indeed the broader conventions of websites.

A notable proportion of centres marked the website work at Level 5 with little justification; the wording of the Level 5 marking criteria implies a certain level of quality ("sophisticated"; "highly developed"; "highly appropriate"; "accomplished", etc.), yet it was difficult to relate those descriptors with some of the material it was applied to by centres, particularly where websites consisted of a couple of photos, a small amount of text and a mocked-up store page. Formatting was often an issue, with some candidates giving little thought to the aesthetics of website design. Again, it sometimes appeared as if centres were approaching the websites as an ancillary product rather than as a media product be marked at the same level as the offline artefact.

Almost all the websites seen by this moderator were created using Wix. Most video work was hosted on YouTube, with some candidates using Wix's in-built video streaming and one or two using Vimeo (which was possibly a more reliable alternative). Most embedded material worked well.

Some superb examples were seen, going beyond the specifics of the brief in terms of the amount of material included, both in terms of the visuals and the copy. Such examples made it evident that candidates had considered real-world examples of websites and had applied this knowledge effectively. These tended to be for the magazine brief, although some of the reality TV and music websites were also impressive. Such candidates had clearly appreciated that the website is worth the same number of marks as Product 1 and had, as such, put in an equivalent amount of time in creating it. These sites exhibited effective, carefully constructed original photography and well-considered copy; they often captured the tone appropriate to the needs of the intended audience, with a degree of sophistication being clear and with a wide range of representations. Crucially, such sites did not rely on Wix's own images, and these candidates had adapted the templates to suit the specific needs of the project.

Nevertheless, the websites remain the element of the assessment where the quality was most variable; a significant proportion included very little content, consisting of not much more than the animated background of a Wix template with a couple of images slotted in with no consideration of layout.

In general, less successful websites either demonstrated a lack of attention to detail or missed key elements of the brief or codes and conventions of the form. Some examples included: sites which did not include a menu bar, where the menu bar was hidden or where the menu only consisted of the two assessed pages; sites where the linked page was virtually blank or included text but no image; sites where it was difficult to find the second (linked) page or where candidates had only created one scrolling page with internal links (although this is how some websites operate, it did not meet the requirements of the brief, which explicitly requires two individual pages); sites which did not include embedded audio/video, or where the embedded material was not original; the use of generic Wix backgrounds, sometimes completely unsuitable for the project being undertaken; the unedited use of template materials on assessed pages rather than the candidate creating bespoke imagery and writing their own text; sites which relied on found images; sites which reused the same images on both pages; and sites which did not introduce the artist, magazine or show.

Some of the music video sites had a linked page that was either a tour schedule or a merch shop which had limited original content; in the case of merch pages, most used obviously found images and these had been adapted with branding, but centres should think about using original images.

Some candidates who undertook the radio and TV briefs slightly misunderstood that the website is for the show and not the channel. One excellent pastiche of the More4 website was seen, for example, but this consisted almost solely of found images; the actual show the candidate had created was relegated to a single image and a line of text. Centres are advised to direct their candidates to the fine detail of the brief.

Digital convergence

Digital convergence was explored both directly and indirectly and was often very successful. However, a significant number of pieces were seen which did not include direct traffic between both products.

Where convergence was effective, the use of imagery, logos and models across products clearly demonstrated that the overall branding had been considered, with an emphasis on promoting the websites/products across both forms. Product 1s were often overt in using the "call to action" to direct their readers, listeners or viewers to content on the website (for example, a link at the end of the video, a reference in a voiceover or copy on the cover/ contents pages of the magazines) and the websites were sometimes effective in their use of cross-media links (for example, featuring the front page of the current edition or embedding the video/radio show and highlighting specific content in the partner product.) There was also some very effective consideration of how to interact with the target audience (for example, contact forms, exclusive offers, social media feeds, partnership deals and sponsorships, etc.). Subscription panels were often used, which was good, the most effective being a pop up when the site opened. The best work really did consider the convergence between the two products, plugging the digital version of the magazine and clearly soliciting stories from the audience, for example. Many productions could also have made more use of social media, for example creating posts which then appeared on their websites.

There were many examples where there was a lack of convergence. Examples included: products which did not mention the website at all (most prevalent in music videos, where even a caption at the end would have worked, but surprisingly common in the reality TV work as well); websites which did not link directly to Product 1 (mostly magazines, although one or two music videos sites did not include or embed the video – a screengrab from YouTube was not an acceptable alternative) or with little or no imagery taken from the partner product; logos on websites which did not match those on the partner product; models or actors on the website which were not used in the partner product; features on the website which were not mentioned in the partner product (mostly magazines).

Some radio productions addressed this issue extremely well in their audio production, referencing the website a number of times and encouraging the audience to contribute, but this encouragement was often lacking on the website itself.

Overall, there was some very creative work seen by moderators. It was concerning to see a lot of work which did not meet the requirements of the selected briefs and production detail, especially where this was not acknowledged sufficiently in either centres' comments or marks. The specification clearly states that for a Level 5 mark candidates' work must be 'an excellent realisation of the chosen brief that addresses all the requirements of the brief and includes all elements of the production detail'.

For future submissions centres are advised to make sure candidates are clearly focused on all aspects of the selected brief and that appropriate research is conducted into the genre they are about to plan and produce, which will then result in more conventional and appropriate productions.

Candidates who did well generally did the following:	Candidates who did less well generally did the following:
- researched and planned effectively - engaged thoroughly with the Statement of Intent - practised the technology - followed the brief closely in terms of genre, institutional context, target audience, employing the relevant codes and conventions - included all production detail - produced two strong products and considered carefully the way digital convergence would work between the two.	- had not completed research and planning - presented a perfunctory Statement of Intent or did not submit one - lacked control of relevant technologies - did not employ the relevant codes and conventions of the set brief - ignored the set target audience or institutional context - did not include all/any of the required production detail - produced two unequal products, not considering the breadth of ways digital convergence could be constructed.

Most common causes of centres not passing

Candidates not following the brief.

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