

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/01
Foundation Portfolio

Key messages

In order to successfully complete this coursework component, candidates should:

- keep a detailed blog showing the development of the project, their final artefact meeting the requirements of their chosen brief, and a creative critical reflection upon their work
- aim to complete these elements to a high standard, demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, research and planning, and appropriate skilled use of media tools
- ensure the blog remains online and easily accessible throughout the examination series.

Individual Candidate Record Cards must be completed with clear comments to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective and strand. If candidates have worked in groups, comments must reflect individual contributions to projects.

General comments

This was the second session of the revised 9607 syllabus. Centres and their cohorts continue to work under great stress with lock-downs and unprecedented levels of remote learning. On the whole candidates produced good quality work in very difficult circumstances. Despite restrictions on contact and movement, candidates have risen to the challenge and produced some creative work. Many continue to use the pandemic as a source of inspiration, employing close family members as actors or models to produce some very professional artefacts.

All centres for this series have taken on board the new elements of the syllabus, namely reworded Assessment Objectives, mark criteria, and a reduction to the total number of marks. It is important that centres continue to keep up to date with changes in the syllabus by regularly checking the School Support Hub and reading, and acting upon, any 'Syllabus Change' documents.

On the whole centres engaged well with this component and candidates produced some commendable work, demonstrating detailed research into existing magazines and film openings, which fed into the planning and construction of their own media products. Many candidates demonstrated high levels of skill in the use of media tools, in both the products and in the creative critical reflections. In the best work, candidates combined their knowledge and understanding of conventions from all aspects of the media products with a detailed and thorough blog, which provided evidence of the processes they undertook.

Comments on specific tasks

Blogs

Sadly, many centres chose not to produce blog hubs (a centre blog or web page with candidates' names and numbers hyperlinked to their work); even if there are only two entries the use of a hub helps teachers monitor candidates' work and aids the moderation process. All centres should follow this good practice and clearly transcribe the URL of the hub on the Individual Candidate Record Cards. All hyper-links should be checked carefully by centres to ensure that they are working.

Over the last three months blogging has become more difficult for some candidates after Blogger made a policy decision to close accounts for those under the age of 18. For many years we recommended the use of Blogger but are no longer able to do so with any confidence. In its place there are a range of alternatives available to centres, such as Wordpress or Google Sites. Many centres also choose to use website building platforms such as Wix or Weebly. These platforms can be visually impressive but often lack the functionality of dedicated blogging platforms. If centres do use website building applications for blogging it is very important that candidates organise their work effectively, using appropriate menu titles.

The most effective blogs are organised so that they are read in a clear chronological order, preferably labelled with date stamps. The finished product (film opening or magazine pages) should be the first thing seen as the blog is opened so that it is clear to moderators which is the final version, and all elements should be clearly labelled. The best blogs are comprehensive, with candidates posting meaningful posts on a regular basis. Some candidates produced upwards of fifty meaningful posts. The most effective blogs demonstrated the whole process of the project from initial idea, through research into similar products, planning, production and creative critical reflection. The least effective blogs were those presented on poorly-organised websites, with heavily descriptive posts that lacked meaningful reflection or evaluation of the process of production.

Whichever platform centres choose to use they should consider the security of these and the possibility that they could be plagiarised or amended after submission. Therefore, platforms such as Google Sites should be considered as these can be password protected. If passwords are used these should be made available to the moderator.

All elements of the portfolio must be online, either on or linked to the blog for the moderation period. Much time was spent contacting centres to make work available for moderation after the submission deadline. Some centres continue to use files that need to be downloaded from a Google Drive: Centres must not allow candidates to do this for security reasons.

Some centres are still sending moderators DVDs, USB sticks and printouts in support of their online work, despite repeated requests for this practice to cease. Moderators only use online material as required by the syllabus; physical materials are not used for moderation.

Creative Critical Reflections

The new mark scheme draws heavily on the assessment of the Creative Critical Reflection (CCR). Therefore, candidates need to fully address the four set questions using a range of digital applications to demonstrate their skill, knowledge and understanding. Assessment Objective (AO) 2 calls upon candidates to analyse and evaluate their own work. Marks for this are awarded across both the CCR and the blog but the criteria explicitly refer to engaging with the set questions. If candidates do not engage with all of the questions it is difficult to move beyond level 2. The fourth strand of AO3 awards marks purely for the technical and creative skills used to communicate ideas through the CCR. Therefore, centres should not give high level marks for this strand to candidates who produce CCRs that do not employ creative approaches to presenting this element.

There continues to be some excellent use of multi-media applications making use of a range of sources taken from the production process to fully explore the four set questions. The most successful candidates have allocated adequate time to the CCR and considered it an integral part of their portfolio; the least successful have rushed it and/or considered it a necessary chore following their production. Centres should encourage candidates to give equal value to each of the four questions. Some candidates start with a comprehensive and creative response to question 1 and regress to finish with a thin response to question 4.

Research and Planning

The third strand of AO3 relates directly to the candidate's research and planning, and how this has led to the construction of the final product. Therefore, all research and planning materials should be posted to candidate blogs and made accessible to the moderator.

The most effective research is that completed either individually or as part of a group independently, clearly relevant to the final product; in these the candidate is able to articulate how their research models have informed their production. The least effective research is that where the whole class has analysed the same text, especially when these texts have little or no relevance to the final product. Some candidates presented research into magazines when following the video brief and vice versa. This is relevant if presented as demonstrating the candidate's choice of brief but not as preparation for construction of the opposite brief.

There is no prescribed list of planning materials, but candidates should clearly demonstrate the process of production via their blog. The process should reflect professional practice where possible so should include those documents associated with magazine or film production. The most successful candidates present a wide range of materials which clearly show the development of the project. The least successful tend towards generalised descriptive comments about what they did, often in a diary-like format.

Production

Products are primarily assessed across the first two strands of AO3. Marks should be awarded for the application of technical skills and how these are used to communicate meaning. Products should demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding of media language and key concepts.

Magazines

Very few magazine briefs were submitted this series. Those candidates who did attempt this brief generally fulfilled the requirements, with understanding of features of design, layout, font choice and size in evidence. Some candidates completed well organised and considered photo shoots resulting in some excellent original images. However, others would still benefit from support in this area. There still needs to be a wider range of appropriate images produced with some candidates simply presenting the minimum number of images required rather than considering what their magazine actually needed. Contents pages continue to be an issue with many needing to reflect the full content of the proposed magazine rather than just the pages they were going to submit: it is recommended that candidates continue to compare their products to real magazine pages during the production process, noting differences and subsequently making changes. Double page spreads require candidates to have had some training in journalistic technique: copy was often poorly proofread and, in some instances, meaning was not clearly communicated.

Whilst some centres continue to invest in appropriate technical tools for construction of media products, some candidates still need more support in building their skills with dedicated DTP software such as InDesign, Quark Xpress, Affinity Publisher, etc.

Opportunities for interim feedback need to be built into the task so that candidates can benefit from the critical eye of peers and teachers, particularly in relation to how far they have carried through their research of codes and conventions into their own products. Analysis and evaluation of candidates' own work is an important element of the new mark scheme. Weaker productions often appear to be based on little or inappropriate research into existing products, sometimes taken from genres other than those of the proposed product.

Film openings

The video brief continues to be the most popular for this series, with the most effective products being carefully researched and planned. For the best film openings candidates had researched professional work relevant to their own genre choice and had developed a systematic understanding of the institutional conventions of opening titles. Many candidates had successfully adapted their productions to take into account country specific Covid-19 regulations. It was pleasing to see the creativity in overcoming issues, especially those involving isolation where many candidates switched to domestic drama using their families as actors.

It is also pleasing to see centres giving their candidates more opportunities to use appropriate technology. Many are showing the development of skills by producing and presenting well-constructed preliminary exercises which not only focus on camerawork but also some lighting and sound recording techniques. However, some well-constructed openings are still being let down by a lack of consideration of the importance of light and an effective soundscape.

When candidates work in groups, as permitted by the syllabus, it is important that all members' roles are clearly identifiable and that the centre has allocated marks appropriate to those roles. Comments on Individual Candidate Record Cards should clearly identify how marks have been allocated according to candidate roles.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/02 Media Texts and Contexts

Key messages

Section A is a compulsory question, in which candidates must analyse an extract from a TV drama and consider how meaning is constructed, as well as the specific representations of individuals, groups, events, or places through the technical codes of camerawork, editing, mise-en-scène and sound. An understanding of technical codes in moving image media is essential for candidates to answer the question, which was based on an extract from *Bodyguard*.

Section B requires candidates to answer one of two optional questions on one media industry they have studied, adapting and applying their knowledge. Candidates should support their responses using examples taken from the contemporary media landscape.

General comments

There were many strong responses to both sections of the paper with several candidates showing evidence of thorough preparation, writing at length and supporting points with examples and appropriate use of accurate terminology. While contemporary examples were used in **Section B** to illustrate points, often candidates would generalise about their chosen case studies. The new mark scheme requires candidates to engage with theory and current media debate, and it was encouraging to see many centres engage with these requirements.

Section A

Question 1

Analyse how the extract from *Bodyguard* constructs meaning, including the specific representations of individuals, groups, events or places, through the following technical elements:

- camera shots, angles, movement and composition
- sound
- mise-en-scène
- editing.

There was evidence of sound understanding of technical skills, with most candidates able to identify a wide range of elements accurately and with ease. Technical knowledge was often impressive across all four areas. However, some candidates simply identified elements and did not develop their answers much further when it came to exploring what the impact of these technical elements would have upon the viewer. This did not allow for opportunities to explore meaning and representation, and subsequently these candidates were unable to achieve higher marks. Alternatively, some candidates could easily identify meaning, but lacked the accurate use of technical language of the conventions of moving image to underpin their analysis. Weaker candidates merely narrated what is seen on screen, leading to limited responses, rather than providing a deeper exploration of the connotations of micro elements employed. In many cases, the core concept of representation was ignored, with candidates superficially focusing on the atmosphere of the extract. Centres should focus on the demands of the 5 strands of the mark scheme, ensuring that candidates are aware of concepts of representation, the exploration of social significances, and how to analyse texts underpinned with key theories and appropriate media terminology.

There were many excellent responses at the higher end of the range, highlighting candidates' understanding of the ways in which meaning and representation is constructed through the use of different technical areas. These were often very sophisticated, analytical responses demonstrating an understanding of how meaning

and representation is created, coupled with an excellent use of technical terminology. Often, candidates were able to link the technical codes with analysis of the potential representations of terrorists as stereotypically represented from BAME communities, the white male saviour, the stereotypical hero, some representations of women as weak such as the train guard, or maternal with the depiction of the woman tasked with looking after Budd's children, female empowerment with the policewoman in charge, and representations of power and authority.

Less successful answers often featured areas of common weaknesses. These include: identifying technical codes, but not exploring how meaning is created; the tendency towards narrative or descriptive responses, rather than analysis; repeated points throughout or reduced analysis to one word; inaccurate use of terminology (for example using the term 'jump cut' or 'switch' instead of 'cut'). Some candidates managed to successfully apply theory in their responses (e.g. Propp, Campbell, Barthes), which was very encouraging when employed appropriately. Sometimes candidates explained theories, rather than actually linking to specific discussions of representation in the text, which should be avoided. Weaker responses tended to take each micro element and address it separately, whereas more sophisticated responses usually employed a more synthesised and holistic approach to the analysis of individuals/groups, themes, or meanings.

Candidates responded evenly on all four micro elements.

Section B

General comments

It was very encouraging to see many candidates engage with a range of recent and relevant case studies and media debates and researching case studies that are recent and relevant to their interests and the question. However, there were a significant number of responses without any case study material at all, evidencing little more than a layman's understanding of the key concepts of audiences and institutions, often referencing very outdated texts. Several responses tended towards giving a potted history of the institution or medium, which was not credit-worthy, given that the focus is on recent (text first published within five years of the examination date) and relevant examples. Some candidates were limited by their case studies, having only a study of an independent and a blockbuster product from which to shape their answer. These responses did not fully address the question, providing a generalised overview of the two case studies, rather than addressing the stem of the question. Candidates could be given more freedom to research each area outlined in the specification, building up resources and case studies from each area (and perhaps even across various industries), which would better equip them to engage more meaningfully with **Section B**.

Question 2

To what extent is profit more important than creativity to media companies?

This question often invited responses around the often lack of creativity evident with blockbuster films. Most case studies tended to focus on the film industry resulting in some accomplished responses. Very often the Marvel Cinematic Universe was cited as a case study with various independent films for contrast. It was disconcerting to see references to Titanic, Avatar and the Blair Witch project in quite a number of responses. The syllabus states that case studies should primarily focus on texts which are first published with five years of the examination year, and this fact has been stressed frequently. Whilst these films might be used to provide context, they are no longer at the forefront of film production techniques, and their marketing is not comparable with modern films. Candidates who rely on case studies which primarily focus on these texts are likely to struggle to move beyond the lowest levels of the mark scheme. The most interesting and engaging responses were from the games industry, as they were often quite personal, and well supported with detailed and relevant case study knowledge.

The strongest responses displayed direct engagement with the question, with comprehensive evidence from case studies and a diversity of texts and institutions offered. Often candidates were able to engage around what creativity may be, inspiration and democratization of the creative and technological processes, auterism, franchises and sequels, freedoms and constraints, niche and mainstream audiences, and manufacture vs art. In weaker responses relevant media theory was largely ignored, resulting in the lack of any informed critical debate.

Question 3

‘There are no such things as ‘local audiences’ any more; all audiences are global.’ To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Responses to this question were a little more confident than those to **Question 2**. A good number of responses were technically informed around the debate and were equipped with relevant case studies. Many were able to provide case study material and argue the impact of the internet in secure and engaging global audiences, global distribution practices, the ubiquity of social media, mass/niche/passive and active audiences, Long Tail Theory, alternatives to mainstream and global media and event viewing. Again, some of the stronger responses were able to apply media theory (Curran, Seaton et al) to their critical debate. Weaker responses tended to focus solely on the concept of marketing or an oversimplified notion that social media is free, rather than audience behaviours.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/03 Advanced Portfolio

Key messages

In order to successfully complete this coursework component, candidates should:

- complete one of the four set briefs
- keep a detailed blog showing the development of the project, their three final artefacts meeting the requirements of their chosen brief, and a critical reflection upon their work
- aim to complete these elements to a high standard, demonstrating knowledge and understanding of the key concepts, research and planning, and appropriate skilled use of media tools
- reflect upon their work both in blog posts and the critical reflection
- ensure the blog remains online and easily accessible throughout the examination series.

Individual Candidate Record Cards must be completed with clear comments to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective and strand. If candidates have worked in groups, comments must reflect individual contributions to projects.

General comments

This was the second session of the revised 9607 syllabus and most centres have taken on board the new elements of the syllabus; in this case the new Assessment Objectives, mark criteria, reduced total marks available, briefs with new minor tasks – including the requirement to produce a branded social media page rather than a website, and a new essay format for the critical reflection. It is important that centres keep up to date with changes in the syllabus. To that end they should regularly check the School Support Hub and read, and act upon, any ‘Syllabus Change’ documents.

Centres and their cohorts have had another very difficult term due to the pandemic and are once again to be congratulated on producing a high standard of work in very difficult circumstances. Despite restrictions on contact and movement, candidates have risen to the challenge and produced some very professional submissions for this component. Many candidates presented detailed and focused research into appropriate existing media, using skills, knowledge and understanding gained over the complete course to effectively plan and construct their own products. Most demonstrated good levels of skill in the use of media tools in video, print and online production. Critical reflections demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the subject and the most effective were able to clearly reflect upon their own work.

Comments on specific tasks

Blogs

The number of centres creating blog hubs continues to increase but many are still not doing so. Centres are reminded that this is good practice and that a blog hub (a blog post or webpage containing hyperlinks to all of a centre’s candidates’ blogs) allows moderators easy access to individual candidates’ work.

It is important that centres check within candidate blogs that all links are working and that the moderator is given access to all documents. Once again, moderators spent too much time chasing centres for access to work. Some centres continue to use files that need to be downloaded from a Google Drive: Centres must not allow candidates to do this for security reasons.

Over the last three months blogging has become more difficult for some candidates as Blogger has made a policy decision to close accounts for those under the age of 18. For many years we have recommended the

use of Blogger but are no longer able to do so with any confidence. In its place there are a range of alternatives available such as Wordpress or Google Sites. Many centres also choose to use website building platforms such as Wix or Weebly. These platforms can be visually impressive but often lack the functionality of dedicated blogging platforms. If centres do use website building applications for blogging it is very important that candidates organise their work effectively, using appropriate menu titles.

The most effective blogs are organised so that they are read in a clear chronological order, preferably labelled with date stamps. The package of products and the critical reflection should be the first thing seen when opening up the blog. All elements should be clearly labelled whether through the use of menus, tags, or headers. Candidates who documented the whole process of production in detail tended to be most successful. They showed clear evidence of research in all aspects of the production, clearly documenting and justifying the choices and decisions they made – including the ideas at each stage that they rejected.

At this level a substantial amount of evidence, in a variety of forms (photos, video, articles, audio, presentation, surveys, comparisons, annotations, text, mock ups, tests, drafts and roughs), is needed to illustrate an effective understanding of the core concepts. Some candidates are presenting in excess of fifty meaningful blog posts.

Centres are once again reminded that all elements of the Advanced Portfolio must be online, either on or linked to the blog; disks, USB sticks and printouts should not be sent, and will be disregarded by moderators.

Critical reflections

In the new mark scheme Assessment Objective (AO) 2 draws heavily upon evidence presented in the Critical Reflection. Therefore, candidates need to fully address the four set questions. The mark scheme clearly states across all levels that there should be a degree of engagement with **all** questions. If candidates do not engage with **all** of the questions they self-penalise and this should be reflected in the centre's marking.

The new syllabus requires that candidates produce an 'evaluative essay' therefore centres should prepare candidates for this and discourage simple responses to the four questions set out as four paragraphs under the question heading. Some candidates seemed to struggle with writing an essay that addressed all four questions within the confines outlined in the syllabus – '...around 1000 words'. Centres should advise candidates that this word count should be seen as an advisory minimum. Candidates who write fewer than 1000 words candidates are liable to self-penalise through lack of depth of reflection. Candidates should focus on presenting a well-structured and well-argued reflective and analytical essay rather than worrying about the word count.

There is no longer a requirement for the critical reflection to use a creative approach to presentation. However, some candidates made good use of captioned images from their work to support the content of their essays. This is good practice and to be encouraged.

The strongest critical reflections tended to be from candidates who had kept the most reflective records of their research, planning and production. Successful candidates thus answered the questions using clear examples from all stages of their production.

Research and planning

The third strand of AO3 relates directly to the candidate's research and planning, and how this has led to the construction of the final products. Therefore, all research and planning materials should be posted to candidate blogs and made accessible to the moderator.

Blogs should include a range of research and planning materials posted over the duration of the project which illustrate the process of production from research and initial ideas to the final production packages and critical reflection. The best research materials demonstrated a range of textual analysis with focused and annotated examples. It is important that candidates include the exploration of similar products aimed at similar audiences to those chosen for their production tasks. In the strongest work the research was revisited at stages throughout the production and reflection process, for the purpose of comparison and to demonstrate how conventions were used or deliberately broken. Audience research was strongest when learners went beyond quantitative based questionnaires, which are rarely as useful as qualitative, and analysed how target audiences actually engage with products. Candidates were rewarded when they explored multiple ideas for their product and then documented the progression and development of those into pre-production documents.

There was a range of excellent planning and development presented, especially where candidates had recorded evidence that enabled them to reflect and make informed choices about the way forward for their productions. Centres could continue to encourage learners to include evidence such as script readings, screen tests for actors, location pre shoots, practice shots or lighting tests, costume fittings and ideas, behind the scenes videos or photos, production vlogs (video logs), and 'making-of' video(s). Candidates could also be encouraged to take photos or video on the set and annotate them with reflection of their own roles. Work was almost always improved when candidates gained feedback on rough cuts and in many strong portfolios this was done on a number of occasions for each of the major and minor tasks.

Centres are reminded that research and planning should not just reflect the process of production of the major task. The briefs are to produce a package of work; therefore, candidates should research and plan the major task, the two minor tasks, and branding across the products.

Production

Products are primarily assessed across the first two strands of AO3. Marks should be awarded for the application of technical skills and how these are used to communicate meaning. Products should demonstrate clear knowledge and understanding of media language and key concepts.

The most successful production work built on previous skills, knowledge and understanding. Candidates produced packages of products demonstrating consistency in style, purpose and quality between the major and the minor tasks. Strong examples paid close attention to simulating form, style and generic conventions across video, print, and online work as well as identifying a clear branding strategy.

Of the four briefs (Music Promotion Package, Film Promotion Package, Documentary Package, and Short Film Package) the most popular continues to be the Short Film Package closely followed by the Music Promotion Package. The least popular, but often best executed, was the Film Promotion Package.

Major video products

All briefs contain a major video product. These are a music video, two film trailers, an extract from an original TV documentary, or a complete short film

There were some creative approaches to music videos and many were of a professional standard. These employed a range of forms with the most popular being a mixture of narrative and performance. Candidates rose to the challenge of Covid lockdowns dispensing with group performances and focusing on the solo artist. Weaker productions tended to be simple narratives accompanied by music. The most successful had the star persona/s to the fore and were able to carry this 'branding' across to their minor products.

Only a few candidates attempted the film trailers but these tended to be well considered with most candidates choosing to produce a teaser trailer plus a theatre trailer. Codes and conventions were often researched and applied consistently with this brief lending itself well to the promotional package format. Candidates working on this brief tended to have a clear idea of the narrative of the entire film they were promoting and were able to select and film appropriate extracts. Weaker productions tended to present too much narrative or focus for too long on one part of the film.

TV Documentary extracts continue to be of mixed quality. The most successful were conscious of the fact that they were extracts and candidates often contextualised these in their blogs. Codes and conventions were adhered to and it was often clear that research into theories of documentary production had been explored and applied. Weaker examples tended to attempt too much and started to resemble full short documentaries. They were often poorly researched and edited with long shots of rambling and/or repetitive information.

Once again, this series there were some powerful short films with thoughtful narratives, conscious choices of mise-en-scene, and well considered casting – some of which was as a result of Covid restrictions but which was nevertheless well considered. Weaker products tended to try to produce a short feature film rather than treating the product as a distinct genre in its own right.

Centres are reminded of the importance of producing risk assessments for all video products. It remains a concern that many products contain scenes with weapons, some of which are clearly either real or very good replicas. Products often contain vehicles driven at speed and sometimes dangerous stunts which centres should discourage.

Some centres where English is not the first language are choosing to present products in their first language. This is acceptable for video products as long as English subtitles are used and the rest of the portfolio is completed in English.

Minor print products

Whilst there were some excellent minor print products conforming to appropriate conventions and continuing the branding of the major product, many seemed to be an after-thought or, in some cases, not even included in the portfolio. Candidates should view the minor products as an integral part of the brief and centres should award marks based on the whole package not just the major task.

The most effective digi-packs (Music Promotion) had clearly been well researched and employed an appropriate number of panels. Images had been produced specifically for the product and usually promoted the star persona/s of the major task. Weaker products often resembled vinyl LP covers with just two panels and limited imagery, often lifted directly from the major product.

Film posters (Film Promotion) were the most effective of the minor tasks with candidates demonstrating a clear understanding of their role in the promotion of the film. The main weakness with some posters was the production of original photographs with some candidates relying on screen grabs from their major products for this purpose.

Magazine articles (Documentary) were often well written and clearly a product of effective research. However, if centres choose to offer this brief, they should offer candidates some instruction in journalistic technique in preparation. Copy should be carefully proofed and formatted appropriately. The most effective products were presented as articles from existing professional magazines or online journals. Articles should contain some original photography as well as clear copy and effective design.

The short film festival postcards (Short Film) tended not to reflect the quality of the films they were promoting. Often candidates would lift an image from their film and place text over it along with the film festival logo. Postcards were presented as single sided and often lacked in detail. Some candidates confused postcards with posters and ended up producing a mixed brief which is not allowed by the syllabus. The most successful products again demonstrated a clear link to detailed research, employed some original imagery, and considered both sides of the card.

Social Media pages

All briefs require the production of a social media page as part of the promotional package. This page should reflect the overall branding of the main product and be used to demonstrate an understanding of how products target their audiences. This is a new requirement for this syllabus and some centres are still experimenting with the format. It is important that centres give candidates clear guidance about what is required for this element.

Social media pages may be 'live' online or produced within templates and embedded in candidate blogs. Centres should ensure the safety of their candidates when using live social media pages and adhere to any local guidelines.

The most popular format for this series was Instagram but some candidates used generic templates based on the Facebook format. Whichever format is used candidates should combine a range of text-based posts and original photographic images to complete this product effectively. The most effective products were clearly promotional and reflected the branding of the main product, the weaker products simply posted images from the main product with little or no sense of purpose.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/04 Critical Perspectives
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Key messages

It is pleasing that many centres have taken on board comments from the June 2021 report, especially regarding the approach to Media Ecology (avoiding extensive/irrelevant summaries of McLuhan's work) which focused on the historic aspects rather than addressing the set question. Centres are reminded of the guidance in the syllabus which states that case studies should be primarily focused on contemporary texts – texts which were first published within five years of the exam date. Older texts may be used for the purposes of contextualisation but must not be the primary text or texts. This was often the case of those candidates answering the postmodern question in particular.

General comments

It is very encouraging to read candidates' work which reflects current/topical perspectives in Media, e.g. *Squidgame*, *Youtubers Life 2*, *The Metaverse*. Candidates who demonstrated this awareness of the current media landscape often did very well.

The best candidates also managed their time well, especially in relation to the amount of time dedicated to **Section B**. While the amount of material a candidate produces is not directly related to the mark awarded, examiners would expect to see greater detail and volume in **Section B** compared with **Section A**. Generally, the least successful candidates did not manage this.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 – Media regulation

'Media regulation is failing everyone.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

Some of the very best responses focused on local regulatory bodies and their links with national governments, e.g. India's UAPA/BJP close association. Gramsci's hegemony was successfully introduced in some excellent analyses of state controlled/sanctioned media. There was also some very good work on the difficulties faced by trying to regulate the Wild West Web and the issues around social media companies self-regulating which used Logan Paul as a case study.

Question 2 – Postmodern media

Analyse the key characteristics of postmodern media.

As stated above, the responses to this question often reveal a sound grasp of theory which is unfortunately undermined by an over reliance on historic texts (*Matrix*, *Pulp Fiction*, *Truman Show*). Contemporary texts referred to with great success included: *Tenet* (nonlinear narrative structure); Olivia Rodrigo – *Life 4U* (intertextuality); *Documentary Now* (Parody); *In The Heights* (Bricolage); Bo Burnham's *Inside* (Parody). It was strange that some candidates who had clearly studied Tarantino had completed a case study of *Inglorious Basterds* when one based on *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood* would yield far greater reward. One of the perils of this topic is where candidates adopt an almost sycophantic approach to postmodernism which ignores the many and growing critiques of it. Clearly there has been some very good learning on Lyotard, Baudrillard, Strinati et al; some study on the contexts of their work is highly recommended. Impressively, some candidates referenced (as an example of Postmodernism as an updating of *Second Life*) Facebook's name change to *Meta* and their statement regarding *the metaverse* which was only announced a

few days prior to the exam. This level of responsiveness and understanding is something we strongly encourage.

Question 3 – Power and the media

To what extent do the media represent people fully?

This question was approached in a variety of very successful ways. Some used the rise of social media as self-representation via Tik Tok, Instagram, etc. Twitter was handled very well by some who focused on the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and the response to the January 6th attack on the White House. A successful case study focused on Ava DuVernay's *Array* (a grassroots distribution, arts and advocacy collective focused on films by people of colour and women). David Gauntlett and Henry Jenkins featured heavily here, although their Utopianism re: Web 2.0 has been successfully challenged by David Buckingham whose work is highly recommended as a counterweight. The work of Hesmondhalgh, Curran and Seaton on *Industries/Power* was cited in support of arguments around the under-representation of certain groups in mainstream media products and the efforts of prosumers to address the legacy of patriarchal society, colonialism and media imperialism. Paul Gilroy and Bell Hooks also featured in such critiques.

Section B

Question 4 – Media ecology

'We talk about print, film, TV and radio as separate media, but these are all converging and will be impossible to tell apart in the future.'

Evaluate the evidence which supports this view.

This is a synoptic question, designed to allow candidates to demonstrate all they have learnt on the course and how that learning can be applied to the current state of the Media ecosystem. McLuhan and Postman rightly featured in responses, but the most successful ones moved on to examine current media, with the most ambitious speculating on the future by extrapolating from present trends.

Streaming sites and how they are accessed via portable devices featured in many case studies on technological convergence. Debates included Netflix competing with Film studios – the success of *Roma* and Scorsese's criticisms of the content such sites demand. There was some interesting work around the difference between actively watching TV/Radio News broadcasts/newspapers and receiving curated news via the smartphone – especially the wider social implications of Pariser's Filter Bubbles.

Clay Shirky's theory on audience ability to access production tools was used in several responses. Bo Burnham's move from obscure live comedian via Youtube to Hollywood Film director was offered as an example of how much media institutional gatekeeping has changed. One excellent answer discussed the changing power dynamic between stars and their audiences with the rise of Film actors using social media to offer insight into their (no doubt carefully curated) private lives, resulting in a parasocial relationship with their fans which is exploited via synergy to promote new products.

Some very good answers challenged the presented statement, arguing that distinctive media have individual audiences who continue to consume them separately, and some managed to demonstrate their knowledge by referring to Zuckerberg's Metaverse as a potential future vision including a debate on whether it will be dystopian or utopian. The work of Morozov on how debates about technology should include considerations of politics, economics, history, and culture are useful counter arguments to technological determinism.