

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

There is some evidence that more and more centres are returning to face-to-face learning, although candidates continue to use the pandemic as a source of inspiration and have employed their close families as actors or models to produce some very professional artefacts. However, generally there was a return to a wider range of products with varied casts and locations.

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, knowledge and understanding of conventions of all aspects of the media products was coupled with comprehensive evidence of the process.

Comments on specific tasks

Blogs

Despite continued requests 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 hyperlinks in both the centre's hub and candidate blogs need to be checked carefully by centres to ensure that they are working.

For many years we have recommended the use of Blogger, but are no longer able to do so with any confidence due to age policies in some regions. 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 are often 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 read in a clear chronological order, using date stamps if possible. 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. 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 portfolio 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 often descriptive posts lacking in reflection and 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 are continuing to use files that need to be downloaded from a Google Drive. Centres are requested not to allow candidates to do this as it requires Moderators using their own personal Google accounts to access materials.

Creative Critical Reflections

The 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.

Assessment Objective (AO) 3 awards marks 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. The most successful candidates used a range of appropriate creative applications to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Some centres are still giving very high marks to candidates who only employ one application across all four questions. The mark criteria for AO3 level 2 states, '... often only one creative approach is used ...', whilst for level 3 it states, '... with more than one creative approach used ...'. It is clear that centres should not be giving marks outside of level 2 for CCRs that only employ one approach.

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 independently by the candidate either individually or as part of a group; it is clearly relevant to the final product and the candidate is able to articulate how their research models have informed their production. The least effective is class work, where the whole class has analysed the same text which bears 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.

Products

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.

Print

Candidates who followed the Print 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 not just a few pages. It is recommended that candidates compare their products to real magazine pages. 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 publishing software such as InDesign, Quark Xpress, Affinity Publisher etc.

Opportunities for interim feedback should 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 into codes and conventions into their own products. Analysis and evaluation of candidates' own work is an important element of the 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.

Video

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.

It is 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-scene 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 *The OA* (2016).

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 contemporary media.

Candidates should manage their time effectively to ensure both sections are covered in enough detail.

General comments

There was a good spread of marks across both sections of the paper, with most candidates showing evidence of preparation, writing at length, supporting points with examples and accurate use of terminology.

Film and television were the most prominent industries, followed by music and video games. Very few candidates focused on newspapers and magazines.

Candidates responded marginally more effectively to **Section A**, than **Section B**. A very small number of candidates appeared to 'run out of time' and either spent less time on **Section B**, or did not respond to either question; it is vital that candidates pay attention to the suggested times within the paper, using around 45 minutes on **Section A** and the same on **Section B**.

A small number of candidates were unable to communicate clearly, and responses in these case often lacked an appropriate structure. Centres should be encouraged to support candidates in accessing additional support (such as word-processing, and/or scribes), where appropriate. Centres should also support candidates in their use of written English, including paragraph structures and use of colloquialisms, so that they might communicate their understanding of media clearly.

Section A

Question 1

Analyse how the extract from *The OA* 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-scene
- editing.

There was evidence of understanding of technical skills, with some candidates able to identify a wide range of elements accurately. Technical knowledge was generally clear across camera shots, angles, movement, and composition, as well as mise-en-scene. A few candidates were able to use media terminology in a sophisticated way (connotes/denotes, iconography). However, some candidates were not able to use precise and accurate technical terms (large shot, medium angle), and some candidates did not develop their

answers much further when it came to exploring the impact of these technical elements would have upon the viewer. This did not allow them the opportunity 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. At times, 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. Centres should focus on the demands of all 5 strands of the mark scheme ensuring that candidates are aware of how to analyse texts underpinned with key theories and can use appropriate media terminology accurately.

Candidates who responded well to this question evidenced a thorough understanding of, and effective reference to, the key concepts of language and representation. They showed an effective understanding of the social significances explored within the extract, making effective points using a range of media terminology accurately. Relevant media theories were used effectively in response to the question.

In stronger answers candidates were able to analyse the way that meaning was created within the extract from 'The OA'. Popular themes were enigma codes, genre conventions (sci-fi, horror, drama), poor mental health and a family reunited. Candidates were able to link media theory to their analysis, and used terms such as connotation/denotation fluently. Often, candidates were able to link the technical codes with analysis, though they were less successful at making insightful comments about representation of people and places. Popular areas of consideration included how the clip created tense feelings for the audience (first scene on the bridge: traffic sounds, children, shouting, lack of sound, unstable/handheld camera), communicated the protagonist's ill health due to violence (hospital scene: heart monitor, canted angles, cold colours, torn dress/scars), and established the parents lives as chaotic due to their daughters disappearance (house scene: phone call, untidy house, candle being lit), and the sense of hope in finding each other again (end scene: music, white light). Some candidates were able to cover all the scenes, however some candidates focused only on the first scene to the detriment of the others.

Weaker candidates simply re-told the narrative of the extract, or described/identified the camera shots, angles, movement, composition, sound and editing techniques used within the extract, often following the chronological order of the extract. Candidates who did this generally failed to explain how shot types created meaning, and so were weaker. Ideas were either repeated throughout, or analysis was reduced to simple points. There was also inaccurate use of terminology (for example using the term 'jump cut' instead of 'cut'). Some candidates managed to successfully apply theory in their responses (e.g., Barthes, Saussure, Todorov), which was very encouraging when employed appropriately. Weaker responses tended to take each micro element and address it separately, whereas more sophisticated responses usually employed a more synthesized and holistic approach to the analysis of individuals/groups, themes, or meanings. Some candidates would explain terminology, or theories, rather than applying them to an analysis of the extract.

Section B

To do well on this paper, candidates are required to show thorough understanding of, and effective reference to, the key concepts of audience and industry. They should demonstrate an understanding of the wider issues, contexts, and debates, and link this to the question, and refer to texts from a range of effective and appropriate case studies, using these to explore their chosen media area. Relevant media theories should be used effectively in response to the question.

Most candidates followed case studies taught by their centre, and these tended to follow a similar pattern: an independent (international or domestic, acclaimed and successful or of limited success) and a blockbuster, or tent pole product (such as Bait, Parasite, and Disney/Marvel's 'Avengers' films). This problem with this approach is that candidates only have information from 2-3 case studies from which to shape their answer, which can be self-limiting and discourage full engagement with the key concepts. A more successful approach allows candidates more freedom to research each area outlined in the specification, building up their own 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**.

Some responses did not fully address the question, providing a generalised or statistical overview of the case study/studies rather than addressing the stem of the question. Occasionally, some candidates use case studies which did not meet the requirement that the primary texts are from within 5 years of the examination date. Some responses were without any case study material at all, evidencing little more than a layman's understanding of the key concepts of audiences and institutions. Candidates should be encouraged to practice how they might use their case study material to respond directly to questions.

Question 2

Assess the importance of synergy for marketing in the media area you have studied.

Candidates were able to use some knowledge of synergy, such as cross-media convergence, marketing, and ownership. The most common discussions focused on institutions working together to target a wider audience demographic, to increase company (or product) awareness, and subsequent profit/success. Candidates were also able to use their case studies to answer the question.

Candidate responses tended to focus on cross-media production (such as Disney/Marvel films in cinemas, television programme streaming services, social media engagement, computer games, and merchandise). Many responses also covered marketing/sponsorship contracts, such as cars, or watches being used in films.

In good answers, candidates were able to develop a critical engagement and point of comparison between their case studies, often forming a counter argument. Candidates who focused on their own case studies and domestic productions were often able to respond more effectively. Terminology (cross media ownership, monopoly, oligopoly, vertical and horizontal integration) was used fluently, demonstrating a good understanding. When used, key theories (Hesmondhalgh) strengthened candidates' responses.

Weaker candidates chose less relevant case studies, which were limited. Terminology was not used fluently. They often provided a historical overview or focused on facts such as costs, box office revenue, and marketing products/plans (often limited to social media) without any of the necessary analysis or demonstrating an understanding of wider implications (e.g. Black Panther was released during Black History Month) in relation to the key concepts. Most did not engage with any theory, or applied theories incorrectly. There was a lack of focus in their response to the question, and they showed a limited understanding of terms and concepts.

Question 3

Explain how media institutions respond to the changing demands of the audience in the media area you have studied.

Most candidates had some knowledge and understanding with which to respond to the question. A common area of focus was audience theories, with an emphasis on interaction via social media (e.g. forced change to Sonic the Hedgehog), or prosumerism (inc. influencers). Responses also outlined current trends in institutions producing more online products (streaming services), and considered audience's responses to products, illustrating and awareness of social issues (such as 'Black Lives Matter', 'Me Too' and/or the LGBTQ+ community), and their impact on the product/institution.

When used, key theories (Curran and Seaton, Shirky) strengthened candidates' responses. Some candidates were able to effectively communicate their understanding of the industry in relation to how important film festivals are to independent films.

Weaker candidates focused on facts, without providing any analysis, or demonstrating an understanding of wider implications. Most did not engage with any theory, or applied theories incorrectly. There was a lack of focus in their response to the question, and they showed a limited understanding of terms and concepts, such as the hypodermic needle theory being applied too literally.

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 final three 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 November series saw a small number of centres entering candidates for the A level qualification. Many centres and their cohorts continue to have difficulties due to the pandemic and are once again to be congratulated on producing a high standard of work in very difficult circumstances. As we slowly move back to face-to-face delivery candidates have built on their online learning 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. However, the online component (a social media page) is a developing concern – see the appropriate section below. 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 seems to have declined with the introduction of 'Submit for Assessment'. Centres are reminded that it is good practice to hyperlink all their candidates' blogs to a single blog post or webpage. The url of the blog hub should be transcribed to the candidate ICRCs, thus allowing Moderators easy access to individual candidates' work.

It is important that centres check that within candidate blogs 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 are still employing files that need to be downloaded from Google Drive. Centres are requested not to allow candidates to do this as it requires Moderators using their own personal Google accounts to access materials.

For many years we have recommended the use of Blogger but are no longer able to do so with any confidence as Goggle seems to have made a policy decision to close accounts for those under the age of 18. 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 used a linear format, organising the blog so that the earliest post is last and the most recent post is first. 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 present more than 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; files must not be uploaded to 'Supporting Material' in 'Submit for Assessment'.

Critical reflections

When marking the Advanced Portfolio, centres should note that Assessment Objective (AO) 2 draws heavily upon evidence presented in the candidate's 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 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. The reflection should be structured as an essay with clear reference to the candidate's production package. Centres should continue to advise candidates that the 1000-word count should be seen as an advisory minimum; candidates who use fewer than 1000 words are liable to self-penalise through lack of depth of reflection. Conversely, those who use considerably more than 1000 words tend to self-penalise through a lack of focus. Candidates should, present a reflective, analytical, well-structured and well-argued essay rather than worrying too much about the word count.

There is not a requirement for the critical reflection to use a creative approach to presentation, as for the Foundation Portfolio. However, some candidates continue to make 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.

Candidate 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, 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 has shifted from the Short Film Package to the Music Promotion Package closely followed by the Film Promotion Package. This shift could have been influenced by the constraints of working through a pandemic.

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 almost of a professional standard. These employed a range of forms with the most popular being a mixture of narrative and performance. 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.

Film trailers 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 were less evident this series. What was submitted continued 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.

This series saw fewer short films than usual. However, there were some powerful short films with thoughtful narratives, conscious choices of mise-en-scene, and well considered casting. Weaker products tended to try to produce a short feature film rather than treating the product as a distinct genre in its own right.

In some centres where English is not the first language candidates are choosing to present products in their native 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 proofread 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.

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, as for the June series, was Instagram. This is acceptable, but many candidates are treating this as an 'easy option'. Weaker products contained 3 – 6 images from the main product, or candidate blog, placed into the Instagram format. Some candidates used the Instagram template to replicate what looked like personal pages. This is not surprising as they are familiar with this format. However, centres should encourage a more careful consideration of the use of Instagram as a promotional tool. Images should be made for a purpose, not simply lifted from other components of the portfolio. Candidates could be encouraged to look beyond the images and think about the 'comments' attached to them. Bands/artists, for example, very often use written comments to interact with their fans and promote their personas and work. A range of written interactions linked to well-constructed images can, therefore, illustrate the depth of a candidate's knowledge and understanding.

The most effective social media 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 was pleasing to see many candidates embrace topical media debates from an engaged, informed perspective. Clearly there is some excellent learning and teaching in centres. A significant number of candidates had learnt a great deal but did not address the set question, which made it difficult for them to access the higher levels. Centres must ensure that case studies meet the syllabus requirement that they predominantly focus on texts from no more than 5 years from the examination date.

General comments

Time management remains a concern. **Section B** Media Ecology carries double the marks of each question in **Section A** therefore one would expect to see rather more detailed and substantive responses. Candidates who produced very lengthy answers to **Section A** sometimes struggled to match the volume in **Section B**. A careful approach to time spent on each section would yield real rewards for such candidates.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1 – Media Regulation

Evaluate some of the different ways in which the idea of freedom is used in debates about media regulation.

This was a very popular question with the majority of candidates answering with varying degrees of success. Livingstone and Lunt were referred to by many candidates and the better responses discussed how freedom of expression of citizens and a government's desire for control are frequently in conflict. There was much discussion around proliferation of content enabled by technology (in particular fan produced) rendering attempts at regulation increasingly difficult. It was refreshing to see more topical debates around Musk ownership and the limits of free speech and fewer chronicles of the history of the BBFC from 1912 onwards.

Social media was the focus of several excellent responses examining the debates around self-regulation and Ofcom's responses to public concerns as exemplified by high profile cases such as that of Molly Russell. The UK Online Safety Bill (and/or local equivalents) would be an interesting case study. There was some mention of US **Section 230** which protects social media companies, and the key phrase 'No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider' was used in support of arguments.

Local attitudes to censorship and freedom of speech included discussion around the domination of state in China and Russia alongside more nuanced references to Pakistan and India. It was refreshing to see engagement with the field of Media Effects (e.g. Martin Barker/Byron Report) rather than the cursory, uncritical acceptance of psychologist Bandura's Bobo Doll experiment. However some candidates still made simplistic assertions that in the past audiences were very passive whereas now they are active were commonplace.

Question 2 – Postmodern Media

‘It is difficult to fully appreciate popular culture without an understanding of postmodernism.’ How far do you agree with this statement?

This topic generally is handled better than the others in **Section A** as most candidates display a good level of knowledge of the key theorists and characteristics of Postmodernism. As anticipated, Baudrillard, Lyotard et al feature heavily. The challenge is often to apply such theory to the set question citing case studies of appropriate texts. Successful examples were TV shows *Stranger Things*, *The Great* and the Spike Lee Film *Black Klansman*. Where candidates struggle remains the extended use of old texts – the syllabus requires that case studies focus on texts which are contemporary, published within five years of the exam date. Centres should ensure as far as possible that candidates are aware of this condition as some candidates show good understanding of the subject area but cannot support their answer with appropriate examples. While credit can be given for some of the arguments made, and a historic example can be used correctly to exemplify changes in media, whole answers given over to The Truman Show, Pulp Fiction, The Matrix are do not meet the criteria of the mark scheme and are clearly against the spirit of the syllabus.

Question 3 – Power and the Media

‘Ownership of media companies is restricted to a privileged minority, which means that the media are never fully representative.’ To what extent do you agree with this statement?

One of the key considerations here is that this is not a legacy Collective Identity area of study, although clearly there is a crossover of material. Curran and Seaton’s work was frequently referenced. A particularly successful answer focused on news and the ownership of news institutions, analysing the polarisation exemplified by CNN and Fox’s differing agendas. In another, news coverage of current events in Iran were referred to in some very well-informed work. Christian Fuchs’ work on production and spread of ‘false news’/‘fake news’ would be an interesting starting point for this topic.

Hegemony and cultural imperialism were handled skilfully in some excellent answers. One such featured an excellent analysis of WARU, a feature film made up of eight 10-minute short films, each written and directed by Māori women filmmakers. On response had an interesting interpretation on how the audience responses to cancelled series (Lucifer) and treatment of material (Sonic the Hedgehog Movie) forced the institutions to respond. Disney films featured in a significant number of less successful responses mainly because over simplistic representations of Snow White and Cinderella formed the bulk of such essays. This is another case of old examples undermining candidate success, and whilst these films might be referred to for context, they must not be the primary focus of the case study.

Section B

Question 4 – Media Ecology

Analyse the significance of the convergence of the smartphone with mass communication technology.

This section is designed to be a synoptic one, meaning the question might explore any aspect of the syllabus. It requires that candidates have revised the knowledge and understanding they learnt from their AS studies, as well as that which they have undertaken over the course of completing their A Level. Sadly, some candidates demonstrated little more than general knowledge when responding to the question, embarking upon a journey through their Amazon habits with page after page of how great their phone is for shopping, ordering takeaways, Uber etc. There is a significant body of work on Media Ecology and an Advanced Level in Media Studies should reflect serious, guided academic study. Narratives of phone use which could be produced by a person in a coffee shop are not going to be especially successful.

Thankfully there were some superb responses, one in particular analysed how the convergence of smartphones with social media (particularly Instagram/Tik Tok) has changed the production, distribution and consumption of media. The same candidate also analysed how that partnership has increased the accessibility of world news via citizen journalism citing the Iranian protests.

Some of the theorists referred to successfully were Shirky and Gilmor. Gauntlett’s work on identity and fluidity featured prominently in higher level answers alongside Jenkins’ on participatory culture fandom (particularly how smartphones enable community groups to form on Reddit). One candidate explored how twitter gave its audience access to celebrities as an example. The technology allowing war news from

Ukraine – seen as both positive/negative – and the Christchurch shooting (negative) was debated by several candidates. ‘Cancel culture’ remains a problematic term for many – certainly one that should be at the very least interrogated by candidates rather than accepted as evidence of a ‘woke’ conspiracy.