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 artefact, and a creative critical reflection upon their work
- aim to complete these elements to a high standard, demonstrating knowledge and understanding, research and planning, and appropriate skilled use of media tools
- ensure the blog remains online and easily accessible throughout the examination series.

Expectations of evidence from each assessment objective are listed on pages 24–27 of the syllabus. Individual Candidate Record Cards must be completed with clear comments to show how marks have been arrived at for each assessment objective. If candidates have worked in groups comments must reflect individual contributions to projects.

General comments

This was the final session of the current 9607/01 syllabus and like all November series before there was a considerably smaller entry than for the June series. Centres and their cohorts have had to deal with lock-downs and unprecedented levels of remote learning due to the pandemic. They are to be congratulated on producing high standards of work in very difficult circumstances.

Candidates follow one of the two set briefs as determined by the syllabus (video or print). On the whole centres continued to engage well with this component and candidates produced some excellent work, showing 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

Whilst many centres have now set up blog hubs (a centre blog or web page with candidates' names and numbers hyperlinked to their work) there were too few of them used for this session. 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 in both the centre's hub and candidate blogs need to be checked carefully by centres to ensure that they are working. Some centres transcribed URLs inaccurately leading to a delay in the process.

Blogs need to be organised carefully 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 within the post. The best blogs were comprehensive, with candidates posting 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 clearest blogs to follow were those produced using dedicated blogging

applications such as Blogger which use a linear format to order blog posts from most recent to earliest, with the earliest post last, and the most recent post at the top.

All elements of the portfolio must be online, either on or linked to the blog for the moderation period. There are still centres sending moderators DVDs, USBs and printouts in support of their online work, these are kindly requested not to do so in the future.

Creative Critical Reflections

Candidates who fully addressed the four set questions using a range of digital applications to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding, performed best in this area. There continues to be some excellent detailed voiceover videos with extracts from the finished product and from the process and some really imaginative approaches to using presentation applications to which adequate time had been allocated. Candidates should approach the Creative Critical Reflection as an integral part of the production process and not something tagged on to the end of a project. 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**.

Products

Magazines

There continued to be fewer print productions in this series than in the June series. Candidates generally fulfilled the brief, 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 centres continue to invest in appropriate technical tools for the construction of media products, some candidates still need more support in building their skills using dedicated DTP software; this might be with professional programs such as InDesign or PagePlus, although there are many freeware programs which offer much of the same functionality.

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 into codes and conventions into their own products. 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 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 candidates' 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 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
Key Media Concepts

Key messages

Section A is a compulsory question in which candidates analyse an extract from an American TV drama, and consider how meaning is constructed 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 be able to attempt the question, which this session was based on an extract from *Big Little Lies*.

Section B requires that candidates answer one of two optional questions on one media industry they have studied, adapting and applying their knowledge. This session, questions were focused on the dominance of large institutions and the related benefits of being smaller, and the impact of technology on audiences. Candidates should support their responses using examples taken from the contemporary media landscape. The new syllabus defines contemporary to mean a text which was first published no more than approximately five years before the examination year.

General comments

Many candidates showed evidence of thorough preparation, writing at length and supporting points with examples, and there was a good spread of marks across both sections of the paper. Film language was generally well learned, but in many cases was not applied to the analysis of the creation of meaning in selected examples from the text. Many responses lacked detailed relevant and contemporary examples in order to illustrate points; often the candidates understood concepts and produced sound arguments, but these were not always applicable to their chosen question. The ability to address the key terms of the question and to shape relevant knowledge towards fully answering the question was not always evidence.

Section A

Question 1

Discuss the ways in which the extract from *The Big Little Lies* constructs meaning through the following:

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

Technical knowledge was often impressive across all four areas and it was pleasing to see evidence of some effective teaching of all of the technical skills, with the majority of candidates able to identify a wide range of elements accurately and with ease. However, some candidates just identified elements and did not develop their answers much further in relation to the impact these technical elements would have upon the viewer: by not using the opportunity to explore meaning and representation these candidates were severely limited in their responses. Alternatively, some candidates were easily identifying meaning but lacked the accurate use of technical language of the conventions of moving image to underpin their analysis. A significant number of responses just narrated the text with a list of technical terms, which resulted in limited interpretation.

There were some excellent responses at the higher end of the range, highlighting candidates' understanding of the ways in which meaning is constructed through the use of different technical areas. There were some very sophisticated, analytical responses demonstrating an understanding of how meaning and representation is created, coupled with an excellent use of technical terminology. The best responses synthesised construction and meaning in an organic way. Often candidates were able to link the technical

codes with analysis of motherhood, suburban life, murder-mystery, artificial lifestyles, deception and the representation of gender.

Common problems in responses were identifying technical codes but not exploring how meaning is created, a tendency towards narrative or descriptive responses, rather than analysis, the repetition of points throughout or analysis being reduced to one word, such as 'enigma' or 'realism'. The inaccurate use of terminology (for example using the term 'jump cut' or 'switch' when they meant 'cut') and the explanation of a generic use of code, rather than the specific application to the text, also impacted on candidates. Some tried to apply theory in their responses (e.g. Barthes, Mulvey, Propp et al), which was not really necessary and often left candidates trying to base their responses around a series of theories which in this version of the syllabus is more appropriately discussed at A2.

It was pleasing to see candidates respond more evenly on all four micro elements and this has clearly been the focus in the teaching of this component.

Section B

General comments

It was again worrying to see such a significant number of responses without any recent or relevant case study material, or in other cases, completely inventing erroneous figures as supporting evidence. At times there was a tendency to give a history of the institution or medium, which was unnecessary, given that the focus is on recent and relevant examples. A common problem with *Section B* seems to be the choosing of an independent and a blockbuster product as case studies, whereby candidates have only the information from two case studies from which to shape their answer. Often this was limiting candidates' responses as they did not have enough to write on for the focus of the question, and they wrote everything they knew about these two case studies, rather than address the stem of the question. Candidates could be given more freedom to research each area outlined in the specification and build 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. 'Although large media institutions dominate the market there are benefits that come from being smaller.' To what extent is this true for the media area you have studied?

This question invited candidates to discuss a range of institutional practices and ownership including production, convergences, synergy, horizontal/vertical integration and distribution. The most successful answers were able to provide recent case study material and argue the creative freedom often associated with independence, versus the existence solely to create profit for conglomerates. Most candidates chose to discuss film for this question. Many responses had institutional examples of how ownership and horizontal/vertical integration impacted on the successes of a media product with relevant and contextualised case study evidence, often citing Disney as an example. Candidates were also able to explore the impact of subsidiaries, synergy and cross-media convergence and ensured they addressed the significance of the impact on institutions.

The best approaches focused directly on the question discussing the advantages of independently produced texts, and in particular the creative freedom offered, supported by reference to recent and relevant texts. Critiques of major institutions might focus on how such structures inhibit innovation, with a focus on the generation of profit, which could be supported by reference to the reliance on cash cows such as remakes, sequels and franchises. Many candidates were also able to explore the impact of technological convergence, particularly for independent case studies, as a way of levelling the playing field of production and distribution. They were also aware of the importance of social media and viral marketing to further level the playing field.

Many candidates chose to compare blockbuster and independent case studies, and while a range of evidence from the former was often evident, the latter would often be lacking, merely citing that they had not the same access to resources or expensive technology by way of comparison. Some candidates gave a detailed history of their chosen institution/area, rather than shaping their knowledge towards answering the question. Many candidates were using very old texts as case studies; for the new syllabus more recent and relevant case studies must be used and, where possible, centres should encourage their candidates to undertake independent research in their own fields of interest.

Question 3. Explain how changes in technology have affected audience behaviour in the media area you have studied.

The majority of candidates chose to answer this question, often due to its accessibility from their own experiences. The best answers were able to provide recent and relevant case study material and argue the impact of the spread of technology on audiences, although many struggled to apply targeted case studies specifically to this question, while others discussed production methods instead of answering the question.

Many candidates were limited by responses that discussed older media products (including black and white films, print media, vinyl or pixelated video games) being examples of 'poorer technology' and that digital and CGI products were 'better' experiences for audiences. Some candidates were able to answer on issues of piracy, but these responses often lacked any nuance and tended towards technology being an advantage and piracy a disadvantage to institutions. Better responses were able to link the proliferation of technology, hardware and software to audience behaviours, rather than just mere consumption, or indeed a generalised personal discussion of mobile phone usage. Games often garnered better responses, looking at DIY bedroom production and prosumerism.

Candidates were often hampered by the two centre-led case studies, and at best were listing the technology used to make the product and how this leads to a better audience experience. I, Daniel Blake was often used comparatively, and very unsuccessfully. The transformative power of the proliferation of technology, for better or worse, was often ignored. All too often, a rudimentary knowledge of current streaming services and the fact that audiences can consume from the comfort of their own provided a large thrust of this response.

MEDIA STUDIES

Paper 9607/03
Advanced Portfolio

Key messages

Successful candidates should:
- complete one of the four set briefs
- keep a detailed blog that documents all of their own research and the production process
- reflect upon their work in the creative critical reflection

Each of these elements needs to be completed to a high standard, with a substantial amount of evidence demonstrating knowledge and understanding, targeted research, planning and appropriate use of media language and techniques. Expectations of evidence from each assessment objective are listed on pages 27–30 of the syllabus. Coursework Assessment Summary Forms must be completed by the centre, and should give clear comments for each learner explaining why the marks have been awarded for each assessment objective.

General comments

There were some exceptionally strong submissions for this component, with the vast majority of candidates completing all the tasks to a satisfactory level. A good number of candidates presented detailed and focused research into appropriate existing media, using the knowledge gained to effectively plan and construct their own products. In these a high level of control over both video and print production tools was often demonstrated.

In the very the best work, learners exhibited a clear understanding of the relevant media conventions, both in general and through specific analysis of existing texts. They then applied their understanding of conventions rigorously to the planning and production, testing and illustrating their theoretical and technical learning in a reflective journey. The best submissions made innovative use of new technologies in both planning and production work as well as in the creative critical reflections.

For many candidates, the most limiting aspect is still a lack of clear documentation at all stages of the production process, including the learner's own research, and a limited use of new technologies and innovative responses to the creative critical reflection questions.

Comments on specific questions

Blogs

The number of centres submitting work on a central porthole or hub is pleasing but many are not doing so. Centres are reminded that this is now an expectation and that the blog hub (an online directory of all the candidates' blog links) allows moderators easy access to individual candidates' work; typing in long URLs runs the risk of errors. Links must be checked in advance to ensure that they are working. Centres are once again reminded that **all** elements of the project must be online, either on or linked to the blog; disks, USB's and printouts should not be sent, and will be disregarded by moderators.

The blog is the key piece of evidence of achievement in all the assessment objectives. Effective blogs often used a linear format, organising the blog so that the earliest post is last and the most recent post is first. The strongest blogs were submitted by learners who documented the whole project process in detail and showed clear evidence of research in all aspects of the production, clearly documenting and justifying their choices and the decisions they made – including the ideas at each stage that they rejected. Other strong candidates organised the different aspects of the production process under relevant heading and on separate pages –

however, within these pages, it is always most useful for moderators when posts are arranged chronologically. Either way a substantial amount of evidence, in a variety of forms (photos, video, articles, audio, presentation, surveys, comparisons, annotations, text, mock ups and tests, drafts and roughs), is needed to illustrate a competent understanding of the assessment objectives.

It is vital that blogs include a range of materials posted over the duration of the project which illustrate the process of production from research and initial ideas to the final production and creative critical reflection. The blog should show and explain the choices made at each stage of production in order to illustrate a level of control over all aspects of the production process. The strongest work was from learners who consistently reflected on the revisions and choices they made. Very short blogs did not provide enough evidence to justify awarding marks even if the final products were strong.

The best research demonstrated a range of textual analysis with focused and annotated examples. It is vital that candidates include the exploration of similar products or with similar target audiences to those chosen for the learner's 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. Good examples included interviews with potential audiences as well as analysis of existing distribution data, audience responses and marketing material for similar existing media products. Centres looking to strengthen their marks for research should seek to incorporate the use digital video, audio and print technology into the presentation of their research ideas.

Candidates were highly 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, especially where learners had recorded evidence that enabled them to reflect and make informed choices about the way forward for their production.

Centres seeking to improve their marks should 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). Learners should 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.

Production work

The most successful production work built on previous experiences and was the end product of iteration and test shooting, rehearsals and detailed planning. Candidates who were rewarded high marks also needed to show strong control over software and hardware with a clear and well-documented understanding of media codes and conventions.

Centres are to be reminded that the production work is a package that needs to show a consistency in style, purpose and quality between the major and the minor tasks. Strong examples paid close attention to simulating form, style and genre characteristics across both video and print work as well as identifying a clear branding strategy.

It is important that production work is not presented as a finished product alone. Candidates are rewarded for plotting a journey both in terms of skills development and design and aesthetical understanding – this should include any preliminary tasks, test work and discarded ideas or media material (see section on blogs above). Centres are reminded that satisfactory evidence of planning is needed in order to access marks above Level 3, even if the submitted production work is strong. Candidates should show the choices they have made about equipment they have used as well as casting, settings and locations.

Creative critical reflections

The strongest critical reflections tended to be from candidates who had kept the most reflective records of their research, planning and production. If the work has been completed as the project unfold then many of the assets and materials needed for the critical reflection should be in place and the candidates task is to creatively present them in a way that enables them to reflect on the choices they made. Successful candidates thus answered the questions using clear examples from all stages of their project journey.

Examples of level 5 submission included:

- a magazine article with annotated images from the learner's own production work
- a split-screen video comparison plotting the reference points the existing media texts researched in the planning stage
- a directors commentary
- a presentation with side by side analysis of the image, fonts, colours, layout and graphics from the learner's three production tasks, with comparable industry examples
- annotated screen grabs of video production work
- a model of the product's distribution alongside comparable real-world examples
- a video demonstrating the changes made to the product after audience feedback
- a breakdown of colour grading and other digital effects to illustrate the choices and consistent themes across the package.
- a podcast show aimed at film fans that interviews the director and/or other key production staff in which all technologies used were explained for the purpose they served and on the project.

Other level 5 submissions included radio show and podcast, TV and radio talk show interviews, DVD extras, SFX guides, director question and answers, advertisements for specific technologies used, technology review shows as well as marketing packs info-graphic and posters.

There was some excellent self-reflective work in which candidates gave clear motivations for the decisions they made, backed up with examples from the industry or with research they had carried out into audience and institutions.

Please note that from 2021, the Critical Reflection should be an evaluative essay. The new syllabus for examination in 2021 has the full details.

Summary

It is clear from the work submitted that this component continues to give students an exceptional learning opportunity and an experience to develop a wide range of soft and hard skills. Many candidates have obviously been on a journey of discovery, building their practical skills and confidence as well as their understanding of media theory. The difference in marks awarded continues to be largely down to the extent that learners are able to generate evidence that they have reflected on their own practice and then given themselves time to go back to improve on both their technical ability and their application of relevant media conventions.

MEDIA STUDIES

Key messages

Candidates should:
* reflect in some detail on the skills they have developed whilst creating their coursework
* analyse their coursework offering an evaluation of the way they explored a key concept
* be prepared to write an extended response on one contemporary media theme
* support their answers with detailed references, to their own coursework and other published media texts
* use contemporary media texts in *Section B*
* combine knowledge of at least two media and a range of texts, industries, audiences and debates, to be selected by the centre or candidate
* be encouraged to engage with independent case studies about texts and subjects which interest them.

General comments

Centres are to be congratulated on candidates following the rubric as entrants attempted all the required questions which has not always been the case. Some responses offered clear arguments well supported by contemporary examples. One candidate in particular produced an essay which deserves a mention for its nuanced analysis, breadth of knowledge and engaged debate.

However, overall the reliance upon historic case studies needs to be considered. There new syllabus stresses the requirement for contemporary case studies as defined here:

The topic areas require understanding of contemporary media texts, industries, audiences and debates. For the purposes of examination, a contemporary media text is defined as being a media text that was published or released within five years of the examination date. For example, in June 2021 a contemporary media text would be any media text from the period of 2016 onwards.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

(a)   Successful candidates wrote about how developing their digital skills (perhaps in relation to specific tools) was the way to realise their creative ideas. Some more confident candidates explained how and why they wanted to subvert the expected codes and conventions for their specific audience and genre – these were often successful answers.

A minority of candidates wrote about one production despite the rubric –

In this section you need to write about your work for the Foundation Portfolio and Advanced Portfolio components.

(b)   This question is often answered with less success than **1(a)** as it requires a clear understanding of the concept referred to in the question. Responses may be informed by theory but do not have to be. This question focused specifically on genre, and it was clear not all candidates had a good grasp of this concept. Centres must ensure candidates are fully prepared for this question by covering all the media concepts in detail. There was some confusion in those who wrote about music videos and ignored the general conventions of the music video form in favour of a discussion

of music genres, which was often vague and generalised and not linked to the music video form at all. This is a recurring error which might be addressed by examining the work of Andrew Goodwin among others. The very best answers offered articulate reflections on their products and showed excellent understanding of the key concept. Theorists such as Neale, Chandler, Fiske were occasionally referenced with varying degrees of success.

Section B

There was one exceptional response and some others which accessed higher levels but overall the entries tended towards the middle/lower end. This was largely due to the absence of contemporary case studies as supporting evidence. ,

Contemporary media regulation

2 **'*Media regulation will never satisfy everyone*.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?**

OR

3 **Evaluate the challenges of regulating contemporary media?**

The best examples often referred to international media organisations rather than UK ones – the BBFC has extensive resources but the application of them to learning should go beyond an account of their history. An interesting area of study might be the debate around social media and regulation – Twitter and Facebook continue to be at the centre of controversy

Global media

4 **To what extent have global media transformed distribution?**

OR

5 **'*Global media have removed the need for local media*.' How far do you agree with this statement?**

Only attempted by a few candidates, some of whom engaged successfully with this question in relation to cultural imperialism, which was appropriate. A good approach would be to focus more on the institutional aspects of global media in terms of ownership and funding alongside the implications of an increasing concentration of power within the media, and localised resistance to it.

Media and collective identity

6 **How do contemporary representations of particular social groups compare with the representations of these groups in the past?**

OR

7 **'*Media representations of social groups can never fully capture their complexity*.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?**

A popular choice – areas of representation tended towards ethnic groups, young people, women and LGBTQ. The best response addressed the complexity and/or lack of in the mainstream representation of 'women of colour, queer women and queer women of colour' using examples from *Mad Max: Fury Rd, Ocean's 8, Pitch Perfect 2 and 3, Baywatch, Oh Ramona* and *Euphoria* (all contemporary as defined above) – an example of outstanding practice. There was a tendency to make sweeping statements about the representation of social groups being either 'good' or 'bad' often concluding that 'representations are getting better'. There were some good historical case studies but less confident contemporary ones; many candidates tried to tackle five or six different social groups when it would be more beneficial to focus on one or two in real depth (as in the above response).

Media in the online age

8   Analyse the impact of key developments in online media in the area you have studied.

OR

9   '*The internet has revolutionised media production.*' How far do you agree with this statement?

The most accomplished work set up sophisticated arguments around the competing ideas presented by Jenkins and Leadbetter. Wikinomics and the Long Tail did not enhance the responses as they were merely reproduced at length rather than applied in support of an argument. Far too many relied upon candidates' own experience of watching *Netflix,* and/or listening to *Spotify.* While these are good starting points the specification requires subject specific knowledge to enable such reflections to move beyond banal/common sense observations, e.g. people used to go to the cinema/buy CDs in shops now they go online.

Postmodern media

10   '*Postmodernism is more of a style than a historical period.*' To what extent have you found this to be true in the media area you have studied?

OR

11   Explain why some media texts could be described as postmodern?

Some encouraging responses referenced *Stranger Things* and the Music Videos – *1999* Charli XCX/Troye Sivan, Lana Del Rey *Doin' Time.*

When candidates were less successful they tended to rely on a narrow range of examples which made it more difficult for them to access the top band. There were some informed references to theory in the better candidates, who used it to explore and support their ideas, sometimes with a strong and coherent argument. Knowledge of postmodern theorists was more apparent than examples of texts.

Closing comments

The paper offers candidates a chance to clearly demonstrate that after two years of study they have developed knowledge and an understanding of the media beyond that which we might expect a member of the general population to understand. If they merely rely on their own personal exposure to media products they will not be able access even the middle of the mark range.

Centres are reminded that this component has changed significantly in the new version of the syllabus, for first examination in 2021.