

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

The entry in November is smaller than for the June series.

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

Many centres still did not 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 in both the centre's hub and candidate blogs need to be checked carefully by centres to ensure that they are working.

There are a range of dedicated blogging platforms available to centres such as Blogger, Wordpress or Google Sites. However, many centres choose to use website building platforms such as Wix or Weebly. These platforms are may 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 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 continues to be 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

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 strand 4 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(iv) 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 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 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 for this series was based on an extract from *The Deceived* (2020).

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

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 and supporting points with examples and accurate use of terminology.

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

Overall, candidates were able to respond to the questions. There is evidence that they responded slightly more effectively to **Section A**, but performance was equal whether they chose to respond to **Question 2**, or **Question 3 (Section B)**. A very small number of candidates either spent less time on **Section B** or did not respond to this section, indicating either a lack of awareness that a response was required, or that they ran out of time to answer two questions. In **Section B**, candidates were able to respond to Assessment Objective (AO) 1 slightly more effectively than AO2, indicating their strengths (knowledge and understanding of media concepts, contexts and critical debates, using terminology), and weaknesses (analysis of media products, textual evidence).

Comments on specific questions

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. However, some candidates were not able to use precise, and accurate technical terms, and some did not develop their answers when it came to exploring the impact technical elements might have upon the viewer. This did not allow for 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 strands of the mark scheme, ensuring that candidates are aware of how to analyse texts, underpin their analysis with key theories where appropriate, and can apply the use of appropriate and accurate media terminology.

Candidates who responded well to this question evidenced a thorough understanding of, and effective reference to the key concepts of language and representation. They evidenced an effective understanding of the social significances explored within the extract through 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 Deceived'. Popular themes were mystery, danger and suspense (the house, and the teacher), an illicit relationship (attraction between student and teacher) and power dynamics (intrapersonal, and societal). 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, and made insightful comments about the representation of people, and places.

Some of the most effective discussions focused on areas such as: how the clip created tense feelings for the audience (opening scene tracking shot, low-key lighting, sad dialogue used in the voiceover, atmospheric soundtrack); understanding that the narrative structure was non-linear (initial scenes in the future, flashback to the past); the danger held for the female protagonist (vulnerable voice over narration, linking the teacher to the dark house via the book, danger indicated by smoking), romantic feelings were reciprocated (classroom close-ups and office shot-reverse-shots of eye gazing, romantic soundtrack), the dominance of the teacher and educational establishment (low angles of teacher, high angles of student, reflection of teacher over student's shoulder, books), and that the female student was constructed to be a conventionally attractive female (mise-en-scene – costume, red coat, feminine dress). Some candidates were able to cover most of the scenes, however some candidates focused on the first scene, or only 1–2 scenes.

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 unable to access the higher bands of the mark scheme. Points were repeated throughout, or analysis 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., Mulvey, Butler, Hall, Barthes), 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

The strongest candidates in this section show a thorough understanding of, and make effective reference to, the key concepts of audience and industry. They evidence an understanding of the wider issues, contexts, and debates, and link this to the question, supporting their response with textual examples from multiple effective and appropriate case studies, using these to explore their chosen media area. Relevant media theories would be used effectively in response to the question.

Many candidates provided acclaimed and successful blockbuster or tent pole products as case studies (such as Disney/Marvel's 'Avengers' films, F&F Franchise, or Barbie/Oppenheimer). There is evidence that some centers have reconsidered their approach in teaching case studies. Candidates demonstrated more freedom and evidence of building up their own resources and case studies from each area (and perhaps even across various industries), which has better equipped them to engage more meaningfully with **Section B**.

Some responses did not fully address the question, providing a generalised or statistical overview of a case study rather than addressing the stem of the question. Occasionally, responses were not credit-worthy, given that the focus is on recent (within the last five years of the exam date) and relevant examples. A handful of 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. Candidates who were able to respond to the question and the discussions surrounding them were able to respond more effectively.

Question 2

Analyse the process of marketing a new product in the media area you have studied.

Candidates were able to use relevant knowledge of marketing, such as the ability to use technology in marketing products on social media platforms, and how this might reach a larger audience. They were also able to use their case studies to answer the question and provided examples of how products are marketed using trailers and events, or streaming algorithms. The most common discussions focused on analysing the success or failure of marketing strategies based on measures of success, such as box office figures.

In good answers, candidates were able to develop a critical engagement and point of comparison between their case studies, often forming a counter argument. Terminology was used fluently, demonstrating a good understanding. When used, key theories strengthened candidates' responses. Weaker candidates chose less relevant case studies, which were limiting, and terminology was not used fluently. They focused on facts without providing any analysis or demonstrating an understanding of wider implications. Often providing a historical overview, they were limited to facts such as box office revenue and marketing products/plans (often limited to social media). Some responses used case studies which were neither recent nor relevant; in others there was a lack of focus on responding to the question. They may have evidenced a weak understanding of terms and concepts, or misused theories.

Question 3

“There is no single audience anymore, but multiple audiences.” To what extent does this statement reflect your experience of media consumption?

Most candidates had some knowledge and understanding to answer the question. Candidate responses tended to focus on responding in the affirmative. They identified different demographic measures of audiences, such as age or gender, and/or took a psychographic approach to their analysis, explaining how different products appealed to different interests through genre, or formats (streaming versus cinema exhibition), supporting understanding of and appropriate reference to ‘uses and gratifications’ theory. When used appropriately, key theories strengthened candidates' responses. Responses also outlined the impact of social media interaction, including influencers and a preference for short-format content. Many candidates were able to effectively communicate their understanding of the industry in relation to audiences. Weaker candidates focused on facts, without providing any analysis or demonstrating an understanding of wider implications. They did not engage with any theories, and there was often a lack of focus on responding to the question. They may have evidenced a weak understanding of terms and concepts.

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 awarded for each assessment objective and strand. If candidates have worked in groups comments must reflect individual contributions to projects.

General comments

This November series continued to see a small number of centres entering candidates for the A level qualification. Many of these 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) continues to be the least successful minor task – 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

If centres are entering more than one candidate, they 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 the work of all candidates entered. Many centres are still only supplying individual candidate URLs, which are time consuming to type into browsers, especially if there are transcription errors.

It is important that centres check that within candidate blogs all links work 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 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.

Centres should recommend the use of dedicated blogging platforms so that candidates can present their work effectively. Platforms such as Blogger, Wordpress or Google Sites are ideal for this. Many centres 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 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 (major and two minor) and the critical reflection should be the first thing seen when opening up the blog. All elements should be clearly labelled, through the use of menus, tags, or headers. Candidates who documented the whole process of production in detail tended to be the 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. Successful candidates often present over fifty meaningful blog posts.

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. Fewer than 1000 words candidates are liable to self-penalise through lack of depth of reflection. Candidates who write considerably more than 1000 words tend to self-penalise through lack of focus. Candidates should, therefore, focus on presenting a well-structured and argued reflective and analytical essay rather than worrying too much about the word count.

There is no requirement for the critical reflection to be presented creatively, 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 was the Music Promotion Package closely followed by the Short Film and Documentary packages. The Film Promotion Package has shifted from most to least popular. This shift could have been influenced by the lifting of constraints after the pandemic.

Major video products

All briefs contain a major video product, either 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 very high 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. Some candidates produced only one trailer, thus not meeting the requirements of the brief.

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.

There continues to be some powerful short film entries 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.

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.

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. 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.

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

The most popular format continues to be Instagram. This is acceptable, but many candidates continue to treat 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

Key messages

In order to do well on this paper, candidates should:

- manage their time effectively – many candidates submitted lengthy **Section A** answers followed by very short responses to **Section B** despite both being worth the same number of marks.
- avoid using case studies that focus on primary texts older than 5 years from the examination date.
- address the set question; a significant number of candidates had clearly learnt a great deal but did not frame their answer to respond to the question which made it difficult for them to access the higher levels.
- have enough case studies to provide a variety of examples rather than relying on one case study. Those who used the same content for every answer struggled to demonstrate enough breadth of understanding.

General comments

This paper asks students to choose two questions from a choice of three in **Section A**; each question is marked out of 15. **Section B** is a compulsory question on Media Ecology which is worth up to 30 marks. The syllabus states that case studies should feature a majority of contemporary texts, although any text may be used to give historical context. The term contemporary is used to mean a text which was first published no more than approximately five years before the examination year, in this case 2018.

Time management seemed to be a problem for a significant proportion of candidates which resulted in some very short essays in **Section B**. While there is no direct correlation between volume and outcome one would expect a longer response for Media Ecology given the potential marks available are double the other questions.

There were some excellent responses from candidates who achieved very high marks by addressing the set question. These offered detailed case studies which exemplified the relevant features of their chosen topic area – a result of guided independent study which leads to a greater level of engagement with the topic than centre taught case studies of specific episodes of TV dramas / music videos. For guidance, the case study should be a collection of associated texts, linked thematically or in another way, which the candidate clearly knows well – including the processes through which the texts were made, how they were intended to be distributed and consumed, and their intended audience.

Comments on specific questions

Section A

Question 1

‘Media regulation is getting more and more liberal.’ How far do you agree with this statement?

The most common approach offered was that of Censorship versus Freedom of Speech, which led to a debate around the self-regulation of social media; unfortunately this was too often referred to in generalised terms rather than with specific, detailed examples. Livingston and Lunt’s work is a good choice for this topic but all too often it was not applied to the arguments or was unanchored from case studies. Media effects is one of the most widely studied areas in the subject, however many candidates seemed to overly rely on a much-criticised research project from the early 1960s by Bandura. Among the huge volume of work in this

field, centres might find David Gauntlett's *Ten things wrong with the media 'effects' model* an excellent resource. Candidates generally scored highest on this question.

Question 2

Analyse the relationship between postmodern media and realism.

The best responses offered critical reflection clearly informed by study of key theorists Baudrillard, Lyotard and Jameson. *Barbie* was the most frequently used example. The highest grades were awarded to answers which offered multiple case studies including *JoJo Rabbit*, *I Don't Care* (Ed Sheeran music video). Old examples (e.g. *Pulp Fiction*) are still more common than one would expect given the clear guidance in the syllabus.

Question 3

'Media institutions have to meet the demands of the consumer, rather than the other way around.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

Most candidates attempted this option and generally concentrated on whether social media offers audiences a platform to express their views. Where candidates explored detailed case studies utilising specific examples such as the ongoing movements #MeToo, Black Lives Matter and the IKEA advert 2020. Curran and Seaton's theories were frequently cited – the more successful responses analysed and discussed these rather than just namechecked them. The *Sonic the Hedgehog* movie and the subsequent alterations to it was frequently used as an example of audience empowerment.

Section B

Question 4

Evaluate the significance of contemporary technologies which have changed our relationship with the media.

In terms of historical context, Neil Postman featured far more frequently than Marshall McLuhan which probably reflects centre preference in such a small sample. Centres are reminded that prefacing the response with an overview of term Media Ecology is far from the most effective way to start an answer. The most successful responses examined the smartphone as a key technology illustrated through the impact of social media, contextualising it in terms of wider cultural debates around censorship, audience and industries. Black Lives Matter and prosumers/influencers in general were used as examples which in the last case would have been even better if they had focused on specific, named figures.

Weaker responses relied upon candidates' own experience of Uber/Amazon and dating websites and apps as well as streaming sites like Netflix. As starting points, the candidate's own consumption represents good practice, but the syllabus requires subject-specific knowledge which demonstrates an appropriate level of learning. After two years studying Media, it is surprising to read fairly widespread use of assertions such as 'people used to go to cinema now they watch netflix' / 'send emails rather than post letters' and many other simplistic comments. These are not in themselves rewarded by the mark scheme but might, with appropriate focus on key concepts and supported with appropriate and relevant textual references, be a starting point for candidates to demonstrate what they have learned by engaging with the specifics of the question.