**General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2013**

Media Studies   **MEST3**

(Specification 2570)

Unit 3: Media: Critical Perspectives

Report on the Examination

General

Although many students produced good exam papers and resit students could improve their marks, for a significant minority of schools/colleges January was too early to enter their students for MEST 3. These students were able to answer one section well, but then produced a very weak second section or they only had satisfactory understanding of one of the pre-set topics so struggled to answer some Section A questions.

SECTION A

Section A of this year's exam was the ESPN title sequence from the coverage of the Women's Super League and highlights from the BBC of the football match between England and France in the 2011 Women's World Cup.

The questions encouraged students to critically analyse the texts and in Questions 2 and 3 to address the more complex ideas of media, issues, debates, theories and wider contexts.

The focus of the three questions is:

Question 1 Media concepts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on concepts – forms (media language, narrative and genre), representations, institutions, audiences or values. This year's question was on narrative and audience position.

Students are rewarded for:
- analysis of both media products, preferably detailed analysis with detailed reference to the products
- understanding of concepts, in particular in this question narrative and audience position**.**

Question 2 Media issues and debates

Use the unseen products to answer a question on media issues and debates. Students may refer to other media products to support their answer. The 'may' is intended to encourage students to move beyond the two unseen exam products and include examples of and from media products other than the two exam products.

Students are rewarded for:
- evaluation using media issues/debates/theories
- supporting their answers with a range of examples.

Question 3 Wider contexts

Use the unseen products to answer a question on wider contexts. Students should refer to other media products to support their answer. The 'should' is intended to tell students they will be expected to move beyond the two unseen products and include other examples.

Students are rewarded for:
- evaluation using wider contexts

- supporting their answers using a range of examples from other relevant media products.

For Questions 2 and 3 students can include examples from a wide range of sources, for example their individual case studies, their MEST 4 coursework, AS work, other class work and from their own media use.

Students should read the introductions to the two media products carefully to provide useful background that can help answer the questions. However students must use the information to answer the question, not just repeat the information descriptively in their answer.

Students should be reminded to take the time and care to read the Section A questions before they view the products, and again before they answer the questions. They should underline the key words and make notes using these key words as they watch the two products. They need to answer the particular question that has been asked, not just include a general analysis of the products or latch on to just one word in the question.

Students are rewarded if they make a number of different points and for higher levels a range of different points in each question. They will not achieve as high a level if they only include one point in an answer, even if that one point is answered well.

Higher level answers show discussion and debate of both sides of an argument or advantages and disadvantages. For example in Question 3 higher level students included arguments and examples for and against the media being able to challenge traditional representations of women.

There were lots of good answers in Section A.

1. **Evaluate how the narrative techniques used attempt to position the audience and to create excitement.**

Question 1 was answered with mixed success, with some students struggling to focus on narrative techniques.

Students should be reminded that they must answer the question. Question 1 is not a general analysis of the products. It is an assessment of particular media concepts - forms, (media language, narrative and genre), representations, institutions, audiences or values. In this question the focus was on narrative and audience position. Weaker answers only addressed the word 'excitement' and as a result lacked focus on the media concepts narrative or audience.

Good answers included, reference to some of the following points:
- the narrative technique of binary opposites to create conflict and position the audience on England's side and against France. The BBC as a UK broadcaster was biased in favour of England
- in Product 2 close ups were used to show the emotion of the England players and position the audience on their side. In Product 1 the use of long shots of the players showing their skills were used to introduce the main characters of future programmes, encouraging the audience to watch the matches
- the use of narrative enigmas to engage the audience and encourage them in Product 1, to watch the Super League programme and in Product 2 the outcome of each penalty and the penalty shootout
- the narrative structure of equilibrium and disruption, promising the audience the pleasure of resolution and the emotion of the new equilibrium

- the narrative roles of hero and to some extent villain that exaggerate the conflict and position the audience on the side of the England captain
- the commentator's role as a narrator with dramatic and emotive language and a dramatic pause to create suspense
- the commentator's use of direct and quite a personal mode of address to guide the viewer and position them with the England side. His conversational codes positioned the audience as being at the game in conversation with the commentator
- the use of the diegetic sound of the crowd to create excitement and position the audience with the crowd in the stadium as if they were at the game. This was also shown by the use of high angle and long shots to promise the audience the best view in the stadium
- weaker answers tended to focus on general and vague points about exciting music and bright colours to attract the attention of the audience. A wider and higher level understanding is needed at A2.

2.   How has digital television transformed the viewing behaviour of audiences? You may also refer to other media products to support your answer.

This question was answered well by almost all students.

Good answers focused sharply on a range of media debates, issues and theories, with lots of examples from other media products to support their points. Almost all students had good knowledge of a wide range of developments in digital television. For example on demand services, links to official website and social media, interactive services, a huge increase in the number of channels.

Weaker answers lacked focus on the question. A minority of students wrote about audiences in general, for example some wrote about audience effects. Students need to read the question carefully. Past paper practice is good for students to do, but they must be reminded that they should answer the particular question that has been asked in this exam not a previous one they have practiced.

What really separated the lower level answers from the higher level ones was the ability not to just describe these technological developments, but to develop them into media debates and issues about audiences.

Good answers included reference to some of the following points:
- audiences now have more choice. Higher level answers used pluralism to discuss this. Sophisticated answers debated whether there was really more choice or just more of the same and whether audiences had only a very limited choice or the illusion of choice and channels and programmes were still dictated by institutions
- channels now catered for niche audiences and niche interests. They can broadcast a greater diversity of programmes, some that wouldn't be shown on more mainstream channels. Was this a positive development or did it still create an unequal hierarchy in terms of programmes shown and audiences catered for?
- audiences can now watch programmes and channels from other countries. Higher level answers used this to discuss the concept of globalisation. Sophisticated answers debated the possible advantages of globalisation, but also the problems of cultural imperialism and the domination of US channels
- the increase in channels led to a decline in the viewing figures for the mainstream channels causing economic problems
- audiences could become more active and powerful. They could be prosumers by commenting on programmes and contributing to programmes via official websites and social media

- audiences feel and can be more involved. There is now increased audience interaction. Higher level answers debated whether this was positive, giving audiences more control or whether it is just superficial
- audiences could now self schedule giving them more control and choice about viewing. However time shift viewing could raise problems with the lack of a watershed.

There was a really wide range of examples used to support points made. Good answers used their examples to explain and support points, weaker answers just described the example.

Examples included, general examples such as 4OD, BBC iPlayer, Netflix. More detailed examples such as the Olympics and Paralympics. Particular specialist sports and music channels, US dramas, Sky Atlantic and Sky Sports News, Al Jazera. Programmes that involved audiences voting such as The X Factor and Britain's Got Talent.

Theories that were successfully used to support points included a range of active audience theories such as Uses and Gratifications, Hall Encoding and Decoding. Pluralsim/Marxist debates. Globalisation theories such as McCluhan and Robertson. Plus theories related to new and digital media, such as Gaunlett, Gillmor and Neuman.

3.   Is the media able to challenge traditional representations of femininity? You should refer to other media products to support your answer.

Good answers focused sharply on a range of wider contexts, with lots of examples from other media products to support their points.

Again what really separated the lower level answers from the mid and higher level ones was the ability not to just describe representations that challenged, but to develop them into wider contexts points. Higher level answers placed their representation points and examples in a wider media and social context.

Good answers included reference to some of the following points:
- femininity as a social construction. Higher level answers explored how femininity was a contested idea, with different views about what femininity is that had changed over time
- the complex representation of femininity. Higher level answers debated examples that suggested traditional representations were being challenged and examples that suggested they weren't
- women being represented as objects and sexualised that was used to attract audiences and sell products
- women in secondary roles with little power in the product's representation or in the narrative
- women defined by their relationship to men, as mothers, partners that didn't reflect social changes. Some sophisticated answers discussed the nostalgic appeal of such representations
- wider context reasons why women were represented in the way they were, especially economic.

There were lots of good up to date and topical examples to support points. The Olympics and BBC coverage was the most popular example. Historical TV dramas such as Downton Abbey and Call The Midwife, TV dramas such as Casualty and Holby City, plus a range of crime drama. Individual adverts such as the ASDA Christmas advert, the John Lewis advert used in the AS exam. Music videos, such as Rihanna and Beyonce. Celebrity and lifestyle magazines. Page 3 in The Sun and men's magazines such as Zoo and FHM. Higher level

examples explored the contradictions in one text, for example action film heroines and video games.

Theories that were successfully used were a range of feminist theories such as Mulvey, Wolf Beauty Myth Levy Raunch Culture, Butler Gender Trouble. Good students also showed an understanding of the concept of feminism and could produce good answer without necessarily needing lots of theory.

SECTION B

Students are reminded on the exam paper that they would be rewarded for showing evidence of independent study by using their:
- own individual case study topic
- own individual media products
to answer the question.

Students were rewarded for:
- an individual case study with a range of examples
- an understanding of representation or the impact of new and digital media
- application of relevant media issues/debates/theories/wider contexts
- focus on the question.

For Representation, the most popular group was still young people/teenagers. Other popular social groups were women, people with disabilities, the working class, Muslims and gay men. Places were often the place a student was from and in the best answers students included issues such as representation of class, ethnicity, etc. Good representation case studies often had a sharp and original focus, for example rather than a very general case study on the representation of women, a sharper focus on the representation of women in video games or action films. Other examples of this, included young Asian men, men in action films, Liverpool and the Hillsborough disaster and working class Manchester.

For the Impact of New/Digital Media case studies the most popular was Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. However this sometimes led to very general case studies with a lack of detailed examples or detailed analysis. A sharper focus and a selection of a small number of actual media products with detailed analysis would help.

Some students had very wide ranging case studies and although they were still rewarded for the wide range of examples they used, this made it difficult for some students to write a focused or coherent answer, with the weakest ones ending up as lists of examples with limited evaluation.

Schools/colleges should also advise their students not to choose case studies based on a technological development, such as the iPhone, Kindle or digital photography. These case studies do not easily lead to detailed examples of actual media products/texts and often lacked a media focus.

The best case studies were produced by students that had worked hard throughout their course and thought for themselves and it was good to be able to reward this.

The best case studies included:
- a range of different media products from the three platforms, with different representation/values/genres/producers, etc.
- detailed examples from particular media products with detailed analysis
- evidence of research into media debates and issues and relevant wider contexts

- theory applied to media products used to explain and support
- a genuine interest in the case study they had chosen to do, seen by engagement with the issues and their own opinions.

The main ways students achieved higher level marks was by having their own individual case study to answer the question. There is still a minority of schools/colleges doing centre led case studies with only centre led examples. Students from one centre shouldn't all have the same case study. This doesn't allow students to show evidence of independent study, which excludes them from the higher levels. For example a centre all writing answers on the representation of youth, with the same or very similar media products is disadvantaging their students. In addition students who had their own case study were more engaged and more willing to focus on the question, rather than repeat a pre learned answer of descriptive points. All or at least the vast majority of the media products students use to support their answer should also be individual.

Schools/colleges can start the pre-set topics with a class overview on Representation and the Impact of New/Digital Media to introduce the topic and may want to do a mini class case study as an example, but then students should do their own individual case study, with their own choice of media products.

Good Section B answers:
- answered the particular question, not writing 'everything I know about my case study'. This is continuing to improve. Stronger answers identified and addressed the key words from the question in their answer and answered the question directly in their conclusion. Students should also answer all parts of the question, not just latch on to a few words
- included detailed analysis of and references to particular media products rather than just general examples. For example not just YouTube but a particular scene, shot, mise en scène, etc from a particular video or not just Misfits, but a particular scene, costume, storyline or piece of dialogue
- showed a range in their answers. For example referring to a wide range of platforms, preferably all three, using products from different genres/institutions/ representations/values. Students were also rewarded for referring to a range of media products to support their answer. Answers couldn't achieve the higher levels if they only used one or two
- applied media issues and debates, what does their case study suggest are the current issues in the media? Applied relevant media theories to their case study and media products throughout their answers, using the theory to answer the question and support the point they are making, not just describing a theory. Weaker answers tended to list pre learned centre led theories, that although relevant were not clearly applied to media products or used to answer the question
- included relevant wider contexts and again applied them to their own case study. Weaker answers tended to include lists of facts and statistics or the history of a particular topic with no evaluation or link to the question.

REPRESENTATION

Representation questions were answered well on the whole. Good answers didn't lose sight of explaining how their group or place was actually represented in individual texts. Higher level answers did this in detail, with detailed examples from media products.

A few weaker answers wrote a very general essay about the representation of their group or place or re wrote a past question they had obviously done in class, rather than focusing on

the question from the exam paper. However, this is now a small minority and it continues to improve, with almost all students answering the question.

4.   Representations are rarely straightforward but are often complex and may be contradictory. What evidence is there for this in your case study?

This was the most popular representation question and was answered well.

- Stronger answers analysed and evaluated a range of different representations of their group or place to evaluate the words 'complex' and 'contradictory' which appeared in the question. They could then come to the conclusion that their representation was or wasn't complex and contradictory. Choosing a variety of media products carefully when planning their case study would help this.
- Good answers came to a complex conclusion. Higher level answers compared the straightforward representation in some media products but then the more complex representations in other products. However some sophisticated answers could also argue forcefully that the vast majority of mainstream representations of their group were straightforward and supported their answer.
- Good answers discussed the reasons why representations were complex and contradictory or not. They used media issues, debates and wider contexts, to explore this, for example values, ideologies and hegemony, the role and motivations of media producers, the role of audiences.
- Sophisticated answers discussed the role of audiences and used active audience theories to discuss the different possible readings different audiences could get, but also the power of preferred readings.

5.   One effect of repeated negative representations is to demonise and marginalise. How far is this true of the representation of the group or place you have studied?

This was a less popular question but answered well by those who chose it.

- Almost all answers evaluated how their group or place was represented in a negative way and understood the words 'demonise' and 'marginalise'. Stronger answers focused on both aspects of the question, weaker answers on just the 'negative'.
- Higher level answers discussed the range of representations of their group or place. Higher level answers included some examples that didn't demonise or marginalise as well. A good way for students who may find Section B a challenge to improve their answers is to study a wide range of examples that represent their group or place in different ways.
- Good answers discussed the reasons why representations were negative and demonised and marginalised. They used media issues, debates and wider contexts, to explore this. Answers really benefited from economic and social wider context reason for the representations.
- Sophisticated answers discussed the role of audiences and used active audience theories to discuss the different possible readings different audiences could get, but also the power of preferred readings.

THE IMPACT OF NEW/DIGITAL MEDIA

Almost all students showed good understanding of the Impact of New/Digital Media. A minority of weaker students got bogged down in only knowledge of new and digital media and their answers tended to be descriptive lists.

6.   **The internet is a democratic space, where we are all free to participate equally. Using your case study, discuss whether the impact of new and digital media has been democratic.**

This question was answered well, with students using a really wide range of case studies to answer it.

- Almost all students discussed the impact new and digital media has had on enabling audiences to participate, with detailed examples to support this from their case study.
- Good answers also addressed the harder concept of democracy, but were able to apply it to a really wide range of case studies, not just obvious ones like news.
- Good answers used this to discuss the changing role of audiences and producers. Higher level answers debated the arguments for and against.
- Higher level answers debated the obstacles to equal participation and democracy, for example the digital divide in the UK and globally, the power and control of media organisations. Sophisticated answers debated whether this was increasing or decreasing with developments in new and digital media. Good answers had examples of this from their own case study rather than just as a general point.
- Good answers discussed the reasons why there was democracy or not, using media issues, debates and wider contexts.

7.   **New and digital media offer a wide range of competing ideas and opinions, from experts and journalists to bloggers and social networkers, making it harder for audiences to know who to trust. In such an environment, how does the audience know who to trust?**

This was a less popular question, it was mostly answered well.

- Almost all answers had examples from their case study of competing ideas and opinions. Weaker answers tended to just describe them.
- Good answers discussed the different 'value' audiences placed on these sources. Sophisticated answers discussed how this could change and wasn't fixed. For example did audiences trust established media organisations or user generated content now? What were the advantages and disadvantages for audiences of the different sources? Did audiences now use a range of sources for different reasons? Could established media organisations lose trust?
- Good answers used concepts of active and passive audiences to support their answers.
- Good answers discussed the role of audiences in influencing and producing media content and the advantages and disadvantages of this for audiences and producers. They supported this with a discussion of ideas such as user generated content, prosumers and citizen journalism.
- Good answers discussed the reasons why there was democracy or not, using media issues, debates and wider contexts.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the **Results statistics** page http://web.aqa.org.uk/exams-office/about-results/results-statistics.php of the AQA Website.

UMS conversion calculator: www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion