Section A: Text, Concepts and Contexts

General Comments

The unseen product, the title sequence for the BBC docusoap Scrappers, presented students with a variety of ways to approach the analysis of media concepts and they responded thoughtfully and at times enthusiastically to Terry and his ‘Scrappers family’. As in previous years, the level of detailed reference that students were able to make to the product under exam conditions was impressive. The responses suggest that students are well prepared for this exam in terms of understanding the media concepts as well as in the skills of effective note taking. There was again less reliance on the contextual material in the written answers which is another positive development.

Question focus in both Section A and B is an important discriminator. In Section A, students should make sure they are addressing the specific questions set within the context of the question heading - Forms, Representation, Audience and Institution. Question focus is also an integral part of the assessment in Section B; descriptions of cross-media studies and rote responses based on whole class teaching, often on film marketing and Reality TV, don’t allow the student to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme.

Question 1: Media Representation:

How is the representation of the ‘Metro Salvage’ workers as a family unit constructed?

This was successfully answered with students clearly confident in applying the concept of representation with ideas of selection and construction providing an excellent foundation for the analysis of the ‘family’ unit. The best answers directly linked the points about the way the sequence constructed traditional roles of the family - as patriarchal, hierarchal and gendered - to specific examples from the sequence. These included the composition of shots with Terry as a single focus, leading the viewer through his empire, with the more static shots of groups of women in domestic spaces. Much reference was made to the groups of workers being represented as mischievous children, with Terry as their firm but fair father. The final group shot of the sequence was identified by many as referencing a family portrait. It was notable that the great majority of students saw the idea of family as unarguably positive, a connotation which would be transmitted to the audience. Top level responses did this but also considered some of the reasons for and effects of the representation, suggesting that it was an intertextual reference to BBC soaps or part of an ideological function of the media.

Problems in the responses to this question came when students had misread the sequence to believe that the Scrappers were a biological family or when they discussed the concept of family in an abstract way without linking back to the sequence. Sometimes there was an issue with students moving too far away from the idea of family, focusing instead on the mood and tone of the sequence.

Question 2: Media Forms:

How does the sequence encourage the audience to keep watching?

This was the question where students achieved the highest marks. Students had plenty of ideas about why the audience might be encouraged to keep watching, but needed to make sure that they were firmly rooted in the concept heading of forms. It was fine for students to focus on one aspect
of media forms and there were many sound responses using narrative theory to analyse the use of narrative stages and enigmas in order to entice the audience. The emphasis on narrative also extended to the use of character identification and positioning which helped to lead the audience through the sequence, along with the clear exposition provided by Terry in voice over which meant that viewers were quickly orientated into the programme.

Using the prompt of media forms led to successful answers which analysed the use of cinematography, mise en scène and sound. Answers referred to the visually appealing use of shots of the scrapyard counterpointed by the music which suggested originality and creativity - a twist on the conventional docusoap which made it more appealing to the audience. It wasn’t necessary for students to recognise the music, but they were confident in analysing it as a contrast to the setting and subject matter. Several responses also made reference to the excitement and action of the sequence, with the car falling at the end apparently causing a strong audience response. Weaker answers were characterised by more general reference to the sequence’s content which didn’t give precise examples eg identifying the importance of Terry as a character was much more successful when backed up by reference to use of close ups, tracking shots and direct address to the audience.

**Question 3: Media Institutions:**

**How does the sequence reflect the BBC’s stated aims as a public service broadcaster to ‘inform, educate and entertain’?**

Students seemed happy to address this area and it was clearly a familiar concept. Many took the slightly unexpected approach of working through the three descriptors from the BBC remit one at a time in a highly structured way. There was nothing inherently wrong with this strategy but it did perhaps make for a slightly repetitive response than a more holistic approach.

On the whole, students were able to use the sequence to draw out examples of entertainment in the slapstick humour and exchanges between characters, extending this to successfully argue that the forms - cinematography, mise en scène, sound etc - used were also entertaining. The clear focus in the question that students should focus on the sequence itself seemed to lead to more relevant responses. The discussion of informing and educating focused on the idea that the working of the scrap business was being revealed to a mainstream audience, along with the idea that this was a group of people, in terms of class and region, who were often ignored or negatively stereotyped by the media. The best answers directly linked this to the props and setting, picking up on the signifiers of working class culture in the sequence which provided recognition for the audience. This was a very fruitful area of discussion and some answers referred to this as a counterbalance to the London centric nature of the BBC identifying it as part of the institution’s remit to represent the whole nation, often noting that this was a positive representation based on community and support.

It was notable - and slightly problematic - that while raising the issue of marginalisation many students seemed to interpret this group as ‘other’; one which apparently didn’t watch television and wouldn’t be interested in identifying with their own culture on screen. However, this idea was also explored in a more subtle way with some answers linking Scrappers to a trend in popular television which encourages a voyeuristic response to the subject matter and which could be accused of ‘class tourism’.
Question 4: Media Audiences:

How does the sequence appeal to a prime time mainstream audience?

This question caused the greatest difficulty for students with responses often barely making reference to the sequence itself. While it was appropriate to refer to the time slot of the programme this needed to be linked to the family friendly, pre watershed content of the sequence rather than being a description of people’s domestic habits (finishing work, putting children to bed, eating dinner etc). Much more successful was the related approach of placing Scrappers in the context of soap opera, reading it as a continuation of programmes such as EastEnders with a familiar address to the audience. Students pointed to the familiarity of narrative, characters and conventions as well as the appeal of the humour, also pointing to the use of the construction of the family unity to appeal to a family viewing. The docusoap focus on everyday work situations was also read as appealing to a mass, mainstream audience. This relationship was usefully explored by some as an example of the media constructing personal identity and a range of media uses and gratifications were also referred to.

Section B: Cross-Media Study

General Comments

There was again evidence of a lot of effective work on the cross-media study with students covering a variety of contemporary products, audiences and institutions. There were strong cross-media studies across the topics with good responses using cookery and lifestyle, music industry, sports and film. It is recognised that with the developments in technology, the three media platforms are not the discrete forms that they once were with TV broadcasts now on channels such as YouTube, newspapers having an online presence, hosting podcasts and films as well as existing in print forms. It is important that students cover a range of examples – they do not have to be evenly distributed across platforms.

As has been discussed in detail in several previous reports, it is vital that students have a viable cross-media study in order to access the higher levels of the mark scheme. The focus should be on a case study which allows students to engage with contemporary media debates and also gives them a wide enough range of products in order to be able to select the most appropriate examples for the question focus. With the emphasis being on contemporary media debates it is necessary for students to have current and recent examples to use. Case studies on documentary in particular often refer to examples which are really too old to be effective in analysing the contemporary media landscape. It can be relevant to talk about the way that older media products may have an extended life due to digital repeats but this should not be the main focus of a cross-media study.

It is also worth noting that there is no need for students to describe the cross-media study in detail at the beginning of the essay; this doesn’t tend to be relevant and wastes their time. In a related point students should be reassured that long essays are not necessarily better; it is often the case that they suffer from repetition and lack question focus. On average the five A4 sheets provided in the answer booklet for Section B should be sufficient to produce a thorough, coherent response.
**Question 5:**

“Media institutions always attempt to shape the values and attitudes of their audiences through their products.” Consider this statement in relation to the products in your cross-media study.

Far fewer students answered this question which was disappointing, as those who did performed well with some very thoughtful and at times original responses. Most students who answered this interpreted it as a question of how - and if - media products operated ideologically (though they didn’t need to use the term explicitly). This was a very productive approach which could be applied to all choices of cross-media studies. Examples included analysis of the way particular representations can be used to normalise types of appearance and behaviour. For example, case studies on music artists such as Taylor Swift and Beyoncé debated feminist messages in a sophisticated way while Game of Thrones was a frequent example, using the political conflicts as well as the representation of gender to address the question.

The idea of constructing a brand or a whole lifestyle in order to shape values and attitudes of the audience was successfully applied to examples from Nigella Lawson’s empire to US sit coms. Particularly successful responses were evident in work on the Marvel franchise where the roles of different superheroes were read ideologically and linked to institutional contexts. It was also acceptable for students to interpret the question as one about marketing and persuasion to analyse how producers encourage audiences to consume products, though these tended to be more literal responses. While the majority of responses tended to agree that the media shape values and attitudes to a great extent, some students did argue against this very effectively, using evidence from theories of active audiences to back up their points.

Weaker responses to the question were typical of poorer responses to Section B in general, with students paying little attention to question focus and instead giving a detailed description, often at some length, of their cross-media study. While any relevant points would be credited, these answers, despite their length and detail, could only achieve lower level marks.

**Question 6:**

Show how and why producers have responded to the audience’s use of new technology in consuming media products.

This was by far the most popular choice in Section B with students clearly responding to the concepts of audience and new technology, although not always addressing the question in its entirety. A clear differentiator here was the ability to address both the how and the why of the question as well as keeping a clear focus on the wording which asked students to consider how producers - rather than audiences - have responded. The definition of producer in the context of this question could range from global conglomerates, commercial institutions and public service broadcasters to music industry personas/brands such as Kanye West and Miley Cyrus.

Where students selected material from their cross-media study to precisely address the question, there were interesting and thought provoking responses evaluating a range of reasons for the way producers had responded. These tended, logically, to refer to the financial imperative and demonstrated a welcome ability by students to look beyond producers’ more benevolent claims about new technology. Examples included film merchandising where viral marketing also tracked user’s data, issues around privacy and surveillance with online streaming and the different ways
producers benefit from online voting in reality game shows. As with Section B Question 5 there was a very productive use of the idea of brands with a particularly successful cross-media study looking at how the Hairy Bikers responded to the use of new technology while also attempting to retain a traditional, authentic persona. An unexpected approach came with some students who focused on the use of new technology as part of a film’s subject matter (Spectre, Kingsman, Marvel films etc) arguing that this was a way of attracting a youth audience familiar with the products. The music industry was also a popular choice with candidates comparing the response to new technology in the context of global conglomerates and independent (often local) industries. It was possible to take an alternative view of the question with some students arguing that there are industries where producers haven’t responded effectively enough, such as the newspaper industry.

As referred to in Question 5, weaker responses were those which lacked question focus and merely regurgitated the cross-media study. There were a lot of responses which dealt well with the how of the question but had no or limited reference to ‘why’, meaning that they couldn’t access the highest marks.
Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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