Section A Texts, Concepts and Contexts

General

The unseen product, an extract from the E4 series *Chewing Gum*, presented students with a variety of ways to approach the analysis of media concepts. They responded perceptively to the character of Tracey and the estate setting. As in previous years, the level of detailed reference that students are 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 skill of effective note taking. There was less reliance on the contextual material in the written answers, which has been another positive development.

Question focus in both sections of the paper 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, Institution). Question focus is also an integral part of the assessment in Section B. Descriptions of cross media studies and rote learned responses based on whole class teaching, often on film marketing, reality TV and news, don’t allow the student to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme.

**Question 01 Media Representation**

**How is the housing estate and the people who live there represented in the sequence?**

This was successfully answered, as indicated by a mean of just over 50% of the total mark. Students were clearly confident in applying the concept of representation, with ideas of selection and construction providing an excellent foundation for the analysis of the estate and the people who live there. The best answers were able to identify the apparently contradictory aspects contained in the representation, while weaker answers sometimes made assumptions based on stereotypes. For example, many students assumed that the estate was dark, depressing and gloomy, despite the bright mise en scene, colourful flowers and examples of community cooperation. Students who made specific reference to the sequence were able to point to the subversion of common, negative representations, whilst also recognising the use of stereotypes, such as the link between class and crime. The link between genre and representation was explored by some, who understood that the comic tone meant that the representation of crime could be read in a more light hearted way, with the representation of the police a well-meaning, but ineffectual part of the comic tone.

In their discussion of representation, students frequently used the term ‘chav’, without any explanatory context. The use and ideological meaning of the term does need to be considered before using it in a media studies analysis.

**Question 02 Media Forms**

**How are different techniques used to construct the narrative of the sequence?**

Students were confident in dealing with the concept of narrative and many answers referred to theories of narrative stages. The most successful answers were those that linked narrative to forms, as indicated by the section heading. They were able to move from dialogue as narration to the way in which mise en scene, camera, editing, etc, constructed narrative. These points referred to the pace of editing and how this was reinforced by the music, leading the viewer through the sequence and creating character. The movement between the different plot developments were
discussed in terms of audience understanding of the narrative and the complexity of its set up through the directed focus on Tracey, while her friends emptied the flat behind her.

Weaker responses misinterpreted narrative as narration and solely focused on Tracey's address to camera. It was also noticeable that the definition of a jump cut has become very loose, used synonymously with rapid cuts between locations.

**Question 03 Media Audiences**

**How is the audience positioned to respond to Tracey?**

After a relatively poor response to the audience question last year, this was tackled much more successfully. The mean was just lower than 50% of the total mark. Students were able to combine detailed reference to the sequence and discussion of relevant audience theory. There was some confusion over the term positioning but even students who interpreted this literally – how Tracey was placed in the scene – were still able to respond with relevant points. Answers focused on the direct connection with the character through access to Tracey's thoughts and aspirations – taken into her confidence like a friend. Responses pointed to the way the viewer knows more than the character, suggesting her innocence and naivety, reinforced by her performance, hair and costume.

Students also effectively considered the way in which different audiences could respond to Tracey, positively or negatively, depending on their own social and cultural experience. They often made reference to the way in which she might be perceived as either innocent and enthusiastic, or materialistic in her 'shopping list' of demands.

**Question 04 Media Institutions**

**How does the sequence reflect E4’s remit to be innovative and distinctive?**

This type of question on institution was a familiar one and students were able to root their responses in the sequence. The focus on marginalised groups and the subversion of traditional representations and stereotypes worked well, with students linking this to the channel’s remit. That the writer and star of the programme was a young black woman was also given as evidence of a channel looking to represent society differently. The techniques used in the sequence were also seen as innovative through the use of breaking the fourth wall (a phrase many students seemed familiar with) and the use of the double plot line. The use of a realist style in a sit com was identified as distinctive of E4 and another successful approach was to argue that *Chewing Gum* was in great contrast to more mainstream sit coms produced by other channels, such as the BBC’s *Miranda*.

**Section B Cross-Media Study**

**General**

There was a fairly even distribution across the two questions. The mean marks for both questions were just less that 16.5.

There was 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 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, although they do not have to be evenly distributed across different 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. Case studies should allow students to engage with contemporary media debates, as well as a wide 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. 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 tends to waste time as these descriptions are often irrelevant to the question. In a related point, students should be reassured that longer essays are not necessarily better. It is often the case that longer answers suffer from repetition and lack question focus. The five A4 sheets provided in the answer booklet for Section B should be sufficient to produce a thorough and coherent response.

**Question 05**

Explore the idea that representations within media products are designed to appeal to audiences of those products.

Question 5 allowed students to engage with detailed discussion of representation within the products and to consider whether there was a link to audience through this. Some very thoughtful approaches were evident in the analysis of news values and the way in which newspapers shape their representations to address audiences, both politically and ideologically. The study of the music industry provided a wealth of examples from independent musicians and theory construction of alternative personas to the mainstream representation of fans in Katie Perry and Taylor Swift’s work. Some responses argued that the representations of the target audience in the media product were not always positive ones, for example in TV series aimed at teenagers, which suggested a more complex relationship than perhaps first imagined.

While responses to the representation question in Section A suggested a confident understanding of the concept, there did seem to be some confusion in the responses here. A fair number of responses interpreted the question as related to the frequency with which a product was represented across platforms or the amount of use it made of these platforms. These types of responses suggested a poorer grasp of the concept.

Weaker responses to this question were from students who paid little attention to question focus and instead gave a detailed description of their cross media study, often at length. While any relevant points would be credited, these descriptive answers, despite their length and detail, could only achieve lower level marks.

**Question 06**

Producers rely on familiar format and content in order to attract audiences. How far is this true of the products in your cross-media study?

There were many interesting and thoughtful responses to this question and students were able to interpret the idea of familiarity and formats in a variety of ways. Responses covered both broad,
conceptual discussion of products and detailed analysis of forms. One popular approach was to use it as an opportunity to explore genre theory, across a range of cross media studies, identifying the appeal of both familiarity and difference. This was effectively discussed in relation, for example, to the development of styles in the music industry and the challenges involved in keeping superhero films popular. Several approaches attempted to explain the desire amongst audiences for familiarity, referring to quite sophisticated ideas around nostalgia and the wish to return to childhood. Students were also confident in challenging the statement suggesting that often producers had to do something different in order for a brand to survive and find new audiences.

As referred to in question 5, weaker responses were those which lacked question focus and merely regurgitated cross-media studies. There were a lot of responses which dealt well with the familiar formats aspect but didn’t then link it to targeting audiences.

**Use of statistics**

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.

**Mark Ranges and Award of Grades**

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.](#)

**Converting Marks into UMS marks**

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

[UMS conversion calculator](#)