General

This was the penultimate MEST3 examination, and it provided a good range of responses from students across the ability spectrum. Schools and colleges are familiar with the format of MEST3 and prepared their students well, as indicated by a mean mark of 67% on this paper. The unseen extracts in this year’s exam were a moving image advertisement for the Prince’s Trust Charity and an advertisement for Facebook. Both texts provided a range of points for analysis and students across the ability range were able to write responses that showed some real engagement with the unseen material. The detail in the majority of the answers suggests that students were again very well prepared for the examination in terms of understanding, with greater evidence of media theory than in previous years.

Equally, the majority of students had prepared interesting and engaging case studies around which to base their responses in Section B. It was evident that much time and effort had gone into preparing for the exam, with many students showing the ability to write in a sophisticated manner about a range of different example products, while simultaneously applying media theory effectively and exploring relevant wider contexts.

There was a continuation of the development in last year’s exam, in that the majority of case studies in this year’s exam included a focus on contemporary products (those released within the last five years or so) with few examples of more historical products being used, particularly as a central product in student responses. The introduction to MEST3 in the specification refers to a “holistic understanding” of Media Studies as a subject and encourages both teachers and students to examine the media in a “less formulaic way”. Successful schools/colleges are taking this advice on board, and as a result their students are preparing their own independent case studies. Some, however, continue to ignore this point. There were still some examples of what appeared to be taught case studies this year, in which students simply appeared to be regurgitating teacher notes, and a number of students failed to do themselves justice by reeling through a number of seemingly pre-prepared paragraphs, which failed to address the specific nature of the question set.

As with the 2016 examination, the main frustration with responses that emerged this year was undoubtedly the poor quality of hand-writing. A number of students had writing that verged on being entirely illegible. As a result, the work of some of those students could not be marked entirely accurately, primarily as the hand-writing meant that all examiners could do was effectively guess at what had been written. Again, it is accepted that there is a lot of material to be covered in a short amount of time, and that students are clearly under a lot of pressure in an examination situation, but teachers are expressly reminded to make clear to students that it is of utmost importance that an examiner can actually read responses.

Section A

Question 01 Media Concepts

How do the two products attempt to create an emotional response from an audience?

Many students wrote engaging responses to this question, discussing a range of media language techniques in good detail. There were some really nice comments about the use of soundtrack, camerawork, editing and mise-en-scene, while many responses highlighted the differences between the positivity seen in the Facebook advertisement and the more negative atmosphere created in the Prince’s Trust piece.
The students who did not do so well almost uniformly failed to address the 'emotional' element of the question wording. Such responses made some satisfactory comments on the products themselves, but did not adequately address the impact that the products may have had upon audiences. It seems a very obvious point to make, but students really do need to respond to the wording of each question as it appears on the examination paper.

The primary additional point that was picked up from this question was the length of responses that some students submitted. This question is worth 8 marks, and given the duration of the paper it is advised that students spend no longer than fifteen minutes writing their response. However, some students wrote in excess of four sides of A4. Quantity and quality do not always marry up, and many of those students perhaps failed to leave themselves enough time to fully answer the longer questions, that are worth more marks, later on in the paper.

**Question 02 Media Issues and Debates**

How do contemporary media products influence the creation of a British identity? You may refer to other media products in order to support your answer.

Many students relied on stereotypes here, so a number of responses were seen that suggest that British identity revolves around a combination of red phone boxes, cricket on village greens, cucumber sandwiches, fish and chips, curry, drinking tea and playing polo. Some responses managed to argue that factors such as these were intrinsic to the nature of being British while simultaneously recognising that few people were likely to recognise all of them as part of their individual identity. There were some unusual responses, which conjured up alternative notions of British identity, for example ones romanticising football hooliganism. Few responses, though, got to perhaps the heart of the issue, which is that, given the multi-cultural and diverse nature of twenty-first century Britain, the concept of identity is fragmented and subjective. Perhaps there is no such thing as one definable British identity but that it is different things to different people.

A large number of students failed to engage with the ‘how’ aspect of the question. Many others seemed to ignore the fact that the question was specifically asking about British identity, instead writing about how identity itself was influenced by the media as a whole. This suggests the same issue as in question one. Some students did not read the question properly and therefore produced responses that did not answer what had been set. It is impossible for examiners to give much credit to such answers.

**Question 03 Wider Contexts**

It could be argued that many popular media products are superficial, preventing us from engaging with real-life issues. To what extent do you agree with this point of view? You should refer to other media products in order to support your answer.

The wording of this question was longer that that used in either question one or two, and this seemed to create challenges for some students.

The vast majority of students picked up on the 'to what extent' element of the question and discussed the extent to which the point of view posited in the question could be agreed with. However, many responses then depended upon some fairly obvious media products, such as reality television programmes, in order to make some fairly clichéd points. Many responses started with the assertion that contemporary culture is celebrity obsessed, but few of these answers went on to develop a fully realised argument.
Those students that did manage to explore the concept of real-life issues did provide some excellent work. Students who achieved marks in the top band showed some superb insight, that made much use of particularly contemporary news stores. The exam was sat just four days after the London Bridge attack, and discussion of coverage of this event, both in mainstream media and upon social platforms, was engaged and erudite. Students who achieved particularly well in this question managed to contrast events covered in the news, such as London Bridge, the Manchester Arena bombing, the rise of ISIS, the 2017 General Election and the emergence of President Trump, with the more superficial nature of some other media products.

The lesson to be learnt from this question for the final MEST3 cohort, due to sit their exam in June 2018, is that having an up-to-date knowledge of global news events is probably a very good thing, particularly given that this subject is Media Studies.

Section B

Identities in the Media

Question 04

“... we need to live in cultures that no longer make assumptions about who we are or who we want to be ...” In what ways does your case study highlight the different ways in which we construct our identity?

This question was the least popular of all those set in Section B.

Some incredibly good responses were seen, some of which focused on some particularly interesting topics of identity (including female athletes, intersex/transgender communities, musicians, the British working class as portrayed by tabloid newspapers and South Koreans). Good responses to this question discussed the ways in which individuals and communities are increasingly able to reject mainstream media messages and values. They instead use social media platforms to have their specific voice heard and to create groups that can rely on mutual support without the need for mainstream media approval or coverage.

Weak responses tended to concentrate on the quotation provided and thus failed to refer to the ‘to what extent’ instruction that appeared later in the question. As a result, while there were some nice discussions about what it meant to be homosexual, bisexual, transgender, black, etc, in contemporary Britain, few of these responses explored the ways in which the contemporary media landscape enables people to construct their own identity.

Question 05

The media should enable individuals to develop and refine their own identity; it should not determine and control their identity. To what extent does your case study support this statement?

This was the most popular of all the questions available in Section B. The main focus of the question was not presented as a quotation, and this seemingly led to responses being more focused as a result. Stronger students drew from a range of theory and media products, discussing the concept of prosumers, the impact of social media upon contemporary life and the differences between how different generations make use of different media platforms. Many answers explored
the use of platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram, and discussed the ways in which individuals are able to express a variety of different aspects of their identity to a variety of different audiences.

Weaker responses tended to assert that the media does determine and control people’s identity without exploring the moral issue at the heart of the question. It was also evident that a number of these responses tended to still focus on representation as a concept, rather than exploring the notion of identity. As a result, there was a lack of debate in such answers, with viewpoints being rigidly stated, seemingly without awareness of fluidity or optionality.

**The Impact of New/Digital Media**

**Question 06**

*It is clear that the long-term future of media is online; media institutions need to find new and exciting ways to help audiences make the transition. Consider this statement with reference to your case study.*

This was the more popular of the two questions posed in the ‘Impact of New/Digital Media’ section of the exam, and some excellent answers were seen.

When this question paper was written, it was felt that this question would lead to some strong responses based around the emergence of Netflix and Amazon Prime, or around the impact of new technologies upon the music industry, and this thought was borne out.

Many students wrote detailed and focused answers on the shift away from traditional terrestrial television institutions, particularly amongst younger generations, towards online broadcasting, with the developments surrounding BBC3 appearing in a number of responses. Equally, many students revealed some very good knowledge about the emergence of products such as Soundcloud, Bandcamp and Spotify, with a keen awareness of how emerging bands and singers were now able to bypass traditional record labels. The future of the newspaper industry was also explored effectively, with many responses making good points about local newspapers, the demise of ‘The New Day’ and the online only presence of ‘The Independent’ as an institution.

Weaker responses had knowledge of some of these products and factors but tended to rely on description rather than analysis, with some answers merely recounting what had happened in some industries. Such answers did not really address the impact upon audiences, and tended to ignore entirely the idea that audiences no longer rely on products and services offered to them by traditional media providers.

**Question 07**

*With reference to your case study, explore whether the range of social media platforms available encourages social and political engagement.*

This was the second least popular option in Section B. On the whole, this question was either answered particularly well, or particularly badly, with little in between. Students who were able to engage with the social and political element of the question made some particularly astute and insightful comments, notably about Donald Trump’s use of social media, differences between the social media platforms available in Western cultures and platforms such as Weibo. There were also some very specific case studies about social media access in North Korea, cat-fishing and online stalking. These responses made excellent use of media theory, with the ideas of Clay Shirky and Eli Pariser appearing in a number of essays.
However, some students attempted to shoe-horn their case study into their answers. For example, many responses focused on how celebrities use social media, including a handful of voices that suggested that Kim Kardashian is an agent for social change because she uses Twitter on a fairly frequent basis.

Summary

It was pleasing that a number of examiners advised that, even after having looked at dozens of scripts, they were still enjoying reading the answers that students had provided. Phrases such as “enjoyable to read”, “engaged” and “mature and sophisticated analysis” appeared time and again in feedback provided by those examiners. What this suggests is that students across the ability range were able to access at least some of the questions. This implies that students are being particularly well prepared for MEST3, and that teachers are encouraging a level of autonomy that did not always exist a few years ago.

Many students revealed excellent knowledge and understanding of contemporary world events, and a real engagement with the world around them, particularly as it is presented by the media. Section B case studies, especially, suggest a generation that is engaged with the subject and the way in which life is changing as a result of social and technological developments. There is now only one year left of the current specification, and the challenge for teachers is to maintain, and develop even further, that level of independence that so many students have already shown.
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