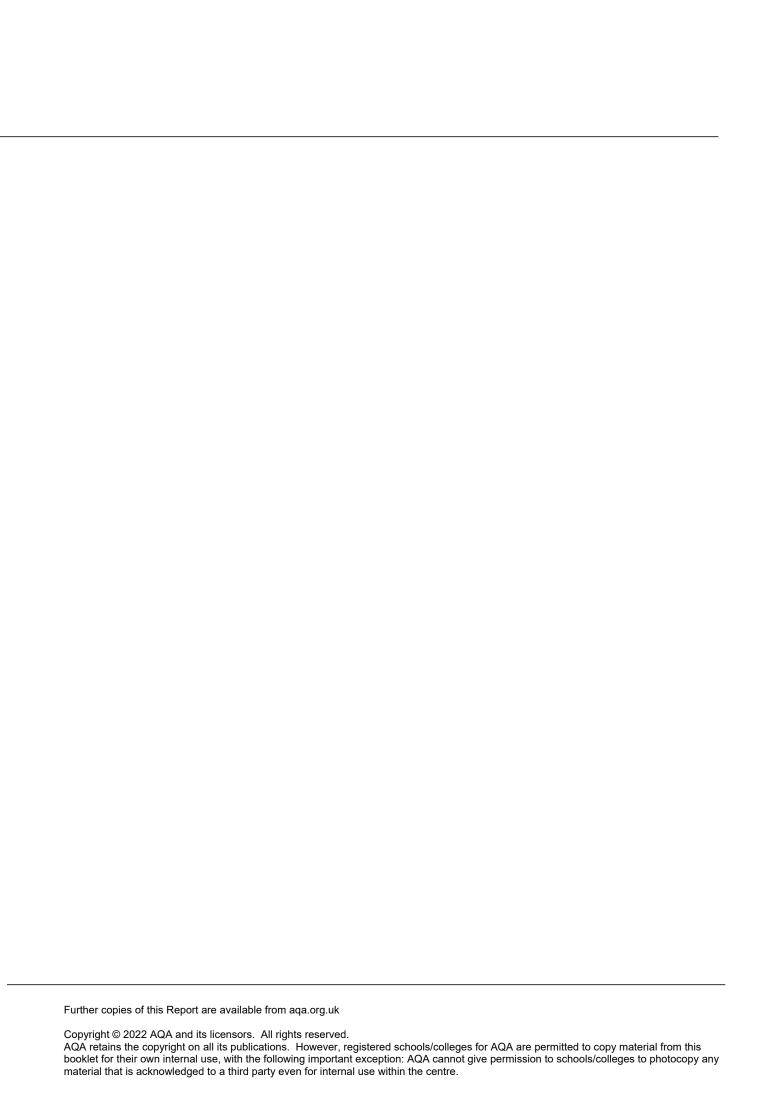# GCSE
MEDIA STUDIES

8572/C Non-exam assessment: Creating a media product
Report on the Examination

8572
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Version: 1.0

Introduction

This series was the second time that the non-exam assessment (NEA) for this specification has been moderated, and the first time since 2019 due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

There was lots of enthusiastic work and the full mark range was accessed. Most students completed the work fully and appropriately.

Although NEA work had not been required for moderation in 2020 and 2021, the senior moderation team had been collecting examples of work and agreeing on the marks these folders would have been awarded. These assessed folders have been available on the Teacher Online Standardisation system (TOLS) which is available via AQA's Centre Services. The folders available in 2021-22 included examples of fully realised products as well as prototypes and mock-ups to exemplify the marking standard.

Guidance documents are available on the GCSE Media Studies section of the AQA website, for both teaching and submitting the work. In particular the document entitled '*Notes and guidance: recording and submitting NEA evidence'* outlines how work should be prepared and submitted for moderation.

Teachers of GCSE Media Studies are also able to access one-to-one email advice from their assigned NEA advisor. Any centres requiring this support who are not yet aware of their advisor should contact MediaStudies@aqa.org.uk citing their centre number.

Prototypes and mock-ups

Because of the ongoing impacts of the pandemic, there were some changes to how GCSE Media Studies NEA were assessed in 2022. This year, as an exception, students were able to submit prototypes and mock-ups instead of fully realised products. The majority of centres submitted some students' work with found images, although it was pleasing to see that many students had created original images, despite restrictions that may have been in place when they created their work.

Almost all students submitted work had been created digitally, with a very small minority submitting hand-drawn / hand-written mock-ups or planning. Some students, however, made a virtue of the ability to submit mock-ups, by planning productions that clearly exceeded those they would have been able to create in a normal year, especially for the Sci-fi TV brief.

Applying the assessment criteria

This year, approximately 60% of centres' marking was within tolerance of the agreed AQA standard. However, this also means that approximately 40% of centres had marks outside tolerance of the AQA standard, with a very high proportion of these centres showing inconsistent marking. This was usually for one of three reasons: internal moderation had not taken place where there was more than one teacher; different marking standards were applied to different briefs; centres had difficulty applying the mark scheme from level 3 up to level 5 with accuracy, leading to accuracy at the bottom end, but very generous marking at the top end.

In general, Statements of Intent were often slightly over-marked, even when other aspects were marked accurately. In most cases where centres were marking out of tolerance, Production: Effectiveness was overmarked, especially where work didn't meet the brief fully or didn't use expected conventions.

Statements of Intent

Very few statements were seen that merited marks in the top mark band. In order to achieve marks of 9 or 10, students must demonstrate that they can write in a detailed, focused and clear manner whilst remaining within the 300-word limit. Repeating the wording from the brief is rarely required, especially when students do this instead of explaining the specifics of what they aim to achieve.

Sometimes centres had rewarded use of terminology or media theory although this was not related to the product being created. In more than one case, every student in a centre discussed a range of audience theories without explaining how these would be applied to their specific products and sometimes without even naming the product or explaining any of the elements it would feature.

Statements of Intent should focus on:
- what is being created and included
- how the product will be constructed using specific examples of media language
- why these specific decisions have been made, in relation to the representations and meanings being created, the brief or the target audience.

After reading a good statement of Intent, the reader should have a solid idea of what they will see or hear within the product.

To get this level of detail, the statement is best written when all pre-production planning and tasks are complete, and before production starts. Students at this point should know exactly what they are going to create and why. Occasionally, statements of Intent were written as evaluations after products have been completed. The statement should be about *intended* uses of elements of the theoretical framework rather than about how those elements *were* used.

Quite often, statements were skewed towards either media language or audiences, and most statements did not deal with representation in any depth. Both language and representation, in relation to the brief and the audience, should be well covered.

A handful of centres had students who submitted statements of Intent describing their process of planning rather than the intentions for the product itself. The statement of Intent needs only to relate to the actual product, not to the process of planning and creating it.

Marking of the production

Moderators always find it most helpful to start with the Production: Effectiveness mark, to avoid penalising or indeed rewarding the same elements twice. Therefore, this report follows the same model.

Production: Effectiveness for an audience

The major aspects being rewarded in this section of the criteria are:
- the mode of address used to engage the target audience
- using codes and conventions of the genre
- meeting the requirements of the brief.

Some very effective pieces were seen where students had clearly considered both the target audience outlined in the brief and the main and minimum requirements. These students had submitted the correct number or length of products, which were clearly aimed at the specific audience and contained all the required elements in the Minimum Requirements checklist. This meant that marks placed in the top two levels were able to be accepted.

However, a significant number of centres placed students in level 4 or 5 despite pieces not fulfilling the *main* requirements of the brief. There were, for example, gossip magazines targeting the C2DE audience that looked like *Tatler* or *Vogue* instead of using the conventions of magazines such as *Heat* and *Reveal*. There were also newspapers that had a front page and a double page spread instead of a front page and one inside page, or that did not use the conventions of tabloids. A high-level product should be using relevant codes and conventions for the format and genre of the product consistently, and any deliberate deviation from these should be fully explained in the Statement of Intent.

Too many products given high marks by centres did not meet all of the *minimum* requirements in the briefs, including websites that did not include the linked page or the associated audio, and newspapers that did not have four images or 350-400 words on the inside page. Students are expected to have a copy of the brief they are responding to, so that they can check that they are meeting its requirements.

Marks above level 3 cannot be agreed where pieces do not meet all or almost all of the requirements of the brief. By starting with marking for Effectiveness, pieces can be matched against the brief and against existing conventions, and any errors can be picked up and assessed correctly straight away. Centres should use a checklist approach to confirm that the pieces have met both the main and minimum requirements in order to avoid over-generous marking.

This year students were allowed to use found images and footage. In future years, the rubric will revert to normal, so that the use of found images, footage or text will lead to a capping of the Effectiveness mark at Level 2 (8 marks). The same cap applies if students do not list their cast / crew on their Candidate Record Form (CRF). See pages 22-23 of the specification for more information.

Production: Media language

The main aspects being rewarded in this section are:
- specific selection of media language elements *to convey meaning*
- creating effective narratives; deliberate control of connotations.

The quality of media language varied depending on how much research students appeared to have done into their chosen media format. Some pieces demonstrated an exceptional level of verisimilitude. In particular, some very strong gossip magazine covers were seen, with great control of font styles, colours, images and graphic features.

However, despite being allowed to use found images, there was sometimes a lack of thought in terms of selection and placement of various elements. For example, images were badly pixelated or stretched, or text was cut off by the margins. Some found images did not add to the meaning or sense of narrative, whereas those created by students themselves tended to be more effective in this regard.

Production: Media representations

The main aspects being rewarded here are:
- the use and/or subversion of stereotypes that would resonate with the target audience
- deliberate representation of issues, people or places that convey meaning.

Some students had clearly thought very carefully about how to represent their subjects through a combination of verbal and non-verbal codes, with a very clear appreciation of stereotype and/or countertype. For example, there were some excellent choices of specific individuals on magazine covers and a deliberate choice of non-white presenters on community radio sites.

However, some students did not make it clear how their subjects were being represented. This was particularly evident in some of the magazine double-page feature pages where imagery did not include a clear representation of the celebrity that was related to the narrative in the copy.

In general, students seemed to have found consideration of representation a little more challenging than media language, reflected perhaps in the lack of detail seen in Statements of Intent regarding this area of the theoretical framework.

Common misunderstandings of the criteria and rubric infringements

Common misunderstandings of the criteria and rubric infringements included:
- misreading the brief
- adapting the brief and, in doing so, deviating too far from what is required
- allowing students to do projects not covered by the brief
- overly long Statements of Intent
- projects being marked at level 4/5 for effectiveness despite not meeting the brief requirements
- projects being marked at level 4/5 for language despite including pixelated images or poor formatting.

The Briefs

There are five set briefs each year, available on AQA Centre Services from 1 March in the year before submission. These will always include at least one brief for each of the four main production areas: print, video, audio and e-media. Each brief is related in some way to at least one of the CSPs. Centres can offer as many or as few of the briefs for the year as they feel able to support. Many centres only submitted responses to one brief, which was usually the gossip magazine brief. Some centres submitted a small range, and a much smaller number of centres had clearly offered the full range of briefs to their cohort.

Brief 1: Radio adverts for a regional film festival

Responses to this brief were seen from over 10% of centres. Students who had done well made some excellent adverts with a real understanding of the conventions of the genre – lively voices, strong slogans, excellent sense of atmosphere – along with good mixing between the relevant sound sources. Furthermore, the choice of voices and syntax carried clear representations of the people speaking and the range of content in the series of adverts carried strong representations of the film festival.

Some radio adverts heard were relatively poor, however, and demonstrated little knowledge of the form. Some students who worked on this brief also seemed to have little understanding of the notion of a film festival and had ignored the requirement of mentioning a film premiere. It seemed that these students had not researched either film festivals or radio adverts, leading to work which lacked verisimilitude and did not fully meet the requirements of the brief.

Brief 2: Celebrity and social gossip magazine

This brief was by far the most popular and was offered by almost 90% of centres. Some fantastic magazines were seen, which fully met the requirements of the brief. These students had clearly considered the layout, content and tone of magazines like *Reveal* and *Heat*, replicating these effectively across their front page and the double page feature. The mode of address was a particular strength across the responses to this brief.

However, some were very poor and suggested that centres had not prepared students so well. A significant number of students submitted work which missed some of the minimum requirements, such as the dateline on the cover or the standfirst in the double page feature. Front covers were generally the strongest part of each submission, while quite a few students did not really follow the formatting of double page features, often having single blocks of text instead of columns, an over-large font size in the copy, or no clear main image.

Other problems were seen in the double page spread. The brief called for a 'double page feature' on a 'music artist, blogger or vlogger'. A number of students featured celebrities other than vloggers, bloggers or musicians on their double page. Such magazines did not fully meet the brief and so could not be given marks in the highest bands for Production: Effectiveness. In addition, some students created a double page spread with a number of smaller stories about a variety of celebrities instead of a 'double page feature'.

A significant minority of students produced magazines which did not fit the specified genre, some of which had been marked quite highly. Examples were seen of magazines aimed at cyclists, gaming enthusiasts and boxing fans, whilst some magazines apparently aimed at a C2DE audience looked like *Tatler* and had articles about designer clothes and perfume. A small number of students had plagiarised parts of their articles from external sources. All text submitted for moderation should've been original despite the exception this year to be able to submit found images. All images and footage in future submissions should be original.

The better magazine submissions were clearly created using three distinct but adjoining pages of the same shape and size, so that students were aware of where the gutter came on their double page and could plan their layout accordingly. For those who created their double page as one landscape sheet, printing a draft copy fairly early in the process and folding it in half would have enabled them to see any layout issues well before their final submission.

Brief 3: Tabloid newspaper

Responses to this brief were seen from approximately 20% of centres. The brief asked for a rival publication to the *Daily Mirror*, one of the CSPs for this specification. Some of the resulting products were superb, showing a thorough understanding of tabloid newspapers, their layout conventions and their mode of address. Generally, students were aware of the difference between a hard news and a human-interest story.

Some students, however, struggled with the format of a tabloid, despite the example of the *Daily Mirror* to guide them. Often, students did not use columns, especially on the inside page. In more cases than expected, the inside page was a different shape and size to the front page, and in several cases was presented as a double page although only one inside page was called for.

Representation was slightly better, with most students understanding the tone and style of tabloids. Some candidates took on board the political dimension implied by the brief (the *Daily Mirror* being a left-wing paper) and created articles with a highly relevant mode of address.

The final submission should be as close in size to the specified product as possible, so tabloid pages were best printed on A3, leaving a slight margin to the top and bottom. This enabled students to check that they were using relevant font sizes for their headlines and copy. In addition, those marking and moderating the products need to be able to read all of the copy as this forms a substantial part of the submission.

Brief 4: Website for a community radio station

This brief was the least popular with centres, being offered by approximately 10%. Websites were often not done well and, in some cases, students had used a basic template and changed very little about it. Most students seemed to have used online website builders such as Wix, which do allow for most aspects of a template to be adapted, but not all had found these features. Google Sites had been very effectively used by at least one centre.

Many students seemed to misunderstand what a community radio station was or indeed what a radio station was, some focusing solely on podcasts instead. Websites were often either only focused on the featured show, which was meant to be the focus of the linked page, or failed to mention the show at all. Very few considered the idea of a rebrand, and only a handful actually mentioned the radio station's schedule. Many spread their content over more than the required two pages, as their chosen template had four or five pages. Where the brief requires the content on two pages, the other pages can be left blank or given just a heading and no further content.

The websites were often lacking in content, in some cases comprising solely of a few found images and a few words of text. Of more concern was the discovery that a very small number of centres submitted work where students had plagiarised material. Although this may have been generic text used by the Wix templates, the material was presented as if it was the students' own work. Students' work should be carefully monitored to prevent plagiarism.

The audio component was often well done, with students using appropriate features such as bedding and stingers to enhance their work. These were often embedded in the websites, allowing for a degree of verisimilitude. Representation was also often handled well, as students had given good consideration to who their radio presenters were and how to connote this.

Those centres that presented their websites for submission as video walk-throughs generally did so very effectively, having presumably followed the available guidance. Websites submitted as URLs were rarely accompanied by hard copy print-outs. The hard copy is a requirement,

enabling the moderator to check that they are seeing the same version that was assessed by the centre.

Brief 5: Sci-fi TV excerpt with a narrative resolution
Responses to this brief were seen from approximately 20% of centres. Some were very effective and included a range of editing, camera movements and even special effects. Some were less well planned and ended up being hard to decipher. A few, unfortunately, were shot in portrait format instead of landscape, which is not in line with television conventions.

Some students had clearly shot their videos when Covid-19 restrictions were in place, and used ingenuity to create multiple characters from one or two actors. These were accepted as 'mock-ups' and the need to distinguish characters actually helped the students to evidence representation.

A significant number of videos did not have a narrative resolution, a requirement of the brief that was completely missed by some students. The sci-fi element was also a little lost at times, while others went to town on this aspect, with detailed plot lines and relevant sound effects.
Some students submitted storyboards and shooting scripts instead of video, as allowed this year. Most of these submissions were excellent, showing a thorough understanding of the genre, but one or two had no camera shots or movements, making it hard to give much credit for media language. Some found footage was used this year, as allowed by the temporary rubric changes, particularly for special effects, news footage, explosions or 'off-planet' reports. These sections often worked very well, but it should be remembered that in future submissions this will not be permitted.

Guidance given by teachers
Some Statements of Intent demonstrated the use of a writing framework, which should be avoided, and which was problematic when the framework did not point students in the right direction. For example, when the writing framework focused on theory rather than on the intended content of the products.

Some teachers had clearly taught the relevant media format(s) before students embarked on their NEA production, especially gossip magazines. However, some students didn't know the expected conventions of the format they were creating. The links between the briefs and the CSPs should help in this regard if students are taught about the relevant CSPs before starting their NEA planning.

Most projects seemed fairly student-driven. However, some students would probably have benefitted from a little more guidance given how many of them produced work that did not fully fit the brief or did not look like the type of product being created.

Administration
In general, work from the vast majority of centres was neatly packaged and in student order. Encryption of most USB submissions was correct. However, all moderators reported some administrative issues from centres, which probably reflects the lack of practice in submitting work over the previous two years.

As mentioned at the beginning of the report, the document '*Notes and guidance: recording and submitting NEA evidence'* is available on the GCSE Media Studies section of the AQA website, and outlines how work should be prepared and submitted for moderation.

Print work (magazines and newspapers this year) should be submitted as print outs, as close to the appropriate size as possible. This ensures that they are seen in the manner intended, and also guards against formatting issues arising when moderators do not have the fonts installed that students have used. While many centres did print work out appropriately, others submitted print work on USB drives, or printed tabloid newspapers so that they didn't even fill A4 sheets. Digital files, for TV and radio, were often in formats other than those specified in the document, which can cause problems for the moderator trying to access them.

The final box on the CRF, 'concluding comments', is intended for teachers to explain their thinking behind the awarding of marks. If using the CRFs digitally, this box expands to enable in-depth comments. Most teachers choose to print out and write on the forms by hand, in which case, this box is not really sufficient to explain the awarding of four different marks. Some centres show excellent practice in adding to this space by either writing their comments on the back of the Statement of Intent, or by creating their own sheets that allow for a mix of highlighting the assessment criteria and adding a sentence or two for each of the four sections.

However, it was often left to the moderator to work out why marks had been given. Two to three lines exemplifying key areas from each of the four sections being assessed would be helpful, and these should refer to details within the student's work. Where teachers are copying from the assessment criteria without exemplification or context, it is sometimes hard to see how the decisions have been made.

Recording of unassessed contributors (as cast and crew) was often limited. In the best cases, students had scrupulously noted down the names of every participant, explaining clearly what each had done and how they were directed, as in the assessment requirements. Most students simply recorded the names of unassessed participants, often with no indication of how they had been directed. In several cases, although unassessed participants had been used, this information was not recorded at all. It is a requirement to provide these data, or marks should be capped.

These were not common, but the following issues were experienced:
- missing Statements of Intent, although marks had been awarded for these
- magazine work printed at A6 size, which not only does not fit the industry standard but also made the work difficult to review
- inaccessible elements of websites or other missing material
- missing Centre Declaration Sheets
- CRFs not signed by students
- centres not including the specific project name (eg 'Tell Tale') on the CRF and instead writing the media format (eg 'magazine') – the 'Title' line is intended to help match the CRF to the specific student's work if they become detached
- centres submitting work as loose sheets rather than work that has been stapled, treasury-tagged or is in some sort of sleeve
- some USBs were not encrypted or used a password created by the centre, not the one sent out by AQA.

Best practice

There were some excellent examples of work seen this year, with a clear sense that students had engaged well and learned from the process. Most centres ensured that all requirements were met for the work and the administration.

In the best submissions, moderators saw:
- students who have clearly engaged with their brief and who have been able to explain their choices and decisions
- cogent and focused Statements of Intent, written when students knew the detail of what they were about to produce
- adherence to the chosen brief in full
- media production work that would engage the target audience
- attentive use of media conventions
- deliberate control of media language to create intended meanings
- strong representations of issues, people and places, in words, sounds and images.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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