GCSE EXAMINERS' REPORTS

GCSE (LEGACY) FILM STUDIES

SUMMER 2018
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On this final summer outing for the current paper it continued to be successful in allowing candidates of a wide range of abilities to demonstrate what they had learned and the application of such. Indeed centres seemed to have prepared their candidates well and gave them clear opportunities to demonstrate successfully, macro and micro analysis, industry awareness and creativity - the three main elements being assessed in this paper.

**Question 1**
This remains a solidly accessible and effective opening question, which enabled candidates to respond successfully and very few failed to grasp its overall intent.

(a) Although most candidates did identify an example of sound such as the non-diegetic score rising to emphasise Magneto’s power, a few candidates still failed to identify a specific example from the extract.

(b) Candidates engaged well with the concept of ‘create meaning’ to discuss their example. Most were able to explain how the sound was used to impact the spectator, even those who had failed to make their answer to Q1a) specific entered into productive discussion here.

(c) The quality of response remained good for this question. The use of the descriptor ‘to create meaning’ opened up a range of effective responses from the candidates. Most responded effectively in terms of the meaning of their chosen aspects, camera and mise-en-scene being popular choices. The clear centre preparation showed in the small amount of candidates that chose to discuss more than 2 aspects or aspects that were not listed in the options. Many answers addressed the use of mise-en-scene and camera in the extract and there was a good degree of confidence among candidates with regards to their use of correct terminology. Centres seemed to have taken on board previous year’s advice in regard to handling mise-en-scene that one aspect should be dealt with in great depth and detail with some excellent discussion of the meaning created by both setting and costume / props. Editing continues to be less well handled and many candidates confused it with camera or visual effects. Time management for (c) also seemed to have improved with fewer examples of answers on the second micro feature being measurably weaker than the first.

**Question 2**
Again both familiarity and centre preparation meant that question 2 was less problematic for candidates than previous years. The issue of similarity/dissimilarity or typicality being handled well.

(a) Virtually all candidates were able to identify a superpower here. Where they lacked the technical terminology (telepathy/telekinesis) or character knowledge (Magneto’s mastery of metals) their description of that which was ‘super’ or ‘meta’ in the extract was sufficient.

(b) A majority of the responses here had clearly been taught the role of typicality in establishing genre codes and conventions. Candidates were rewarded equally for discussions in support of, or against, the typicality of their chosen super power. Indeed some of the better genre based answers argued that the mental abilities on display in the
sequence were less typical than those of super strength or flight that were more commonly seen in other films. The best answers were those that were able to give specific points of common usage, or not, that form the basis of the chosen tropes typicality.

(c) There seemed to be a clear divide here in terms of the quality of candidates' responses. This divide rested upon candidates' interpretation of the word 'use' in the question. The mid-range and lower ability responses limited their response to how characters, both hero and villain, chose to use their powers. Those candidates that did take this approach were able to access the higher marks when this discussion dealt with the motivations behind the characters choices. The more basic answers merely described the use of powers from a range of films. Those candidates who interpreted the word 'use' to include the film maker's intent to make differing meanings as well as character motivations were able to produce sophisticated responses that fully deserved the reward of full marks. As the genre has proliferated into cinematic dominance over the life of this paper candidates were able to draw on analysis and knowledge of a broad range of films they had both seen and studied so there were few issues of candidates lacking material to discuss.

Question 3
Responses to question three, which attempts to assess the knowledge of aspects of the industrial elements of Hollywood filmmaking are now, through centre experience, being handled more confidently by the candidates. Most candidates discussed their own examples in terms of how their engagement increased the financial success of the franchise and ultimately the studio. This year we looked for the candidates to consider the wider commercial implications of revenue streams outside of box office revenue. The main theme of successful answers here was how these increasingly expensive spectacles need to earn revenue from multiple sources in order to make them worthwhile / profitable. Some of the more sophisticated answers even discussed how DVD / Blu-ray revenue was declining and streaming revenue was increasing in importance. Responses fell into three broad categories: the lower mark responses typically described features from the items in the resource materials with non-existent or a very basic awareness of how they functioned to generate income for the studios. Those in the middle ranges were able to take one or more examples from the resource materials and discuss how this would interest both fan and general audiences with some notion of how this would increase revenue and contribute to the financial success of the movie. The higher order responses demonstrated a clear understanding of how box office revenue was 'just the start' of how studios were able to monetise the superhero film and that DVD / Blu-ray was an important (if diminishing) piece of the complex mosaic of financial success.

It was clear that most candidates had been prepared in regard to the mainstream film industry and its commercial nature and their answers reflected this with only a minority leaning on a purely media studies style textual analysis of the resource materials. Candidates were able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the commercial role of the resource material and their own examples.

Question 4
Question four continued to be answered reasonably well this year although not without a couple of issues. In parts d) & e) the nature of an extra feature seemed to be a problem for some candidates, with some equating it with a design feature of their cover. Compounding this in some cases, and perhaps a function of time pressure, some candidates failed to distinguish between description and explanation in parts d) & e). Despite this there seemed to be far fewer instances of candidates who did not complete the final question and centres should be commended on their treatment of the issue of time management which has been a problem in the past. Centres seemed also to have acted upon the advice that a major part of the question is creative with many candidates coming up with some great ideas.
(a)& (b) These were completed by virtually all candidates although some were over general in the reasons they gave for their choices. The better answers demonstrated a clear appreciation of what might qualify a film and or character to be considered as a superhero “legend”.

(c) Again this year the quality of answers here tended to reflect how much attention had been paid to the bullet point advice as to form and content. A very few candidates failed to appreciate or read clearly that the design was for the box set nominated in the rubric, although where possible they were not penalised heavily for this as we were mainly looking for the creative use of design and genre conventions. The best answers reflected Superhero codes and conventions within the format of a cover with clear reference to the resource materials. Annotation again proved the perennial limiting factor for many candidates and perhaps the only major weakness in centre’s preparation of their candidates. Annotation is their opportunity (particularly for the less artistic) to explain and clarify their design choices; without it the higher marks could not be accessed. Many candidates did use colour and it was a very useful reflection of Superhero movie codes and conventions.

(d) As previously mentioned in the introduction to this question this year only a few candidates seemed to miss out the final parts of question 4. Most made good attempts to describe an interesting extra feature with at least one point of detail (d) and then went onto explain how this would be attractive to fans and or the general audience and thus increase sales (e). As previously stated for a minority of candidates the nature of an extra feature seemed to be a problem with some equating it with a design feature of their cover and in other cases candidates failed to distinguish between description and explanation in parts d) & e).

Overall the response to the paper and its questions was wide and well informed. Both the candidates and their teachers should be commended on the good work that the majority of centres have obviously put in over their course of study.

And finally, thanks to everybody for all your hard work and support of the specification over the last decade or so and good luck for next year’s debut outing for its replacement.
2018 was a strong year for many centres who are now familiar with the expectations of the paper and the stepped questioning format. The paper appeared to be well received and many candidates approached it with confidence, demonstrating a good knowledge and understanding of their chosen text. The most popular films continued to be *Tsotsi* and *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* and these also remained some of the most successful. More centres appeared to study *The Wave* again this year, which was also pleasing to see and resulted in further successful approaches.

Candidates were well prepared for the exam and the best answers demonstrated a real engagement with the chosen text. A minority of centres still appeared to be ‘prepping’ their candidates by teaching one key sequence and one key character. In these cases, this led to very similar answers across the centre which often did not fit or relate to the question at hand and thus were marked accordingly. As in former years, the best examination papers showed candidates had clearly studied their chosen films in real depth. There was also an abundance of film language used this year which was excellent to see and resulted in higher marks being awarded.

**Question 1**

Most candidates answered question one well and were able to identify an important prop or costume used in their chosen film. There were a select few who identified an item which was not of importance and this was reflected in the marks, however this did then make it difficult for candidates to answer the later stages of the question and it is recommended candidates always read all parts of a question before starting their answer. Some candidates did not identify a costume e.g. ‘*Tsotsi’s costume at the beginning*’. In this instance, candidates should have pinpointed an aspect of this costume such as the red top, the leather jacket etc. in order to gain the marks.

Part B was generally approached well with candidates describing what the item chosen in section A communicated to them about the characters in their chosen film. The best answers here talked about the audience’s first impressions of a character or what the prop/costume told them about a character’s personality. Some candidates did not clearly read the question and described what the prop/costume said about the themes/issues/genre of the film. Whilst these were often great pieces of writing and showed good knowledge and understanding they did not answer the question at hand and this was reflected in the marks awarded.

Part C allowed candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the text in terms of wider themes and issues. Candidates who had discussed this already in part B, did well here, as did the majority of candidates, with many linking their prop or costume to one or more themes/issues. This question appeared to be tackled well. Some candidates talked about themes and issues in the film but did not link them to the prop or costume chosen in part A and this was marked accordingly.
Question 2
Most candidates were able to identify a key moment in their chosen film. A select few answered with ‘the beginning’ or ‘the end’ which was not specific and was therefore marked accordingly.

The majority of candidates were able to describe the location of this key moment. The best answers here described in detail the sights and sounds of the location and created a mental picture for the examiner. Some lower ability candidates tended to describe the action in the scene rather than the location. This was also the case in part C of the question, which asked candidates to discuss why the key moment was important to the film’s narrative. The best approaches in part C, tended to look at how the key moment impacted the plot and/or the characters, set up aspects of the story or communicated the genre of the film.

Part D of question 2 asked candidates to look at two aspects of film language from a given list and discuss the meanings created during the key moment. Some candidates chose to look at all aspects of film form. This often resulted in answers that lacked specific detail and was subsequently reflected in the marks awarded. Similarly, although the question asked candidates to discuss the key moment selected in part A of the question, a minority of candidates referred to a different scene and this impacted on their achievable grade. The best answers discussed the correct scene in detail, looking at the meanings and responses generated by two aspects of film language as required. Marks here were awarded in two parts – firstly for understanding of the meanings created and secondly for candidates’ knowledge and understanding of film language and their use of film form terminology. This allowed for candidates across the ability range to access the marks.

Question 3
Most centres are familiar with the lengthier and more challenging format of question three and the many answers given this year were very strong. There also appeared to be less rehearsed answers this year which was pleasing to see. Higher band answers saw candidates following the suggested indicators in the question and using key sequences/film language to showcase their understanding of how meaning was created. This demonstrated real engagement with the text and the use of specific references or detailed analysis of scenes and/or characters was excellent. Lower band answers for this question attempted to follow the bullet points given but tended to be more generalised and vague, as in previous years, and were often personal response heavy. As the question referred to the changing specification, a few candidates took question 3 as an opportunity to suggest other films the exam board may like to consider rather than focusing on the text they had studied which unfortunately resulted in no marks awarded.

Changing Specification
As the last year of our legacy specification draws to a close, I would like to personally thank centres for all their hard work and good teaching across the years. This final year has produced examination papers that demonstrated in-depth knowledge and understanding of the chosen texts (often as a whole, rather than just key scenes) with candidates speaking with confidence and enthusiasm / real engagement. It has been a pleasure working with you all and we look forward to working with you again on the new specification.
In many ways, the final entry for the GCSE Film Studies Controlled Assessment was the most successful. There were few completely new centres and most had established a good understanding of the components and the requirements. As a result, there were fewer centres requiring mark modification and where adjustment was required, this was often to do with over-rewarding rather than failure to comply with the requirements of the specification.

The film exploration components were handled well. In previous years – both through the principal moderator’s report and through CPD events – I have emphasised the need for candidates to engage with their research findings to demonstrate understanding of industry, I am pleased to say that this seems to have been taken on board. The best examples came from centres where there had clearly been some teaching on cinema institutions elsewhere on the course and the candidates were able to discuss what their chosen film revealed about the wider industry.

The micro analyses were also handled well by most centres. In the best examples, the candidates had clearly developed an appreciation of film form and were able to apply this as a framework for analysis. In the most successful centres, candidates were able to articulate their ideas using subject specific terminology and progress beyond a basic semiotic analysis to something much more exploratory of the film/spectator interaction.

The pitch and pre-production components generated a variety of work and it remains clear that for many candidates, coming up with your own idea for a film is a fun thing to do. The most successful ideas pitched came from those where the study of industry (as part of the film exploration component) had given them a framework to work towards.

The screenplay is by far the most popular choice for the pre-production and the availability of exemplar material, as well as professional examples mean that these were mostly handled well. The least successful examples were dominated by dialogue; however the majority of work seen demonstrated an understanding of how the screenplay draws upon an understanding of film form and visual storytelling devices. There were fewer examples of the other options. As I have mentioned in previous years, the most successful examples indicated that the centre and the candidates had played to their own strengths, whether that be the artistic skill of the candidates or the access to technology.

Films and posters remain the most popular choices for the production component. The quality of the best films far exceeds what we might expect to see at GCSE and there are a number of centres where the candidates really excel at this. The issue of role allocation was less of an issue this year than it had been previously and the marks for candidate contribution were allocated according to their individual contribution. There were many examples of candidates choosing to work alone which is encouraging as this is a requirement for those electing to produce film extracts in the new GCSE Film Studies specification. Many of the level 4 posters seen where indistinguishable from professional film posters and the best examples were able to convey ideas about narrative and genre (and implicit understanding of audience) through work which was creative and confidently
executed. The issue over original images, which has been an issue since the launch of the specification, remained a limiting feature for a number of centres.

Overall, the team were very pleased with the quality of work for the final entry and it is hoped that the skills developed in delivering the current specification will help to promote the highest quality practical work as we migrate to the new specification.