



GCE A LEVEL EXAMINERS' REPORTS

**A LEVEL (NEW)
FILM STUDIES**

SUMMER 2019

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FILM STUDIES

GCE A LEVEL (NEW)

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 1: VARIETIES OF FILM AND FILM-MAKING

General Comments

In this first examination of A-Level Film Studies Component 1 there was much evidence of excellent teaching and learning that had prepared candidates well for the scope and demands of the new specification. The majority of responses showed a wide range and surprising depth of knowledge of the films studied in relation to their associated core and specialist learning areas. Candidates often wrote with a level of confidence and engagement that was a credit to their hard work and the tremendous efforts of their teachers in preparing for this examination.

The questions were clearly accessible, if challenging at times, and this enabled candidates to show their knowledge and understanding of the subject content whilst applying it in meaningful ways to the films studied. Those responses that really engaged with the questions and constructed a clear discussion around the question set were far more successful than responses which tended to 'download' pre-prepared information in the hope of scoring marks. There were instances, in all the sections, of responses that featured lengthy recitals of theoretical definitions, plot descriptions, historical overviews and filmmaker biographies that, whilst showing some knowledge of the subject, did not engage with the question very well. Responses that kept a focus on the question and applied conceptual, contextual and textual knowledge as analytical tools to discuss the films tended to show better understanding and more sophisticated critical awareness. There were many candidates who did this very well, but some practice on answering questions rather than just downloading knowledge would be beneficial.

Most candidates were able to complete all three of their responses in the time allowed and produce fairly substantial answers to the questions which showed good practice. Some responses were very brief and this meant that there was limited evidence of knowledge and understanding shown or that the quality of what was produced was basic. Most candidates wrote about both of their films, in each response, equally and this generally led to a more successful answer compared to those that were uneven and had very little on one of the films or where the quality of points about one film was far inferior. The section that proved most difficult appeared to be Section C, where many responses did not evaluate the specified critical approach. The better responses here seemed to be from candidates who had obviously practiced this type of question before and were very confident in reflecting upon the value of critical approaches used to study films. Centres are advised to build evaluation of critical approaches into their schemes of learning to ensure all candidates are prepared for such questions in the future, wherever they might appear in examinations.

There was a fairly even spread of responses to all the questions on the paper, no questions appeared to be more popular. A few films seemed to be less popular for study; Johnny Guitar, Selma, Secrets and Lies and Sweet Sixteen were less often used.

Section A: Hollywood 1930-1990 (Comparative study)

This section produced many engaged and substantial responses that showed depth, detail, and, relevance to the questions. Many candidates had been prepared very well for this section with extensive knowledge of the films, filmmakers, contexts and theoretical debates.

Better responses tended to apply this knowledge in well-structured discussions directly linked to the questions, the very best responses were able to do this with sophistication and exemplify their points with excellent comparative analysis of specific sequences from the films as well as with good contextual knowledge. There was some very good work in this section but there are also a few issues that might enable centres to improve delivery. The most common of these issues, in both questions, was a tendency to ignore the question and recite a prepared response, usually consisting of an outline of auteur signatures or biographies of the directors. Some responses showed a very limited understanding of auteur signature and influence over the films by, for example, only being able to identify Hitchcock's use of "blonde women" or Wilder's use of "witty dialogue" without demonstrating any deeper understanding of the concept of the auteur beyond a superficial checklist.

- 1.1 Responses to this question tended to show good knowledge of auteur traits and exemplified these in the films studied. Better responses used this knowledge to respond carefully to the question by explicitly exemplifying how the films had been influenced by the directors, or challenged this notion by showing how the directors were not the most important influences upon the films. Weaker responses did not really examine how the films had been influenced or consider other possible influences.

The most common films used were *Casablanca*, *Vertigo* and *Some Like It Hot* from the Classical group compared with *Bonnie and Clyde*, *Bladerunner* and *Apocalypse Now* from the New Hollywood group. Most responses discussed how influential the director was compared to the institutional context of production which was a successful approach when a good understanding of the Studio System or New Hollywood was present.

There was some good work on the ways in which Studio restrictions and the Hays Code had influenced earlier films and how different influences, such as Independent production, the French New Wave and a more liberal cultural context, had affected the later films. This also often led into discussions about the auteur debate. Candidates were able to discuss the notion of the auteur and auteur theory (Bazin, Cahiers, Kael, Sarris etc) and in some good responses, this was merged with debates about more problematic 'auteurs' such as Curtiz, Penn and Scott by considering the apparent lack of a signature and the greater influence of others or contextual forces upon their films. Some argued that the influence of the director was strong despite having questionable qualities as an auteur. In places, there was also a sense of directors working against the system from within, this was best exemplified by responses on Hitchcock and Wilder where many candidates showed how the cinematic styles of *Vertigo* and *Some Like It Hot* displayed an auteurist influence coupled with elements of the Classical style.

Less successful responses tended to just assume auteur status or checklist auteur features of the films without evaluating influences or even considering any other possible influences upon the films. Some responses showed a very limited and dubious grasp of the auteur debate, particularly around the subject of auteur signature. There was some good writing about the influence of Hitchcock, Curtiz, Penn, Forman and Scott but some of the responses using other filmmakers was very simplistic. Lee's and Wilder's influence upon their films was often reduced to very limited points about anti-racist ideas and witty dialogue which was not enough to sustain a satisfactory response. It would be useful for candidates to widen their understanding of auteur signatures as well as look at the influences upon the production process of the films they study in some detail. There were some lengthy recitations of auteur theory and biographies of directors that were not necessary and diverted attention away from answering the question.

Many good responses were able to show a wider understanding of the Director's other films to better contextualise and exemplify their points about auteur signature.

There were some excellent discussions that looked closely at notions of collaboration. Hitchcock's work with Bass, Herrmann, Stewart and Head was productively examined by some. It was good to see Benton, Newman, Guffey and Allen being recognised for their contributions to *Bonnie and Clyde* and the importance of Vangelis' score for *Bladerunner* being discussed. There were several answers that used Wilder's *Some Like It Hot* very well by closely examining his work on the script's development and his relationships with actors. There was some very good work on Hal B Wallis' and Warren Beatty's influences on *Casablanca* and *Bonnie and Clyde* respectively. These kind of responses tended to be very successful because they showed detailed knowledge and understanding of the production process and the final film with this knowledge being used to directly engage with the question. The best responses compared a few key influences across both films and linked these influences to precise textual analysis, by focussing on particular sequences or considering wider aspects of the films such as representations of gender or aesthetic style. The better responses compared their films closely and consistently and weaker responses tended to simply state that both films were similar or that there were one or two differences.

- 1.2** There were many good responses to this question and candidates found varied and interesting ways in which to approach and answer it. Unlike in 1.1 there was, thankfully, less downloading of pre-prepared materials about auteur signatures or biographies and many candidates engaged well with the crux of the question which was to show how far the films reflected the times they were made in. There was some excellent work on institutional, cultural and historical contexts that was linked very closely to textual analysis with many responses discussing the relative influences of different issues and comparing the films in systematic ways. Better responses compared the films and challenged simplistic assumptions about the time periods in which their films were made by, for example, pointing out how some freedoms existed in the Classical period and some restrictions still existed in New Hollywood. There were some excellent responses on *Vertigo* and *Some Like It Hot* that showed how modern some aspects of these films are and how unusual they are, in many respects, for the Classical period. Likewise, there were some good responses that discussed whether gender representations in films like *Apocalypse Now* and *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest* reflected a supposedly post-Feminist America. Some responses chose to examine a particular aspect of the films to compare such as cinematic style, and related this to contextual pressures. For example, some outstanding comparative analysis of cinematography and editing in *Some Like It Hot* and *Bonnie and Clyde* showed how the former was influenced by the Classical style whilst the latter used ideas borrowed from the French New Wave. Such an approach often led to highly detailed and focussed responses that allowed the candidate to show enormous amounts of knowledge whilst maintaining a very close engagement with the question. Similarly, there were some very exciting comparisons of how particular cultural and political events had influenced the anti-isolationist stance of *Casablanca* and the anti-authoritarian sentiments of *Apocalypse Now* personified in the characters of Rick and Willard.

Weaker responses to this question tended to have a more limited understanding of contextual issues, used sweeping generalisations about time periods or failed to provide detailed textual examples to support points made.

Some candidates confused “the times they were made” with the times in which the narratives are set. This was particularly noticeable with *Some Like It Hot* and *Bonnie and Clyde*, in some instances candidates thought that *Apocalypse Now* had been made during the Vietnam War, which led to much confused writing.

Section B: American film since 2005

This section produced some very engaging and passionate writing from candidates, the films have clearly been enthusiastically studied and many candidates responded to the questions with lively, informed and well focussed responses. Many candidates chose to compare the films in this section, there is no requirement for this and no marks can be awarded for doing so but it did often seem to help add more fluency and sophistication to candidates’ writing. Centres may wish to consider adopting this approach if it helps candidates write better responses.

The most common weakness in this section was in the way that many candidates discussed spectatorship. There was a lot of confusion about active and passive spectatorship and, on the whole, this way of conceptualising the spectator’s experience of films was not applied well. Too many responses suggested films ‘forced’ active or passive spectatorship or that spectators could be identified as active or passive - as though this was some permanent mode of viewing films. It would be advisable for centres to check their teaching of these concepts carefully next year. Much more productive work was seen when candidates focussed on the concepts of alignment and allegiance to engage with spectatorship debates and recognised the inter-relationship between film and spectator when considering how meaning and responses are formed.

Better responses discussed the dynamic and complex nature of film spectatorship by analysing their own, personal responses to the films but also considered other possible responses in a cautious and sophisticated manner without resorting to simplistic assumptions such as the notion that all men will identify with Seb in *La La Land* because they are men. Theories such as Hall’s Encoding/Decoding model and Mulvey’s work on the Male Gaze worked best when they were applied as analytical tools without simplistic assumptions and generalised assertions about the effects of film upon spectators. The most popular Mainstream films studied were *La La Land*, *No Country For Old Men* and *Inception* whilst *Winter’s Bone*, *Boyhood* and *Captain Fantastic* were the most commonly used Independent films. There was a fairly even distribution of candidates answering the questions in this section.

2.1 Better responses to this question focussed on a single character from each film and provided detailed discussions about different possible responses by close reference to film form in specific sequences or narrative/generic elements that might provoke these responses, and, by considering the filmic and cultural experience of spectators. Weaker responses tried to discuss too many characters from each film and ended up being rather superficial in their application of knowledge or had a very limited understanding of the complexities of film spectatorship. There were some very simplistic answers that assumed spectator response to character was determined by age, gender etc. ignoring the possibility of imaginative positioning and the ability of spectators to identify with characters who were different to themselves.

There were some very good discussions of the very different possible emotional responses to Wink (*Beasts*), Rae (*Winter’s Bone*), Olivia (*Boyhood*) and Cobb (*Inception*) which recognised the ways in which these films try to position spectators and offered sophisticated reasons why spectators may or may not adopt these positions.

Some excellent work on *Beasts of the Southern Wild*, *La La Land*, *Captain Fantastic* and *Winter's Bone* showed detailed and passionate writing, analysing the complexities of character and response and the ways in which these films offer different readings through complex representation of character.

There was some excellent writing about how character arcs and plot development can cause changes in spectator response and how a spectator's personal beliefs and values can affect response to characters. Some of the best answers recognised that spectators can often respond in unexpected ways and that sometimes responses to characters were extremely difficult to explain or rationalise.

No Country for Old Men and *Captain Fantastic* provoked some very good discussion focusing on the ambiguity of the leads. There was some very good writing on Anton in particular, discussing the problems of alignment with an irredeemable villain and also the apparent lack of a hero in this film, some candidates developed this further by exploring how this resonated with their understanding of the Western genre. Some very good discussions of Ben's approach to parenting in *Captain Fantastic* recognised that the film involves the spectator in a debate about this by structuring our experience of Ben so that we constantly re-evaluate our feelings towards him and also have the opportunity to contrast him with alternate parenting models, embodied by the characters of Harper and Jack.

When candidates assessed how they read character's backgrounds, motivations and actions and explored how they responded to them – they produced far more productive and intelligent answers. Some of the best writing explored highly personal, emotional moments such as how we are positioned with Olivia when Mason Jnr leaves home in *Boyhood* and how this might be read by those in that situation (parents/children). The way that the scene is constructed, the mise-en-scene (reduced space, prop of his first photo) and the shift from Mason to his mother's reaction to him leaving realised through the use of cinematography and editing, was analysed in detail and very well linked to character alignment and allegiance. There was some good work on Carol, particularly on how the central character is portrayed sympathetically by the director but how this might counteract with a more predatory reading of her relationship with Therese and her treatment of her child/husband. Equally, there was some very productive work on how the emotional and shocking nature of the narratives of *Beasts of the Southern Wild* and *Winter's Bone* might encourage particular responses to characters or lead to very divergent readings.

- 2.2** There was some excellent, detailed analysis of cinematography in response to this question with candidates choosing very useful sequences and showing a good understanding of the relationship between film form and spectatorship but some responses made very few references to cinematography and didn't really engage with the question. It was acceptable to answer this question by referring to the use of cinematography in the films studied and then discuss other aspects of Film Form, perhaps by arguing that cinematography was not particularly important, but responses that failed to consider the use of cinematography struggled to produce a satisfactory response to the question. Another common issue that surprised examiners was the number of candidates who found it difficult to identify examples of 'powerful responses'.

Some candidates discussed recognising the setting of the film in an establishing shot as a 'powerful response' which wasn't really useful for provoking discussion and debate. Better responses focussed on complex, memorable and surprising responses to the films studied, such as moments of climax, shock, tension and enigma which allowed for more analysis and engaged writing.

Better answers looked closely at one/two sequences per film and showed a detailed and wide understanding of the use of the camera (framing, movement, distance, composition, angles, lighting etc), linking particular examples of technique directly to individual spectator response.

Some good answers on Carol discussed the use of close-ups and reaction shots in the intriguing and alluring courtship between the two women. There was also some outstanding writing on the immersive quality of hand-held camerawork, visceral close-ups, tense framing and bleak, alienating wide shots in Winter's Bone and Beasts of the Southern Wild. The spectacular, cutting-edge cinematography of Inception was, surprisingly, little referenced by candidates but there was some good writing on La La Land's opening sequence in terms of positioning by the camera and its impact on the spectator – better responses debated whether it was camera movement or mise-en-scene that created the spectacle here. Some of the responses on No Country For Old Men were a little light on detail and often struggled to move beyond a few references to close-ups but there were also some very good responses which showed how framing, shot distance, lighting and the lack of camera movement created incredibly tense and memorable moments in the film. Some weaker responses confused cinematography with editing and mise-en-scene and were lacking in any ability to use subject-specific terminology to identify techniques used in the films studied.

Section C: British Cinema

There was a wide range of responses in this section from excellent answers that showed very confident abilities to evaluate ideological critical approaches to very limited responses that struggled to say anything meaningful about the films they had studied in the last two years. The questions in this section were challenging but allowed for a variety of ways of answering them and many candidates found interesting ways of developing their responses to both questions. Better responses had a secure ideological understanding of their chosen films and were able to reflect upon how useful this way of studying the films had been to them, weaker responses tended to be very confused about what an ideological critical approach to their chosen films would be and completely ignored the evaluation task in the question. The most popular films seemed to be Shaun of the Dead, This is England and Trainspotting: Secrets and Lies and Sweet Sixteen were rarely used but produced good responses when discussed.

- 3.1** Basic responses to this question often failed to evaluate an ideological critical approach and just recited a superficial ideological reading of the films or included simple plot description which was not helpful and tended to distract from answering the question. Some candidates struggled as they were unsure about ideology or narrative or both, which was surprising as these are the specialist learning areas for this section. Better responses were able to make some evaluative points about an ideological reading of the films studied and relate this to the films' narratives.

There were some good and very good responses that clearly showed how ideological analysis can help to illuminate features of narrative or narrative devices in films. Some candidates produced really good responses by showing how ideological analysis of films is not necessarily important in studying the narratives of particular films. The best answers clearly identified strengths and weaknesses of an ideological approach, sometimes by comparing this approach with another approach.

Some sophisticated work on this question was produced by candidates who had studied Under The Skin and We Need To Talk About Kevin, two films with complex, multifaceted plot structures and story elements.

Many candidates suggested that an ideological critical approach, such as applying Feminism or even just considering gender representations in the films, had helped them understand the complexities of the plot structures more clearly and made character construction and motivation far more understandable to them. There was, equally, some good work that explored how the choice of a linear narrative and binary oppositions embodied in the characters of Woody and Combo were more understandable in *This is England* after applying an ideological approach because it explained how Meadows was possibly trying to build sympathy for Shaun as a victim of society and Thatcherite ideologies.

Shaun of the Dead and *Trainspotting* were the most popular choices with responses discussing anti-consumerist/capitalist ideological readings of the films and in the best answers this was linked to the use of narrative structure and character arc to reinforce these ideological viewpoints. There was some excellent work on how an ideological critical approach based on class and gender had illuminated the narrative complexities of *Fish Tank* and *Sightseers* for some candidates. These responses pointed to how the use of cause and effect, exposition and resolution, setting and the construction of character relationships had taken on a very different meaning when viewed through an ideological lens and how this had made the narratives more interesting and admirable.

Some weaker responses focused only on the “narrative” aspect of the question and produced largely irrelevant descriptions of Todorov and Propp or were simply plot descriptions with some references to character types and sections of the plot.

- 3.2** This was a very open question with many possible ways of answering it. Some candidates considered how ideological analysis can enhance an understanding of filmmakers’ intentions or help us understanding how the film ‘works’ or even how the film has become important culturally. There were some interesting takes on this question and most could be accommodated by the mark scheme. The difficulty some candidates fell into was a rather circular discussion about how ideological analysis can enhance our understanding of ideologies in films, this often led to confused and rather superficial writing that struggled to show much knowledge and understanding of the films or apply this knowledge to evaluate the critical approach. Again, a common problem was that many candidates ignored the evaluative aspect of the question and did not reflect on ‘how far’ the statement was true for their chosen films. The more successful answers were those that did have a confident grasp of what an ideological critical approach can bring to a film and had obviously discussed this in lessons before the exam.

There was some excellent work on *We Need To Talk About Kevin*, *Under The Skin*, *This Is England* and *Trainspotting* where candidates looked at how ideological analysis had helped them understand how and why the film had been constructed in the way it had and why the films were so important culturally. Some very interesting responses on *Trainspotting*, *Shaun of the Dead* and *Fish Tank* discussed how studying the films ideologically had dramatically improved their understanding of the cultural zeitgeist that the films had captured and why they felt the films had and would endure.

Some candidates argued that other critical approaches had enhanced their understanding of the films more than an ideological approach, for example when responses to *Sightseers*, *Trainspotting* and *Shaun of the Dead* made convincing arguments that the films are better understood through the use of contextual, generic or narrative approaches.

In many weaker responses there was an unquestioning assumption that an ideological approach enhances understanding without really explaining why whereas better responses did engage with this more critically. Some candidates made very convincing arguments that you do not have to apply a Marxist critique to understanding the narrative of *Trainspotting*, *This Is England* or *Sweet Sixteen* and that there might be other, more important, ways of understanding *Fish Tank* and *Under The Skin* than through the lens of Feminism.

Summary of Key Points

- Overall, the first exam paper for the new specification produced good evidence of widespread detailed and sophisticated Film study. The exam seemed to be well handled by most candidates with all three questions adequately addressed in terms of time management although some candidates needed to write more efficiently by avoiding description and irrelevant explanations. There were very few rubric infringements which showed good preparation for the expectations and format of the examination.
- The most important point to remember is that candidates in future should ensure they answer the question that is set rather than recite prepared responses. They can prepare for this by looking at the questions from this paper and the Specimen Assessment Materials, as well as exemplar essays that will be issued by the board, to practise the construction of well focussed discussions. Answers to questions should seek to use the films studied in detail: well-chosen sequences or even particular moments from the films should be used to illustrate and support points made.
- It is vital that candidates know the subject-specific theory and terminology from the subject content but it is just as important that this is used to explore the films and is not referenced or defined in isolation. Similarly, contextual information should always be connected to the films studied and should seek to illuminate aspects of the films rather than be the focus of responses on its own, long passages about the history of the Hays Code or the countercultural revolution of the 1960s are not required.
- It is extremely important that candidates are better prepared for questions that ask for an evaluation of critical approaches in the future. Time should be taken to review the usefulness of the critical approaches used in the study of film: reflection upon what is gained and what is lost by, for example, an ideological critical approach can be a powerful way of developing metacognitive skills in learners that will benefit them in the rest of the specification. Comparing the value of different critical approaches to the study of particular films will sharpen and make more sophisticated a candidate's ability to apply all learning to each and every film studied on their course.
- Finally, I would like to thank all of the candidates and teachers whose hard work, talents and commitment to the subject have ensured that the first sitting of this exam paper has successfully produced such engaging and knowledgeable responses that were a joy to read. I would also like to thank all of the examiners and administrators who have worked with such professionalism and dedication to ensure that all assessments and processes were expedited so carefully and efficiently.

Stephen Robson
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FILM STUDIES

GCE A LEVEL (NEW)

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 2: GLOBAL FILM-MAKING PERSPECTIVES

General Comments

Candidates were generally very well prepared for the first examination of this component of the new Specification. Most rose to the challenge demonstrating considerable learning, together with enthusiasm and commitment. Knowledge of the chosen films was very good – though understanding and application of concepts and debates is, understandably, a work in progress. This report will address some of those areas of the Specification that take us into new territory: performance, aesthetics, filmmakers' theories, the digital, the realism debate, experimental narrative.

It is clear that the two sample papers, the range of support materials and CPD provided by Eduqas have contributed significantly to this good level of preparedness. It was evident from the scripts that the quality of teaching at many centres is very high, sometimes truly exceptional, while candidates from across the ability spectrum communicated a strong engagement with the subject. The best work possessed a true sense of discovery, though it would be good to see many more doing this. Those candidates who think practically – as filmmakers – considering creative choices made and the effects of those choices on the spectator offered some of the most interesting discussion and analysis.

Given that most of the prescribed films on this paper are ones that potentially take the candidates out of their comfort zone, it was most encouraging to find many communicating not just their learning but their genuine pleasure in the films studied. This paper is testing in a number of other ways too, not least in the sheer concentrated effort required to answer four demanding questions in two and a half hours. Almost all candidates were able to do so, even if there was evidence of some tiredness by the final answer.

The new shorter answer single film format for Sections B-D was a successful innovation. In fact it would be true to say that with many candidates it brought out a much higher level of creative thinking and focus than was the case with the rather over-extended, often exhaustive answers produced for Section A. Some centres need to think more about the necessary pragmatics of producing effective short answers: cut elaborate introductions and unnecessary conclusions and more generally drop the very idea of the 'composed essay' in favour of engagement with the question right from the off.

There has been no disguising the fact that the new Specification has been introduced to increase 'rigour' and 'breadth' and this is most obvious in the number of new concepts and debates that have been introduced. The imposition of prescribed films obviously limits choice compared with what we have been used to but has produced many advantages, one of which is a much wider sharing of resources and teaching ideas. There has undoubtedly been an overall improvement in candidates' film knowledge compared with some of the superficial and vague work we have found in the past. However, there is a word of warning within this very positive development. Already a certain uniformity of approach is becoming established with the same sequences from the same films, and the same checklists of points presented by candidates from many different centres.

The pressure to deliver this complex Specification in the time available, possibly with limited resources, is truly daunting but wherever possible do avoid the 'ready-meal' approach to teaching a topic – it really shows in the quality of the candidate's response.

This report will go on to detail issues relating to many of the innovations of the new Specification but before doing so it is important to say here that some of the core issues are recurrent:

- ensuring that the question is addressed directly;
- that examples contribute to an argument rather than remain as descriptive commentary;
- that subject specific terminology is used

More generally it is important that candidates can write and can shape an answer. It may be a new Specification but we remain, unfortunately, in the position where success in demonstrating knowledge and understanding of this audio-visual medium is down to the candidate's ability to put words on paper effectively.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Global Film

In Component 1, candidates have approximately 50 minutes to answer each of three two-film questions. There is no reason for candidates to take more time to answer the two-film question on this paper - freeing up an extra few minutes for Sections B-D would have been a much better use of time.

Both questions asked for detailed reference to a particular sequence from each film. This in itself should have focused the mind and pointed towards analysis over description. In practice many candidates, perhaps the majority, offered more than one sequence from each film and the consequence was that answers became weighed down with commentary and were longer than they needed to be. Candidates must be efficient: in this section there was often so very much effort for relatively little extra reward.

Having made these negative points, it has to be said that candidates were typically well prepared with very good film knowledge and, often, with productive related contextual knowledge. The challenge, of course, is to turn this into an adequate response to the questions set.

No comparison is required. The majority of the candidates did indeed produce essentially two separate short essays with a shared introduction and conclusion. However, some candidates took a comparative approach. While there is no additional reward for a comparative approach as such, the very act of making links, of playing off contrasts, of making little comparative value judgements spoke of the broader quality of the critical and imaginative engagement.

Question 1.1 was done by 65%, question 1.2 by 35% of candidates.

Q1.1 This focused on two key elements of film, *mise-en-scène* and performance, and how these elements 'enriched' meaning. This was a question reflecting Area 2 of the Specification. There was no expectation that candidates would write equally on each of the key elements but that both would be adequately addressed in the course of the sequence analyses.

Mise-en-scène was generally well understood with a wealth of examples. By contrast performance was poorly dealt with. It appears, for some reason, that performance seems to be conflated with scripted action, rather than an actor's delivery of the scripted action. Therefore, there tended to be a lot of descriptive work around the story, rather than evidence of knowledge of performative techniques. The Specification lists characteristics of performance on p.13. A focus just on the first of these would be invaluable: "the use of non-verbal communication including physical expression and vocal delivery". Regular short exercises in scrutinizing an actor in performance are recommended, simply describing what we see and hear. It may even be helpful to think of performance as 'animated mise-en-scène' for the purpose of observation and analysis.

The focus of the question on 'enriching meaning' was lost on many candidates. While able to describe their chosen films, a significant proportion were not able to make the leap to intent and reception. Many who did make the leap adopted what may be called an 'inert' approach, asserting simple cause-effect relations, typically that a specific costume detail produces a singular definitive meaning. The best candidates were able to work with the facts of the film's mise-en-scène and performance as dynamic elements in meaning production. An approach that is prepared to take on the polysemic nature of film, which is much more open to alternative meanings, ambiguous meanings, will produce a thoughtful, enquiring answer.

Less is more. The more tightly focused the answer is on a particular sequence, the more possibility there is for discussion. What is recommended is less description and assertion, more precise observation leading to open exploration. If this happens in the classroom, then the quality of that exploration can be reproduced under exam conditions.

Q1.2 This question again reflected Area 2 of the Specification and brought aesthetics on to a Film Studies exam paper for the first time. The structure of the question was similar to 1.1 in that the named feature (aesthetics) had to be shown to be productive in relation to another aspect of the film (themes). What is different from 1.1. is that an aesthetic is more than 'key elements of film' and a theme is more than 'meaning'. Yet a significant number of candidates approached 1.2 in such a way that they might as well have been answering 1.1.

The most successful answers to this question were those which used descriptive terms like 'gothic' or 'punk' or 'MTV' or 'neo-realist' to describe their aesthetic and who were thus able to anchor their discussion. Once named, the aesthetic could then be described in terms of some of its key elements, such as cinematography or editing. Many candidates seemed to have no sense of how to name the aesthetic and so could only talk about key elements as a rattle-bag of features. And the same can be said for the other focus of the question, themes. Once a theme was named, some of the meanings in play within the film that contribute to that theme became much more pertinent. Some of the best answers to this question focused on the ideological dimension of a named theme and talked about the named aesthetic as, more or less successfully, embodying this in sound and image. For example, the relationship between aesthetics and themes was handled well by those writing about *Taxi Tehran*, where the confined space of the taxi and the limited number of camera positions was identified as relating to both the restrictions on free speech in Iran and to the taxi as a safe space for political discourse. The contrasting aesthetics in the first and second halves of *Life is Beautiful* were also explored well by some.

A clear and simple recommendation comes out of these observations. When teaching a sequence name the dominant aesthetic and name the dominant theme or themes. Armed with these overarching descriptors, sequence detail then becomes much more relevant and alive.

This is a clear area for improvement. Linking an aesthetic ‘look’ or ‘feel’ to a theme – and a theme to an aesthetic ‘look’ is an area that needs more work.

The films used in Section A were generally very well understood and appreciated by candidates – and with high levels of knowledge. Indeed an enthusiasm for the chosen films seems to partly explain the difficulty candidates had in confining themselves to single sequences. The most popular combination was *Pan’s Labyrinth* and *City of God* – both, incidentally, films with very clear aesthetics and with themes that are wedded to these aesthetics. *Pan’s Labyrinth* in particular was very well taught, although the warning above about the dangers of asserting meaning over a more open investigative approach, are particularly relevant here. These films contain clear visual contrasts and the same applies to other popular choices, such as *Life is Beautiful* and *House of Flying Daggers*. Work on the latter film was often outstanding with candidates expressing real delight, so much so that a suggestion here is that if you have not previously considered Zhang’s film, then give it another look, especially if you’ve been teaching the opening sequence of *City of God* for the last ten years! There was fine work on *Timbuktu* and on *Taxi Tehran*, each film again with a very distinctive aesthetic, and exploring clearly definable themes. It was good to see so many centres prepared to take on these films and their troubled contexts. A few centres taught *Dil Se* and the work produced was good to read – with excellent understanding of the complexities and beauty of this thematically unconventional Bollywood film.

Some of the films in the European section were less successful. *Ida* proved itself to be every bit as tough a proposition for candidates as some predicted, while *The Diving Bell and the Butterfly*, more often produced dutiful responses rather than ones that really took off. *Mustang* was much more popular than either of these films. It generated competent and often engaged answers – but the challenge with this film is to consider how far it is possible to go beyond some obvious and easily accessible issues and their relatively straightforward cinematic presentation.

Finally, *Wild Tales* proved a popular choice and many candidates were able to recognise unifying themes and a specific set of contextual factors for this portmanteau of six short films. However, in choosing to write about two or even three of these shorts, candidates lost the opportunity to produce a detailed analysis of one sequence. It is both acceptable and wholly desirable when asked to focus on a particular sequence to focus on one short.

Section B: Documentary Film

This single-film section is particularly demanding. In 30 minutes or so the candidate is expected to demonstrate their textual knowledge of their chosen film, its context, an understanding of issues in documentary per se, a specific understanding and application of filmmakers’ theories and, possibly, some idea about the extent to which digital technology has had an impact. Despite this vast array of subject content, this examination showed that it is just about possible and many candidates produced excellent work.

As already said in the introductory section of this report, it is important to think in terms of an ‘answer’ rather than an ‘essay’ in the time available. This still requires careful organisation and one of the issues in this section is balance. In taking too conceptual an approach, the candidate risks offering too little film textual detail. In engaging very directly with the film, there is the risk of not creating sufficient space for conceptual discussion.

There is no hard and fast rule and the challenge will vary depending on the question – but the candidate is always advised to anchor their work in the film itself and in film detail.

Contextual knowledge was generally very good. This included both social / cultural context and production context – the latter is particularly important in this section.

Bill Nichols' documentary classification was used productively by most candidates, whether answering 2.1 or 2.2. As was the case with the previous specification, these descriptors (expository, poetic, observational, participatory, reflexive, performative) help orientate the candidate in their discussion of their documentary film.

The fit between the film and the prescribed filmmakers' theories has been a cause of concern. The first thing to be said here is that these theories are actually filmmaking practices – and if taught as such, they can much more easily be linked to Nichols and to the filmmaking practices employed in the chosen film itself. In fact the most common use of this filmmaker's theory/practice was in opposition to the chosen prescribed film. So, for example, while Kaspadia does (x) in *Amy*, Broomfield does (y – the opposite) in his work. This is perfectly fine as an approach. One examiner said this: "This question made me realise that if students looked at a filmmaker's theory which represented a very different practice from that of their chosen film (for example, 'Amy' + Michael Moore) then there were opportunities to gain clarity and understanding."

Question 2.1 was done by 50%, question 2.2 by 50% of candidates.

Q2.1 This required the candidate to identify and discuss two documentary techniques of particular significance in their chosen film. Most candidates were able to do so – and generally the more explicit the naming, exemplifying and discussing of these two techniques, the more successful the result. Crazy as it may seem given the time pressure, too many candidates were keen to offer more than two techniques with the result that what they were able to say on any particular technique was too superficial.

Candidates were also required to make reference to one filmmaker's theory (Area 9 of the Specification). A reference is one substantial statement: at least a couple of sentences. While some did this, integrating the reference seamlessly into their broader discussion, many wrote much more than was required. For some the 'reference' dominated their answer at the expense of analysis of their chosen film. Some candidates gave more space to an example of the theorist's film than to the prescribed film. Many candidates offered two theorists when only one was asked for.

As has already been said, the theorists were most commonly used in opposition to the prescribed film. For the most popular film, *Amy*, reference to the observational mode represented by Longinotto was productive, as was (used in opposition) reference to the participatory mode of either Moore or Broomfield. Watson was referred to least often and mainly in relation to *Stories We Tell*.

The question asked candidates to 'explore' which allowed candidates a wide berth. With *Amy*, for example, the use of archive footage and voice-over interviews was commonly used to explore manipulation beneath the surface of a seemingly expository film. Overall, this question enabled candidates to explore significant questions not just about documentary modes but about questions of representation and truth – with some very good work on all five films, perhaps particularly *Stories We Tell*.

Q2.2 This was, overall, the worst answered question on the paper. The fault may lie partly in the question itself with the quote referring to documentary in general. Certainly a proportion of candidates wrote vaguely and much too broadly about digital technologies, making almost no reference to their chosen film. The quote also included the phrase 'our sense of what a documentary can be' and this implicit invitation to consider a freeing up of documentary from its more traditional grounding in 'fact' clearly threw some candidates. Sometimes it betrayed a fundamental lack of understanding of documentary as anything other than capturing the 'truth'.

The biggest problem, however, was the hugely a-historical approach taken to the digital. Repeatedly candidates referred to filmmaking techniques made possible by the digital that in fact have been achievable using analogue technologies for most of the last century. Candidates have always a tendency to go with the proposition presented by the question – with only the better, more confident candidates prepared to argue otherwise. In this case it seemed as if even better candidates were doing whatever they could to work with the proposition. There were many generalisations around dubbing, superimposition, motion graphics, and titling, which expressed the assertion that these were only possible because of digital technology.

Many candidates did produce solid work, whether starting from the obvious but important point that *Amy* would not exist as a film without the assembly of a vast archive of digitally produced material, to the complexities of *Stories We Tell* as Polley moves between different formats and different time frames, to the digitally achieved effects in *The Arbor* and *20,000 Days on Earth*. *Sisters in Law*, used by relatively few candidates, allowed for a consideration of more nuanced points about portable technology in ciné vérité and the fact that this film is politically significant while conforming to a rather traditional 'sense of what a documentary can be'.

The films used in Section B all appeared to work, though in quite different ways, in enabling candidates to develop their knowledge and understanding of modern documentary. Some films produced very enthusiastic work, especially *Amy* and *Stories We Tell*. With *Amy* some candidates' critical judgement was undermined by either a bad bout of fan worship or overwhelming empathy with the subject. *Stories We Tell* was clearly the film that fascinated most and produced some of the very best work as candidates responded to the games Polley plays as a filmmaker while telling a personal and emotional complex story. Work on *The Arbor* and on *20,000 Days on Earth* was often competent with candidates able to identify and discuss important and distinctive features. Neither film seemed to generate the enthusiasm felt for the Kaspasia or Polley works which, especially in the case of *The Arbor*, was surprising. As already noted, relatively few centres chose *Sisters in Law*, even though very many referred to Longinotto as a theorist, while referring to some other of her work. Surely this is to miss a trick – *Sisters in Law* could be used as a second film in this section thus offering candidates a fall back position in the exam?

Section C: Film Movements – Silent Cinema

It was a delight to read the answers to questions in this section, not only because much was of a very high standard, but because the candidates were so tangibly discovering and enjoying great films of the silent cinema era. Textual knowledge was very good – but so too was contextual knowledge and this certainly contributed significantly to the quality of answers to 3.2 in particular. For example, there was an outstanding appreciation of the way *Sunrise* emerged as part Hollywood melodrama and part German Expressionist art cinema.

Compared with the busyness of Section B, here the demands are relatively straightforward and candidates were able to communicate their learning within the allotted 30 or so minutes. One problem that arose was calculating how much additional contextual knowledge to include. At its worst, some candidates wrote very long contextualising introductions and hardly got around to the meat of the question. As said earlier, conceiving the response as an 'answer' rather than an 'essay' means that candidates must focus directly on the question, working in their additional learning only as it is immediately relevant. Both questions on this year's paper required focus on a sequence. Again the point must be made – candidates are not well served referring to multiple sequences as the quality of reference and analysis is reduced.

Eyebrows have been raised about a perceived rather fast and loose adaptation of film movements for the purposes of this section. Expressionism as movement originating in Germany is distinguished from Bazin's attack on forms of expressionist cinema that included both Soviet Montage and German Expressionism. It was good to see that no obvious confusion was caused as a result of this. The further accommodation of Buster Keaton's short films was potentially even more of a problem in relation to 'film movements'. In practice there was an excellent contextualising of the films in relation to American Silent Cinema which in turn produced some of the very best explorations of the realist / expressionist debate, partly by extending the terms of the debate in terms of the Lumière / Méliès binary.

The one major negative is that it was clear candidates in some centre had not seen the films they were writing about – but rather had an uneasy familiarity with sequences in a kind of void. Even though each of the questions specifically asked for close reference to a sequence, those candidates who could not place the sequence confidently within the context of the film as a whole were left exposed.

Question 3.1 was done by 24%, question 1.2 by 76% of candidates.

Q3.1 This focused on editing and appeared to be a 'gift' for those who had studied *Strike* or *Man with a Movie Camera*. While nearly all candidates writing on these films was able to refer to the Kuleshov effect, some were able to extend their discussion impressively referring to Eisenstein's five types of montage, though most often examples were only offered to illustrate intellectual montage. Constructivism was well understood and Vertov's wife, Yelizaveta, at the editing table in *Man with a Movie Camera* was often referenced.

In practice, however, the question asked for more than a set of examples of editing. Debate was invited around a proposition: that editing was central to the visual storytelling of silent cinema. As important as knowledge of editing was the candidate's broader grasp of visual storytelling. With *Sunrise* and *Spione*, there was clearly the opportunity to argue for the centrality of other key elements of film, most obviously mise-en-scène. Only the most confident of those candidates offering a Soviet option were prepared to consider that mise-en-scène and performance are of great importance in their chosen film. Candidates offering the Keaton option, and to some extent *Sunrise*, were able to explore Hollywood-style continuity editing.

The main weakness of nearly all answers was the failure to focus in detail and with precision on one specific sequence, rather choosing isolated examples of editing from a range of sequences.

It was good that very few candidates chose to take advantage of this question by not referring to editing at all, instead beginning with an immediate declaration that they intended to write about some 'more important' key element.

It is important that when presented with a question like this that invites a denial, the candidate should still write a significant part of their answer on the named key element before going on to their declared alternative.

Q3.2 Question 3.2, as has already been said, was the most popular question on the paper and produced the best answers. Clearly candidates were very well prepared for the topic (Area 8 of the Specification) and were able to engage directly with the debate. *Sunrise* was used very effectively throughout. Identifying expressionist feature was not difficult for nearly all candidates, even in the case of the Keaton Shorts about which more will be said in a moment. The challenge came in the identification of realism and it is here that more work could focus for future years.

Some candidates identified realism in relation to 'true to life' so unlikely occurrence fell outside this working definition. This was not very productive. Some identified realism in terms of photographic realism, including the lack of distortion or special effects. This led to some interesting exploration, not least in relation to *Man with a Movie Camera / A Propos de Nice* which are both 'documenting' reality – and where the image is sometimes presented directly, sometimes through effects. Very few related an understanding of realism to Bazin's argument which is the stated theoretical underpinning for this topic.

Keaton's Shorts proved to be both a popular choice and surprisingly well suited to the question. Candidates were able to think through the extent to which Keaton's unadorned photographic representation of what was in front of the camera was 'realism' even if some of the things caught on camera were completely crazy. Many candidates introduced a third term to the discussion – surrealism while the house in *One Week* was described as cubist.

Overall, what was so good about work in response to this question was that candidates were thinking, actively working out an argument. Examiners rewarded this engagement even if some of the arguments and or examples were somewhat contentious.

The films used in Section C were all well taught and many candidates communicated the pleasure they had got from their silent film study. *Sunrise* is an exceptionally teachable film and proved the most popular. The Keaton Shorts was not far behind. What was really interesting about candidates work here was their approach to comedy. Many wrote as if emulating old stone face himself – not a hint of fun! Some were prepared to express amazement and, yes, a hint of laughter.

The Soviet films, while well taught, seemed to be held at arm's length by candidates compared with the US films. The mystery film in this section, literally, is Lang's *Spione*. It is an extraordinary prototype for a very familiar genre and also plays to the argument that films of this period in Germany were anticipating the rise of Nazism. Those centres which offered *Spione* seemed to limit somewhat their candidates by the choice of sequences. Generally, however, work was interesting, especially in picking out how the film represents the transition from German Expressionism to New Objectivity and thus offering a different angle on the Bazin debate.

Another word on candidates offering more than one film in their answer: as with *Wild Tales*, referred to earlier, it is expected that when close study of a sequence is asked for, then one sequence from one film is sufficient. This means that candidates did not have to offer a sequence from *Man With a Movie Camera* and from *A Propos de Nice*, either would have sufficed.

The same applies to the Keaton Shorts although here candidates were actually advantaged by referring to more than one of the shorts in answering 3.2 as the balance of realist / expressionist features varies across the four.

Section D: Film Movements – Experimental Film (1960 – 2000)

Here I want to start rather than finish with some comments on the films available for study for this section. Three of the films are experimental in an obviously formal sense: *Vivre sa vie*, *Daisies* and *Timecode*. The other two, *Pulp Fiction* and *Fallen Angels* are postmodern style experiments, although the latter also captures the zeitgeist of mid-90s Hong Kong. Which is the easier to teach and which are candidates most likely to flourish with? The overwhelming popular answer evidenced from this year's paper is the latter. *Pulp Fiction* was by a huge distance the most frequently chosen film – while *Fallen Angels* appeared more often than had been expected.

It is clear that candidates hugely enjoyed both with *Fallen Angels* coming across as a film for higher level cultists who have already gone beyond introductory level *Pulp Fiction* cultism. It was a pleasure to read much of the work on both films: there was some very good knowledge and understanding of textual features in *Pulp Fiction*; and some truly outstanding work on the relationship between style and themes in the cinematically stunning *Fallen Angels*.

However, are these ideal films to choose in relation to the questions set? Motivation and pleasure count for a lot but strictly speaking both of these films, especially *Pulp Fiction*, present some difficulties. It is not sufficient to simply assert the experimental characteristics of *Pulp Fiction* when the film is essentially playing with long established Hollywood narrative and genre conventions. It is, for example, hard to reward a candidate who asserts, without justification, the experimental brilliance of the McGuffin. What is being suggested here is that the two postmodern films, and *Pulp Fiction* in particular, require a more subtle, nuanced argument in relation to the 'experimental' than is the case with any of the other three films which are self-evidently experimental and which offer up their experimental characteristics very directly.

Vivre sa vie, *Daisies* and *Timecode* may be more difficult viewing experiences – but they are very teachable in relation to the priorities of this section. If the majority of centres are to persist with *Pulp Fiction*, then teaching must include consideration of arguments against this film's experimental status. And to a lesser extent this goes for *Fallen Angels* too. Celebrate the cinematic brilliance of either film, work through a checklist of postmodern characteristics, but having done that, face up to the task of arguing for – or against – these films being described as experimental.

Work on *Vivre sa vie* was often exemplary. Experimental features were clearly identified and explained in relation to Brechtian alienation techniques and in relation to Godard's intent working within the Nouvelle Vague. Similarly candidates found it very straightforward to offer an argument around the experimental status of *Daisies* and were able to place these experimental features in the context of the Czech political situation, in the context of 60s feminism and in the context of surrealist anarchy. *Timecode* was offered by relatively few centres and work that was seen was somewhat limited. There was a surprising under-playing of the performative aspects of the film and a failure to emphasise the centrality of sound. As a footnote: *Timecode* comes alive if you can access a dvd version which allows a replication of a 'live' sound-mix across the four screens.

Question 4.1 was done by 48%, question 4.2 by 52% of candidates.

Q4.1 This focused on two experimental narrative features and specifically their impact, (Area 5 of the Specification). Candidates were generally well equipped to answer this, although the connection between two features and 'impact' was central. Where the connection between narrative features and impact was not made, discussion was necessarily limited.

There was excellent work on *Vivre sa vie* and, to a lesser extent, *Daisies*. To go back to the general observations above, some boldness would have been welcome in candidates writing about *Pulp Fiction*, willing to at least consider the possibility that while playfully postmodern, describing the film as 'experimental' may be open to challenge.

Q4.2 This put emphasis on auteurism (Area 7 of the Specification) and presented a wider brief than 4.1, inviting candidates to address an unspecified number of film conventions they considered their film challenged. Again, candidates seemed well equipped to identify textual features but were not always able to argue a case for (or against) this being primarily rooted in auteur innovation. While the question invited discussion, most often the centrality of the auteur was assumed.

This second question was more accommodating of the two 'postmodern' films as there is no specific reference to 'experimental'. As has already been touched upon, both *Pulp Fiction* and *Fallen Angels* offer brilliant play with established mainstream conventions. There was some exceptional work on *Fallen Angels* bringing together a sophisticated understanding of narrative, aesthetics, context and auteur preoccupations.

Summary of key points

This has been a long report as there has been much to comment upon in this first sitting of the Component 2 examination.

Key points:

- Candidates are very well prepared in terms of film textual and contextual knowledge, but there needs to be more work on concepts, especially those appearing at A level for the first time – such as aesthetics, performance and the digital.
- Greater emphasis needs to be given to answering the question directly and in using textual material as the basis for discussion and debate. There is already evidence of candidates being over-prepared with a 'package' of learning and this is potentially at the expense of critical thinking and on-the-spot problem solving.
- When directed to make reference to a sequence, then as far as possible, the candidate should offer a detailed, precisely observed and extended analysis of one sequence rather than making more superficial points about several.
- Candidates should practice being less assertive and instead offer a more open, enquiring approach. The judicious use of words like 'possibly', 'perhaps', 'alternatively' is recommended..... especially when discussing the relationship between film textual features and meaning. Film is polysemic. The idea that the spectator (i.e. the candidate) makes meaning seems to have been lost.

- When presented with a proposition, the candidate should not feel obliged to agree with it. Rejecting a proposition is always an option, especially when dealing with questions on the digital and the experimental.
- For questions on aspects of film form (film poetics), encourage candidates to think not as critics but as filmmakers – applying their developed practical skills so that a film is understood ‘from the inside’ as it were, from the perspective of the film’s makers, and the creative decisions they have taken
- Give no more than 50 minutes to Section A and provide an ‘answer’ rather than an ‘essay’ for each of Sections B-D
- Reflect on the choice of films: more challenging films have proved the most successful in providing candidate with a menu of examples and ideas from which to shape an answer.

FILM STUDIES

GCE A LEVEL (NEW)

Summer 2019

COMPONENT 3: PRODUCTION

General Comments

In this first year of assessment, it was an absolute pleasure to see how well the majority of Centres had engaged with the new Specification and its demands. This is further amplified by the fact that the new Specification requires individual production work, meaning that the demand and rigour is increased, and therefore the challenge for candidates has also increased. Nevertheless, both Centres and candidates rose to this challenge with great enthusiasm. Component 3 offers a significant synoptic opportunity to apply knowledge gained elsewhere in the Specification through the demonstration of practical skills. To quote the Specification:

Production is a crucial and synoptic part of the specification, giving learners the opportunity to put into practice the filmmaking ideas they develop throughout their course of study. The study of film form in particular is intended to enable learners to produce high quality short films and screenplays as well as provide them with a filmmaker's perspective on the films they study.

Centres were able to engage their candidates with the concepts around the short film, through some dynamic use of the short film compilation set by WJEC, and candidates were able to select appropriate films to study, applying this study to their own productions. This is impressive and Centres should rightly be congratulated on successfully delivering this new approach to teaching and contextualising production.

Candidates offered an incredible diverse range of short films and screenplays encompassing a wide variety of styles and influences. The impact of the short film compilation was significant across the majority of candidates' work, with direct and visible application of learning at all levels. This is highly creditable and is not only a testament to individual engagement, but also to the high-quality teaching they received.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Option 1: Short Film

There was evident excitement and pleasure in making the short films, and there was a marked difference in focus created by the dual demands of applying learning from the short film compilation, and of the Production Brief. It is without question that candidates who engaged directly with the Production Brief achieved the best results. Candidates engaged well with the concept of the narrative twist and with the narrative portraying conflict between two characters, and those applying experimental film techniques to their productions were able to utilise both the narrative which begins with an enigma, and the narrative which establishes and develops a single character.

The options and influences gave opportunity for an incredible level of diversity, and application of learning, with everything from horror and sci-fi films through to Chris Marker-esque meditations on life being created.

It was particularly pleasing to see candidates making the decision to create narratives that were within their abilities to deliver, and enlisting participants (huge thanks to willing or unwilling friends and family members) to assist in this creation. In doing this, candidates engaged with wider learning and developed transferable skills that will see them into the future.

Option 2: Screenplay for a Short Film (and accompanying Storyboard)

As with the film production, there was a wide range of subjects delivered through the creation of screenplays, with many exploring genre, and many revealing significant study of screenplays and of screenwriting. This is commendable and is to be encouraged. The narrative which begins with an enigma, and the narrative which establishes and develops a single character were the most prevalent, with the narrative which portrays conflict between two central characters, and the narrative twist also having significant presence.

Again, candidates were able to offer diverse screenplays from comedies to intense psychological dramas, and were able to engage well with the constraints of duration and with the demands of the short film form. Candidates performed best here where they were encouraged to work from their own enthusiasms and interests, and where this was informed by the study of screenwriting itself. The study of screenwriting, be it through techniques (of characterisation, dialogue, or structure), or concepts (such as myth, psychology, or story) has had a dramatic impact on the quality of screenplays produced, and the application of learning here has given the screenplays significant depth and quality.

Candidates generally were able to exemplify their screenplays through an appropriately constructed storyboard. It is essential that candidates select a sequence to storyboard that offers them the best opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge of filmmaking techniques. It is imperative that candidates use this opportunity to display their knowledge of constructional devices, and it is advisable that they do so within the storyboard template available on the Eduqas A Level Film Studies Resources website.

The storyboard is the place for more focus on technical audio/visual instructions and the best work had some excellent detail in this section. Centres who used the WJEC template or used the headings from it, had greater success in providing the correct amount of detail to accompany the images. Some images were difficult to see: too dark, upside down or shot in portrait. The best photographs were taken in landscape where composition and lighting had been considered. The advice for film-making about the close up and an identifiable protagonist is also relevant here, too many storyboards have a predominance of one shot type, often the long shot or mid shot. Candidates are advised to think about shot durations as long durations for each shot had a real effect on pacing and were not well thought out.

Evaluative Analysis

The new Specification added a significant additional demand to the reflection on production, with the inclusion of reference to the short film compilation. Candidates were able to take to this task with ease, and were able to deploy their knowledge of their chosen films with aplomb, offering structural and textual analysis, and connecting this to their own production work. This is to be applauded and highly commended. With the short films as a contextualising structure, candidates were able to produced tight, focused reflections on their production work, and were able to analyse construction, stylistic features, demonstration of influence, and structural elements. Most importantly, they were then able to demonstrate their knowledge of how all of this creates meaning and effect.

The majority of candidates were able to make references to the short film compilation throughout their analyses, and some took a more segmented approach, detailing their used of the short films, and then moving on to talk about other elements.

A limited number of Centres candidates approached this task as an analytical essay, deconstructing the short films in detail, and this is an approach that did not give candidates enough scope to focus on their own production work, and is to be discouraged.

Summary of key points

- Production work should focus on the Production Brief. Time spent exploring and exemplifying how the four options work within short films would be beneficial to candidate understanding.
- The short film compilation offers a wide range of short films, and candidates should be encouraged to select films that have some relationship to their intended productions. Selecting a film to be used in the negative (how they did not influence, or how they deployed techniques that were not used) is not the best approach, and candidates would be better advised to structure their work to demonstrate the application of concepts/techniques from their chosen films.
- Production work requires study. Candidates making films should study practical short film filmmaking techniques and should apply them. Candidates creating screenplays should study short film screenwriting techniques and should apply them. Both are distinct disciplines and candidates who undertake such study inevitably produce better results.
- Production work that was directly and explicitly focused on one of the options from the Production Brief tended to be work that achieved higher marks. It is worth taking time to measure progress against the chosen option so that its use and visibility can be assessed and mediated where necessary.
- In general, the storyboard which accompanies the screenplay requires more attention from centres and candidates.
- The short film compilation is designed to inform the production work, and as such should be intrinsic to its development. Therefore, in the development stages of the work, it is useful to consider how the chosen films have been used, and whether their influence is evident in the production work. This process of using the films can be further explored in the Evaluative Analysis.
- A reminder please that written work should still be annotated before it is uploaded. Some centres completed coversheets from the previous year and as the coversheet had changed to include a new GDPR section, as well as the separation of the marks as outlined above, it is vital that centres use the most current version.
- Please ensure that non-film sources such as books, people and very often TV shows are not cited as cinematic influences; 'Pretty Little Liars' and 'Black Mirror' seem to have been very popular with this year's cohort and was mentioned inappropriately by quite a few of the candidates.

- Ensure that candidates identify the chosen brief from the list of four in the specification on the coversheet; some candidates just identified which type of work it was (screenplay or filmmaking) rather than referring to the specific brief chosen. It would be good practice for candidates to refer to the brief at the start of the Evaluative Analysis too which many did, evaluating the ways that their piece met the brief.
- Please be aware that there should be no instructions for cinematography and editing within the screenplay. These ideas should be expressed in the illustrative storyboard. In a similar way to the filmmaking, the best pieces had few characters and had created carefully written and convincing dialogue for these, which created a clear sense of character.



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