GCE Examiners' Report

Media Studies

GCE

Summer 2026

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Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.[1]

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

[1] ***Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.***

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Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
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Executive Summary

Unit 1

Candidates approached the examination confidently, demonstrating a secure understanding of the assessment objectives and the demands of each question. Centres had generally prepared learners well, with most managing their time effectively and producing responses of an appropriate length. Candidates applied relevant critical perspectives purposefully and showed a clear distinction between demonstrating knowledge (AO1) and applying it (AO2). Knowledge of the set products in Sections B and C was strong, with effective use of textual references throughout. Overall, responses showed a sound understanding of the media theoretical framework and key concepts across the paper.

Unit 2

Moderators reported many high-quality submissions, with very few incomplete entries. Most centres selected Brief 1 or 3, however submission of audio-visual productions continued to increase. Centres should ensure candidates use current briefs and maintain clear links between research, planning and production. Persistent issues included exceeding word limits for the Research and Reflective Analysis, which must be penalised where appropriate. Candidates must meet all brief requirements, including referring to the required research texts in the Reflective Analysis. Centres should also ensure compliance with regulations regarding found materials and AI-generated content, which must be declared and excluded from assessment.

Unit 3

This unit assessed understanding of representation, audience, media language and critical perspectives across television, magazines and video games. Overall performance was strong, with candidates demonstrating secure knowledge of theoretical perspectives and applying them effectively. The highest-scoring responses integrated theory with detailed textual analysis, showing how media language and technical codes create meaning. Performance was consistent with previous series, with close textual analysis continuing to distinguish the strongest responses. Areas for improvement included ensuring references focused on the specified print magazine products rather than online versions, and improving time management in Section C.

Unit 4

Centres demonstrated confidence in delivering and assessing Unit 4, with most candidates producing thoughtful and creative portfolios that reflected a secure understanding of the media theoretical framework. The strongest work showed clear integration of research, planning, production and evaluation, supported by well-justified creative decisions. Few centres submitted incomplete folders, although some required follow-up to provide missing materials. Common issues included overly descriptive investigative research, failure to meet technical brief requirements, missing bibliographies and use of unsuitable research texts for the television brief. The magazine brief remained the most popular, while entries for the television brief continued to increase, with many producing work of an exceptionally high standard.

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UNIT 1: INVESTIGATING THE MEDIA

Overview of the Unit

This year's Unit 1 examination was engaged with confidently as learners were familiar with the expectations and demands of each question and the requirements of the assessment objectives. From this it may be discerned that learners were generally well prepared for the paper by centres. The majority of candidates managed their time effectively across the three sections and wrote responses of an appropriate length. It was pleasing to see that a range of appropriate critical perspectives, in line with those that are specified, were applied purposefully and appropriately by learners to support their responses. Candidates were confident in their understanding of the assessment objectives where AO1 expects them to demonstrate knowledge and understanding and AO2 requires that they apply that knowledge and understanding. It was clear that most candidates were secure in their knowledge of the set products in both section B and section C and references to these set products were used effectively. The paper overall was engaged with positively and candidates were able to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of the media framework across each of the sections. A series of summary notes and observations follows, each relating to the individual questions and intended to inform future planning, teaching, and preparation for this examination unit.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

1 0 Explore how media language is used in the music video extract to construct representations. [40]

In your answer, you should consider:

- the audio and visual codes
- the technical codes
- the mise-en-scène (settings, locations, costumes and props**)**

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media.

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of the key concepts of media studies to analyse media products.

The audio visual resource proved to be a highly accessible for this unseen analysis question which was evident through candidates' responses. The focus of the question was media language and how the varied elements of media language were used to construct representations. The bullet points served to encourage candidates to consider the range of media language elements which included audio, visual, technical codes as well as the various aspects of mise-en-scene.

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The majority of responses were of an appropriate length for a 40-mark question which suggests familiarity with the expectations of this section of the paper. Best responses addressed the focus of the question and used the bullet points to consider the wide range of features that constructed representations within the music video. A range of different and appropriate representations were explored with many focussing on the construction of gender representations both male and female, the construction of a star image, as well as interestingly aspects of ethnicity and class. Responses in the higher bands were able to examine closely the specifics of media language that constructed the representations often adopting a semiological approach to offer precise, astute and insightful points. Given that the resource was a music video, best responses also considered aspects of the audio codes including the lyrics and their relationship to the visual elements. Confident responses were also knowledgeable about the distinctive nature of a music video form providing a framework within which the representations could be explored. Some responses were more generalised showing secure understanding and knowledge of the video form but sometimes missing the detailed referencing needed to support that understanding. There was also a considerable range of relevant critical perspectives referred to and applied to enhance the audio-visual analysis. While this was not specifically required by the question candidates had clearly been taught the range of critical perspectives outlined in the specification as well as additional critical perspectives the most frequently used were: Gauntlett, Barthes, van Zoonen, bell hooks and Andrew Goodwin. The best answers showed knowledge and understanding of the critical perspectives through application rather than just by referring to them although it was clear candidates were keen to show what they know.

Overall, candidates performed well on this unseen analysis question. The accessibility of the audio-visual resource, combined with clear engagement with the question and bullet points enabled most candidates to demonstrate secure knowledge of media language and representation. The best responses were characterised by detailed textual analysis, confident engagement with the conventions of the music video form, and thoughtful application of critical perspectives.

Section B: News in the Online Age

2 1 Explain why newspaper ownership is important. [10]

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media.

The question this year was industry focused and required that candidates demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the significance of ownership and control of news media as outlined in the specification. There were many ways in which candidates could show their understanding of the importance of newspaper ownership potentially considering the ways in which ownership can influence the way news stories are represented or how owners of newspapers have power and influence as they are able to set the agenda of public debate. With a sense of overview, it might have been considered that the ownership of newspapers by large companies can limit the range of viewpoints available so considering the significance of conglomerate ownership.

As an AO1 question knowledge did not have to be applied (AO2) however many candidates effectively referred to news products in order to support their points and develop their explanations. For some knowledge of newspaper ownership was

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secure and there was confident use of news products that had been explored as part of their study to show understanding of news in the online age. In these instances, the newspaper industry had clearly been taught and learned.

However, many candidates struggled with this question as there was a clear lack of knowledge and understanding of 'newspaper ownership' in the first instance and subsequently why this might be considered important. While the best answers showed their knowledge and understanding through a wide range of supported points less successful responses were vague drawing on generalisation or by clear misunderstanding of the question of 'newspaper ownership'. Some responses were self-penalising if they were too brief and did not offer enough of an explanation as required, possibly due to a lack of knowledge.

It is important while teaching news for this section that there is an emphasis on the structures of ownership and the implications of conglomeration with examples from contemporary news media to better equip candidates with the knowledge and understanding of news as an evolving media form and the industry and audience issues that arise as outlined in the specification.

2 2 How are news products constructed to attract audiences? Refer to one of the set news products you have studied to support your points. [20]

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media language and audiences.

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of media language and audiences to the news product chosen.

The assessment objectives for this question are equally weighted with ten marks for knowledge and understanding and ten marks for application of that knowledge to one news product set by the WJEC. The focus of the question was media language and audience as the question asks candidates to consider how news products are constructed to attract audiences. The candidates were directed to choose one news product from any of their options studied and it was pleasing to see a wide range of products from each of the option blocks used to answer the question and the majority clearly demonstrated knowledge of their chosen product whether a newspaper, news website or radio programme with the most popular being newspapers. The specification states that at least one significant event must be studied, and learners must consider how the event is represented and disseminated across the news media studied. The event must also be a 'hard' news item, such as one related to politics, crime, foreign affairs or economics. Candidates for the most part were also able to address the 'attract audiences' focus of the question showing secure knowledge of audience demographics for the news product chosen.

The majority of candidates did refer to an appropriate hard news story to support their answer. Hard news stories referenced in responses included: Keir Starmer's election win, a range of Trump focused stories such as the meeting of Trump and Zelensky, the arrest of Prince Andrew, and a variety of knife crime stories. For the most part, there were more recent stories studied which was pleasing as contemporary relevance is more in keeping with the underlying tenet of News in the Online Age. However, there were some stories that are quite old, more than eight years in some instances and these should be looked at to be updated. Best answers benefitted from strong knowledge of the set product in terms of the ethos, ideologies and political stance of the news product as this knowledge informed the focus of the question in relation to the ways in which the news product studied attracted their

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respective audiences. Less successful answers gave generalised accounts of audience appeal without the support of a detailed analysis.

Overall, this question was unproblematic and allowed for a wide range of interesting answers. A few rubrics appeared where responses referred to more than one news product as this tended to detract from the detailed exploration needed for the higher bands. On the whole candidates have clearly been well taught in preparation for the second question in this section with only some points as mentioned for future consideration.

Section C: Film Industries – from Wales to Hollywood

3 1 Explain how the film industry targets a range of audiences. Refer to the film made in Wales you have studied to support your points [10]

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key concepts and critical perspectives of media.

Responses were expected to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how the independent film industry targets a range of audiences possibly considering how film industries target audiences through content and appeal; how film industries target audiences the ways in which they are marketed and distributed and how films maintain audiences through marketing across platforms. The question also directed candidates to support their points with reference to the film made in Wales they had studied.

Candidates approached this question confidently for the most part as many responses showed knowledge and understanding of both the industry aspect of the question and the set film product. Best responses made a wide range of points in relation to the industry such as filming decisions in production and targeted marketing strategies to reach a range of audiences whether that be film festival presence, campaign materials or more innovative stratagem. Many responses also considered the content of the film itself and how different aspects would attract certain audiences.

Candidates also knew their set products very well and used this knowledge to offer detailed and specific explanations of the ways in which audiences could be attracted. Less successful answers were limited by brevity and/or cited inaccurate information about their set products.

Overall, this question proved to be straightforward and accessible to nearly all candidates with very few exceptions.

3 2 How is film language used to communicate meaning? Explore a key sequence from the Hollywood film you have studied to support your points. (20)

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of media language.

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of the concepts of media language to analysis of the film studied.

This question required candidates to consider how film language communicated meaning through the analysis of a key sequence from the Hollywood film studied. The elements of film language expected to be considered included: camerawork (distance, angle, movement), mise-en-scène (settings, locations, costume, props),

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editing (continuity editing) and sound (diegetic, non-diegetic and post-production sound).

Best responses focussed on a key sequence; this allowed for close, detailed analysis where a wide range of points could be explored. Some candidates used genre as a framework within which the various elements operate to communicate meaning and narrative to locate the key sequence within the trajectory of the film as both of these aspects can impact the choice of film language used and was a valid approach. While the successful answers explored a key scene in depth and detail some candidates referred to more than one sequence which was usually at the cost of a detailed analysis. Less successful candidates tracked the narrative from start to end using Todorov to explain the plot rather than focusing on the film language aspect of the question asked. Critical perspectives were also used to inform responses such as Neale and Todorov. This was most successful when used to inform the quality of the analysis. While most responses were the appropriate length for a 20-mark question there was some evidence that time became an issue for the final question on the paper.

Summary of key points:

- Key words in question stems should be identified to provide a strong focus for each
- response across sections.
- Revisit the specification particularly Section B to ensure content coverage.
- Reflect on news storied studied and update where necessary.
- For exam preparation the practice of answering whole questions and whole papers in timed conditions would be beneficial.

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UNIT 2: CREATING A MEDIA PRODUCTION

Overview of the Unit

Moderators reported seeing some excellent work this year. Few centres submitted incomplete work for moderation. Most centres opted for Brief 1 or 3. There seemed to be more audio-visual options this year, which was pleasing to see. Many centres appeared to give candidates a choice of brief. This year, as in previous years, there were several candidates who exceeded the word limits for their Research and Reflective Analysis. This remains an issue about which centres must be mindful; centres must adhere to the requirements on page 54 of the Specification and be aware that work that falls outside the word limit must not be considered in assessment.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Administration

Most work was uploaded by the deadline and was easily accessible to moderators. It would help enormously if centres could label folders clearly with the candidate's surname and what it is, for example: surname, research; surname, planning etc. Also, centres must remember that files must be uploaded in one of the permitted formats and ensure that the correct files and only the necessary files are uploaded.

Coversheets were generally accurately completed, making it easier to see how assessment had been applied. However, there were several centres who had submitted coversheets for moderation with signatures and dates missing which held up moderation.

There were some instances where missing marks were evident and, in a few cases, marks on IAMIS were different to those on the cover sheet. Again, it is imperative that all administration is checked. Detailed summative comments are required so that moderators can better understand how centres have awarded marks.

Care must be taken when uploading Production tasks. The quality of scanning for some print tasks made it very difficult to moderate. Where possible, please export digital copies to upload rather than scan hard copies.

Research

Many candidates submitted relevant and detailed research which adhered to the requirements outlined in the Specification. Research is a key element of the NEA, as it is this that should inform candidates' Planning and Production. Consequently, the materials selected by candidates for their research must be relevant to the brief – there were few examples of candidates researching texts unrelated to their Production. There were a minority of centres where only two texts were researched.

As mentioned above, there were many examples of candidates who had far exceeded the upper word limit. Work that falls outside the specified word limit cannot be assessed.

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It should be remembered that the research task is not a piece of textual analysis, but a piece of research to inform the rest of the NEA. In some centres, this area of the unit was more descriptive. Theory must be relevant and well-anchored, and assessment must take into consideration the relevance and application of it.

Planning

Overall, the Planning seen by moderators was relevant, appropriate and of a good quality, However, there were some issues at a minority of centres. Centres are reminded that only storyboards can be assessed for the AV briefs; nothing else. Storyboards are pre-production tasks and should not contain stills from the Production. This was the case for a few centres.

Some centres had included extraneous information (e.g. mood boards, plot outlines, etc.) which cannot be assessed. Quite a few centres uploaded mind maps, font styles and logo ideas; again, these cannot be assessed. For print and online briefs, only draft versions of each page can be assessed. Centres should not assess any other material when awarding marks for Planning e.g. annotations. There were many cases were candidates provided detailed annotations with their draft plan; while this may be a useful activity for the candidate to undertake, this cannot be assessed.

Draft pages should comprise of images and text but should be more developed than basic diagrams showing elements such as ‘Title’, ‘Credit block’ etc., and should bear a resemblance to the finished Production. Most centres had presented well-developed planning that reflected the research findings of their candidates. It is also important to note that all four draft pages need to be complete.

Production

Many candidates produced some imaginative and professional products – for example, some excellent knowledge of understanding of media language and representation was shown in music videos and some extremely well thought out television drama texts were seen by moderators. In some centres, technical skills were generously awarded in some cases, particularly where pixelated and blurred images were used. Moderators also noticed that centres were slightly more generous when assessing AV productions.

Centres are reminded that candidates must use original photographs in their print work (five or six as a minimum, depending on the brief), and many candidates need to pay more attention to the industry and audience requirements of their brief. In a minority of cases, there lacked consistency across print campaigns. As is stated in the specification, ‘Candidates who do not use original footage, images or text for the majority of the production may only be awarded marks up to the top of band 1 of the marking criteria.’

Centres are also reminded that the use of AI must be declared and used appropriately, in keeping with the guidance that is available on the qualification webpage under ‘Key Information’. AI generated content that forms part of the production cannot be considered as candidates’ own work and should be assessed as non-original material.

There was a tendency to over reward Band 4 candidates and place them in Band 5 and a hesitancy by assessors to cross band boundaries over the 3 columns.

Reflective Analysis

In a successful Reflective Analysis, candidates must analyse and evaluate their Production work in relation to the three texts used in their Research. They should focus on the key genre conventions incorporated into their productions, the representation issues raised by

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the production and how media language (and other conventions) has been used to target the specified audience. In some centres, the analysis seemed to be more descriptive and seemed to just describe the process of the creation of their production. Candidates who simply evaluate their own Production work with no reference to these elements are not adhering to the specification requirements and assessment here was often too generous as a result.

If candidates haven't selected comparable products for their Research, then this element of the Reflective Analysis becomes difficult for them in terms of genre and representation issues.

Finally, candidates who write over 750 words for Research (some were over 2000), are usually only analysing two texts within the required word count, and are, therefore, not complying with the requirements. This must be reflected in the assessment of the work and is likely to be self-penalising.

Summary of key points

- Candidates must adhere to the requirements of their selected brief and centres should check that briefs used are current.
- There should be a cohesion between all elements of the NEA work: Research, Planning and Production should clearly link, and work should develop in a logical sequence.
- Word limits must be adhered to for the Research and Reflective Analysis. Candidates who exceed the word limits (+/-10%) should be penalised by centres as outlined on page 54 of the specification.
- Page 30 of the specification states that 30 seconds of found footage is permitted in an audio-visual or online product, and one found background image is permitted per page of print or online product. AI generated images and footage are considered ‘found’. Non-original images and any use of AI must be declared and ignored in assessment.
- The Reflective Analysis must adhere to the requirements outlined on page 29 of the specification. Candidates must refer to all three texts selected for their research and refer to the bullet points outlined.

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UNIT 3: MEDIA IN THE GLOBAL AGE

Overview of the Unit

This unit assessed candidates' understanding of representation, audience, media language and critical perspectives across television, magazines and video games. Candidates were required to apply theoretical frameworks to a range of historical and contemporary media products and support arguments through textual analysis.

Overall, performance across the paper was strong. Candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of the required theoretical perspectives and were generally able to apply these appropriately across the paper. The most successful responses consistently integrated theory with detailed analysis of media language, showing how technical codes and semiology create meaning for audiences.

Performance was broadly in line with previous series. As noted in earlier examinations, close textual analysis continued to distinguish higher-band responses. Persistent areas for improvement concern references to print rather than online magazine products along with time-management issues affecting some responses in Section C.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A: Television in the Global Age

Q1.1 How might audiences interpret crime dramas?

Explore with reference to *Hinterland* and the historical drama you have studied.

This more open question inspired confident responses across the bands. Candidates often used Hall's reception theory to scaffold their answers, appropriately interpreting the question as an exploration of audience decoding.

A lot of responses chose to focus on gender politics within the historical crime drama set products, with *Prime Suspect* again proving the most popular choice. Candidates explored how audiences may interpret patriarchal dynamics, institutional corruption or the moral ambiguity of characters such as Catrin in *Hinterland*. Other responses framed their interpretations within genre context, discussing how audiences recognise conventions of crime drama and respond to their subversion.

As ever in Section A, close application of textual detail facilitated higher rewards. Candidates who analysed camera, sound, mise-en-scène and performance were able to articulate how audiences derive meaning from specific media language choices.

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Q1.2 How do television producers maintain a variety of audiences?

Explore with reference to *Hinterland* and the European drama you have studied.

Candidates approached this question with confidence, often applying audience theory to structure their responses. There was sustained interest in themes and characterisation, with many candidates discussing Saga's apparent neurodiversity in *The Bridge* or patriarchal dynamics within *The Disappearance*. Higher band responses juxtaposed the two products, identifying common ground in their appeal while also exploring how each product targets different audience segments.

More sophisticated responses recognised the idiosyncratic nature of television as a medium, particularly the serialised structure of crime drama narratives. Candidates explored how producers maintain audience engagement through narrative hooks, cliff-hangers, evolving character arcs and the promise of genre pleasures, an approach consistent with earlier series where candidates also acknowledged television's evolving form.

Section B: Magazines — Changing Representations

Q2.1 How do representations of ethnicity reflect historical contexts?

Explore examples from the mainstream online and historical magazines you have studied.

This question elicited wide-ranging responses. Many candidates explored white hegemonies within historical products and examined how far these cultural standards extended into modern magazines. It was pleasing to see candidates draw upon critical perspectives beyond the stipulated theorists, with Alvarado's work on ethnicity frequently and appropriately applied.

Candidates who engaged in close textual analysis — particularly of how media language constructs aspirational or consumer-focused representations — were rewarded accordingly.

As in earlier series, some candidates still referred to print iterations of contemporary magazines, despite page 36 of the specification clearly stating that the modern products should be online versions. This remains a persistent issue across centres.

Q2.2 How do representations of sexuality reflect cultural contexts?

Explore examples from the mainstream and non-mainstream magazines online you have studied.

Candidates often reverted to discussing gender rather than sexuality, producing responses of varying success. However, many candidates recognised and challenged heteronormative assumptions within mainstream media, exploring how diverse sexual identities are increasingly acknowledged within contemporary magazines.

There was confident engagement with non-mainstream magazines such as *Attitude*, *Pride* and *Huck*, with candidates exploring how these products construct identity pleasures and reflect the cultural contexts of marginalised groups. Some candidates

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appropriately juxtaposed the commercial ideologies of mainstream magazines with the alternative values presented by non-mainstream products.

It was disappointing that certain candidates still referred to the print edition of *Cosmopolitan* featuring Ruby Rose. The print edition of *Cosmopolitan* is not a set product in this unit, and this issue features an actor whose cultural currency is now dated. This limited the relevance of some responses.

Section C: Media in the Digital Age — Video Games

Q3.1 Baudrillard argues that audiences are immersed in a world of images which no longer refer to anything 'real'.

Use examples from one action-led franchise game and one game in another genre.

This question generated lively and engaged responses. Candidates confidently applied Baudrillard's concept of the simulacra to *GTA*, *Tomb Raider* and *Minecraft* — by far the favoured choices. Higher band responses explored the mimetic nature of video games, discussing how players immerse themselves in worlds of high verisimilitude. Some sophisticated candidates explored the idea of the 'map preceding the territory', arguing that games become more real than reality for some participants.

Bandura's perspective was often used to support ideas about how audiences may struggle to distinguish between real and simulated experiences.

Q3.2 Barthes argues that media products communicate meanings through a process of signification.

Use examples from one action-led franchise game and one game in another genre.

This was the less popular of the two video game questions. Responses ranged from straightforward applications of Barthes' codes to more sophisticated explorations of how images in video games achieve mythological status through naturalisation. The question encouraged close textual reading, and many candidates responded with purposeful analysis of marketing materials.

As in earlier years, Section C was often answered last, occasionally resulting in truncated responses due to time management issues.

Summary of Key Points:

- Candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of critical perspectives and applied them purposefully across the paper.
- Centres should continue to emphasise the importance of media language and how products use technical codes to create meaning.
- Modern magazines must be taught with acknowledgement of their digital distribution and format; references to print versions remain a recurring issue.
- Candidates should continue to be encouraged to evaluate questions and recognise their polysemic nature before adapting their understanding accordingly.
- Time management in Section C remains an area for improvement.

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UNIT 4: CREATING A CROSS-MEDIA PRODUCTION

Overview of the Unit

This series, it was encouraging to see the confidence with which centres approached both the delivery and assessment of Unit 4. The majority demonstrated a secure understanding of the assessment requirements and a clear appreciation of the purpose of the unit. Once again this Summer, submissions showed that Unit 4 provides learners with an effective opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the media theoretical framework through the research, planning, production and evaluation of their own media products.

Most candidates engaged thoughtfully with the demands of their chosen brief, resulting in many creative and accomplished productions, reflecting the effective support and guidance provided by teachers throughout the production process. Very few centres submitted incomplete folders. Some centres failed to upload all elements of the portfolio and moderators had to request this work.

The strongest submissions were characterised by candidates successfully integrating the key media concepts and theoretical perspectives studied during the course into all aspects of their work. These learners were able to make purposeful creative decisions and provide clear justification for those decisions within their accompanying written work. Centres that consistently adopt this integrated approach continue to produce the highest quality outcomes, where there is a strong connection evident between research, production intentions, creative choices and critical evaluation.

In the written work, generosity was most prevalent in the Investigative Research where the conceptual analysis of the research product lacked specificity, and a significant proportion of the word count was lost to industry information or a discussion of more than one magazine edition or episode of the TV series.

In the production artefacts, generosity was often the result of candidates not fully meeting the technical requirements of the brief. This included exceeding or falling short of specified word counts, omitting the required number of images or words within print artefacts, and, more noticeably than in previous years, failing to include a bibliography. Although the television brief has been widened and now allows research into products from any BBC channel or Channel 4/E4, a small number of candidates continued to select research texts from institutions outside the permitted specification. This year, a minority of candidates researched episodes of series produced by HBO Max, Netflix and Amazon Prime. In these cases, candidates were unable to fully satisfy the requirements of the brief, as the investigation of genre and audience must be grounded in an understanding of products from the specified institutions, namely the BBC or Channel 4/E4.

The magazine brief remained the most popular option this year. However, the numbers of candidates choosing the television brief is increasing year on year, with many centres submitting audio-visual productions of an exceptionally high standard.

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Comments on individual questions/sections

Administration

Administration procedures were generally well implemented. Overall, candidate files were clearly labelled, folders were well-organised and most centres included comprehensive cover sheets with the sample of work submitted.

Although annotation of individual pieces is no longer required, moderators continue to value it as additional evidence to support assessment decisions. More importantly, comments on the cover sheet should make clear reference to the assessment criteria and provide concise, candidate-specific justification, supported where possible by brief examples from the work. This enables moderators to see how marks have been awarded. While less common than in previous years, a small minority of centres continue to rely on copied band descriptors rather than providing personalised commentary. Candidate-specific evidence remains far more effective in justifying assessment decisions.

Almost all centres met the WJEC NEA deadline of May 15th with many uploading well before; if meeting the deadline proves problematic, centres should contact the WJEC to apply for a formal extension. Most centres successfully uploaded all candidate work in acceptable file formats, resulting in fewer instances of missing work being reported by moderators. However, a minority of centres did not upload all elements of the unit. Centres should check that all tasks are present in IAMIS by the 15th May in order to avoid disrupting the moderation process.

Most centres completed cover sheets thoroughly. However, a small minority submitted incomplete documentation. It remains a requirement for both the assessor and candidate to complete all sections of the cover sheet. This year there was a rise in candidates whose review dates were vague, unsigned and undated. Some had not been reviewed at least three separate times as required. Moderators also noted that some candidates had not completed the Completion of Cross-Media Production section, including details such as product type, duration and, where applicable, a website URL. This information is essential for providing context to the NEA work. There were fewer cases of missing student signatures compared with previous series.

Centres should ensure that candidates complete Section C of the coversheet relating to GDPR. Although this was completed correctly by most centres, a small minority omitted this section, resulting in cover sheets having to be resubmitted during moderation and causing unnecessary delays. WJEC is grateful to candidates who give permission for their work to be used as exemplar material and in Professional Learning, as this supports teacher development. Candidates who do not give permission are not required to complete the participant details section.

Assessment

Investigative Research

The Investigative Research task enables candidates to develop and apply their understanding of one key media concept—genre, narrative or representation—through the detailed study of a magazine or television product of their own choosing. The investigation should inform the accompanying cross-media production, with candidates expected to apply the conventions of their chosen media form, as outlined in the brief.

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Centres continued to select a broad range of contemporary media issues and products for investigation, with many candidates' demonstrating clear engagement with topics that reflected their own interests. Where candidates selected focused and manageable research questions, investigations were typically more purposeful, analytical and successful.

The strongest investigations made full and effective use of the recommended word count of 1,250–1,500 words while maintaining a clear focus on a single media concept throughout. Successful candidates selected research questions that allowed for detailed exploration rather than broad description. As in previous years, moderators were pleased to assess many investigations that demonstrated genuine engagement with the topic alongside a secure level of academic research.

The most successful investigations centred on a single media product that closely reflected the candidate's intended production and fulfilled the publisher or broadcaster requirements outlined in the brief. Rather than attempting to analyse several products, these candidates undertook detailed analysis of one magazine edition or one television episode, enabling a more focused and perceptive investigation.

Successful candidates demonstrated a secure understanding of their chosen media concept through the consistent application of relevant media theory and at least two appropriate critical perspectives. Analysis remained conceptual throughout, with theories used to develop and support arguments rather than being included descriptively. Research was integrated effectively into the discussion, allowing evidence from academic sources to underpin candidates' own ideas and conclusions rather than simply being listed in the bibliography.

High-performing investigations drew upon a range of credible academic sources, including textbooks, journal articles and reliable online publications. Bibliographies met or exceeded the minimum requirement of five sources and were generally presented using recognised referencing conventions such as Harvard. Moderators also noted a continued decline in the use of unsuitable sources, such as Wikipedia and other informal websites, demonstrating an improving awareness of the importance of selecting authoritative research materials.

The strongest investigations reached well-supported conclusions that were firmly grounded in the evidence gathered throughout the research process. Candidates maintained a clear focus on the purpose of the investigation, synthesised their research effectively and demonstrated how their findings informed both their analysis and the planning of their practical production. Overall, the highest-performing work was characterised by focused enquiry, perceptive analysis and confident academic engagement.

Common candidate misconceptions and areas for improvement

Moderators identified several recurring issues in less successful investigations.

- The most common was the selection of research questions that were too broad in scope, resulting in investigations that lacked depth, a clear line of enquiry and well-supported conclusions.
- Candidates should also ensure that industry or contextual information is included only where it directly supports the investigation. In some cases, excessive background material limited opportunities for critical analysis and evaluation. Similarly, critical perspectives were sometimes referenced rather than meaningfully applied, leading to underdeveloped conceptual discussion and insufficient explanation of the relevance of theories to the chosen topic.

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- Research should be integrated into the investigation to support candidates' own arguments, rather than being presented descriptively. Where sources were not effectively incorporated, it became difficult to distinguish candidates' own analysis from the views of researchers.
- Academic referencing also remains an area for improvement. Some investigations contained incomplete or inaccurate citations, while others included inconsistencies between in-text references and the bibliography. Centres are reminded that accurate referencing and a complete bibliography are essential in supporting the credibility and authenticity of candidates' research.

Development Outline

Overall, Development Outlines were completed well and generally met the requirements of the specification. It was pleasing to see that supplementary planning materials, including scripts, storyboards, mock-ups and mood boards were not included this year, as these cannot be assessed. Assessment was appropriate in most cases, with the majority of candidates awarded marks that accurately reflected the quality of their work. Where marking was more generous, this was often because candidates summarised the findings of their Investigative Research rather than explaining how those findings would influence the planning of their cross-media production.

The purpose of the Development Outline is to explain how the Investigative Research has informed the candidate's creative decisions and production plans. It was encouraging to see that centres have continued to respond to guidance provided in previous Principal Moderator reports by treating the Investigative Research and Development Outline as two distinct elements of the NEA. Unlike previous series, moderators found no evidence of the two tasks being combined.

The most successful Development Outlines identified the key conclusions from the Investigative Research and clearly demonstrated how these would shape the candidate's production. Stronger responses made explicit links between research findings and creative decisions, providing detailed and purposeful planning while remaining within the recommended word count. Top band responses were specific and detailed in their intentions for the forthcoming production.

A number of factors were identified as limiting the overall effectiveness of some Development Outlines. Moderators identified a small number of recurring issues in less successful submissions:

- Some candidates outlined the findings of their Investigative Research but did not explain clearly how these would inform creative and production decisions, making the rationale behind their proposals less convincing.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on the intended audience identified in the brief. Candidates should make explicit links between their production decisions and the needs and expectations of that audience throughout the Development Outline.
- An increase was noted this year in the number of Development Outlines that exceeded the permitted word count by more than 10%. Centres are reminded that moderators can only credit work within the specified word limit. Keeping within the recommended length also encourages candidates to produce focused and purposeful planning.
- Where candidates choose to work in pairs, the Development Outline should clearly reflect each candidate's individual role and demonstrate how their allocated responsibilities contribute to the chosen concept.
- The Development Outline is intended to inform the production process and should therefore be completed before practical work begins. Retrospective accounts often

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provide less effective evidence of planning and can limit candidates' ability to demonstrate how their production was shaped by their research.

Cross Media-Production

A high standard of production work was once again evident across both briefs this series. The strongest submissions demonstrated technical proficiency, creativity and a secure understanding of the requirements of the chosen brief. Candidates awarded Band 5 typically produced cross-media artefacts of a consistently high standard, underpinned by purposeful research and a sophisticated application of media language. Their final productions clearly reflected the intentions outlined in the Development Outline, demonstrating how research had informed creative decisions throughout the production process.

The most successful candidates demonstrated a thorough interpretation of the brief, producing two equally accomplished artefacts that fulfilled all aspects of the specification. They applied genre conventions confidently while maintaining originality and a clear focus on the intended audience. Effective use of media language, together with a strong awareness of industry conventions, enabled candidates to create authentic products which remained appropriate to the chosen media form. The strongest submissions also demonstrated a clear relationship between the Investigative Research, Development Outline and final production, with representations, narratives and technical choices consistently reflecting the intentions established during planning.

High-quality submissions displayed imaginative concepts supported by strong technical skills. In audio-visual productions, this was evident through carefully planned camerawork, editing, sound design, pacing and convincing mise-en-scène. Effective characterisation, natural dialogue, purposeful audience address and creative use of locations combined to create engaging and authentic productions. Print productions demonstrated strong layout and design, a consistent house style and thoughtful construction of representations across all artefacts, including the related production for Option B where appropriate. The most successful magazine productions also met all specification requirements, including the use of original photography, sufficient original written content and appropriate technical conventions throughout.

Strong Development Outlines continued to underpin the highest-performing work. These clearly explained how research findings would be applied during production, enabling candidates to make purposeful creative decisions and produce original work rather than simply imitate existing media products. The most successful candidates demonstrated confidence in adapting genre conventions to suit their own ideas whilst maintaining a clear sense of audience and purpose.

The Production component continues to be the area most frequently over-rewarded during centre assessment. Whilst many candidates demonstrated secure technical skills, marks were occasionally generous where the overall quality of the production did not consistently justify placement within the higher bands. Common issues included inconsistent application of genre conventions, weaker technical execution across one element of the cross-media production, or products that did not fully reflect the conventions and characteristics of the chosen media form.

For magazine productions, less successful work sometimes featured crowded or poorly organised cover layouts, limited use of conventional front-cover features, weak typography or colour choices that reduced readability. In some cases, required conventions such as pricing, issue numbers, dates, barcodes or sufficient cover lines were omitted. Layouts occasionally lacked the consistency expected of professional magazine design, particularly across the double-page spread and related products.

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Across both briefs, centres should ensure that all specification requirements have been fully met before awarding marks. This includes meeting minimum word counts where required, producing the correct number of original images, using the specified dimensions for digital products and adhering to prescribed timings for moving-image productions. Candidates should also ensure that both elements of the cross-media production demonstrate comparable levels of technical accomplishment and creativity, as the secondary product should be assessed with equal rigour. Where one product is significantly weaker than the other, this should be reflected appropriately in the marks awarded.

A number of recurring challenges were identified that reduced the impact of some productions:

- Research findings were not always applied effectively to the final production. This was particularly evident where candidates relied on multiple or inappropriate comparative products, resulting in creative decisions that lacked coherence or failed to reflect the conventions of the chosen genre or media form. Centres should ensure that the relationship between the Investigative Research, Development Outline and final production is explicit, allowing moderators to see how research has informed production decisions.

- Technical proficiency should be considered across the production as a whole. In some cases, marks were generous where one artefact demonstrated stronger technical skills than the other. To achieve the highest bands, both elements of the cross-media production should demonstrate comparable levels of creativity, technical accomplishment and audience engagement, with the secondary product carrying equal weighting in the assessment.

- Print productions were the most common area where media form conventions were not consistently applied. Recurring issues included omissions of expected magazine features such as pricing, issue information, page numbers, barcodes and sufficient cover lines, together with crowded layouts, weak typography, poor colour contrast, blurred or pixilated images and inconsistent page design. These weaknesses often reflected limited understanding of the conventions identified during the research stage.

- Centres should ensure that all production work fully meets the requirements of the specification before marks are awarded. Common issues included insufficient original images or footage, failure to meet minimum word counts, incorrect dimensions for digital products, productions exceeding prescribed time limits, or briefs that had not been fully addressed.

- Some candidates demonstrated weaker construction of representation, particularly in print productions where images resembled personal photographs or social media images rather than purposefully planned representations appropriate to the genre, audience and brief. Centres should encourage candidates to construct representations deliberately so that meaning is communicated consistently across both artefacts.

Critical Analysis

The purpose of the Critical Analysis is for candidates to demonstrate how the media concept investigated in their Investigative Research has been realised within their Cross-Media Production, supported by appropriate critical perspectives. This component is intended to provide an analytical discussion of the finished production rather than an evaluation of the production process or a reflection on the success of the final artefacts. Candidates should focus on how the selected media concept informed their creative decisions and explain how

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these decisions enabled them to meet the requirements of the brief, including audience expectations and industry conventions.

Where submissions concentrated primarily on evaluating the production or reflecting on what had gone well, they did not fully address the demands of the specification. In these cases, marks were occasionally generous, although centres generally applied the assessment criteria with reasonable accuracy and candidates were usually placed within the appropriate mark bands.

The strongest Critical Analyses demonstrated a confident understanding of media language and showed clear knowledge of the chosen media concept, supported by relevant theoretical perspectives. These responses sustained a well-focused discussion throughout, using appropriate terminology to explain how research findings had influenced representations, technical choices and other creative decisions within the Cross-Media Production. Candidates justified these decisions convincingly and maintained explicit links between the Investigative Research and the completed artefacts. In print productions, this was often demonstrated through discussion of layout, design and visual conventions, while audio-visual analyses explored elements such as representation, narrative construction, camerawork and technical aspect of the production as well as audience address.

Less successful responses shared several recurring characteristics:

- introducing new media products or research that had not formed part of the Investigative Research.
- moving away from the original research focus or making only limited reference to research findings.
- failing to analyse the selected media concept explicitly, resulting in descriptive rather than analytical responses.
- making only superficial or inconsistent use of relevant critical perspectives;
- offering limited discussion of the Cross-Media Production itself.
- focusing on production processes, such as image selection, mise-en-scène, editing or technical challenges, rather than analysing how the chosen concept had been realised within the final production. Encouragingly, this was less common than in previous series.
- evaluating strengths, weaknesses or possible improvements to the production instead of providing conceptual analysis. This tendency also appeared less frequently than in previous examination series.

Summary of Key Points

- Candidates should ensure that all aspects of their chosen brief are addressed and that work fully complies with the requirements of the Specification and associated assessment criteria.
- Centres should ensure that all specification requirements have been met before awarding marks. Common issues for not meeting requirements included insufficient original images or footage, omission of the required word count in print productions, incorrect dimensions for digital artefacts and moving-image productions exceeding the permitted duration.
- The highest-performing submissions demonstrated sustained and accurate use of media language and subject-specific terminology across all written components, together with a clear understanding of the relationship between research, planning and production.
- As in previous series, the Investigative Research and Production components were the areas most frequently over-rewarded. Centres should ensure that marks accurately reflect the quality of the work and the published assessment descriptors.

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- Most centres adhered to the Investigative Research word limit. Where work exceeded the permitted limit, only material falling within the Specification requirements could be credited.
- A bibliography containing a minimum of five sources remains a compulsory requirement of the Investigative Research. Whilst footnotes may be used for referencing, they do not replace the bibliography.
- To access the higher mark bands for Production, candidates should demonstrate consistent technical proficiency and secure application of media form conventions across both cross-media artefacts. The secondary product should be assessed with equal weighting to the primary product.
- Common reasons for generous marking in Production included inconsistent technical quality, blurred or pixelated images, ineffective layout, obscured cover images or text, weak editing, unengaging pacing and limited use of genre conventions. In some cases, these weaknesses reflected insufficient research into an appropriate comparable product.
- Centres should check that all required documentation has been submitted. A small number of folders contained missing coversheets or omitted compulsory components, such as the Critical Analysis or one element of the Cross-Media Production.
- Centres are reminded that where only one cross-media artefact has been submitted, the work must not be awarded above Band 1, in accordance with the Specification.

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Supporting you

Useful contacts and links

Our friendly subject team is on hand to support you between 8.30am and 5.00pm, Monday to Friday.
Tel: 029 2240 4308
Email: media@wjec.co.uk
Qualification webpage: AS/A Level Media Studies

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