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FILM STUDIES
General Certificate of Secondary Education
Summer 2013

Chief Examiner: Jackie Newman

General Remarks

This fifth year of the GCSE Film Studies course has seen another rise in the number of centres and candidate entries. The composition of the cohort is comparable to previous years and although there has been a slight change in the specification from coursework to controlled assessment, statistical evidence demonstrates no significant changes in achievement.

It is pleasing to note that the increase in numbers has not affected the standard of work submitted for Paper 1, Paper 2, and the Controlled Assessment. It is clear that good practice is becoming embedded across many centres and teacher expertise and confidence continues to grow. There is ample evidence of excellent teaching and learning especially within the more established Centres, and candidates across the ability range are increasingly able to demonstrate a growing knowledge and understanding of the three interrelated study areas: film language, film organisation and film audiences.

Many centres continue to offer the course in one year. This option produces mixed results often depending upon the age of the centre’s cohort. Year 9 candidates often struggle to demonstrate the depth of knowledge and understanding and/or the technical skills required at this level, especially within a compressed period of time. All too often time pressures and large cohorts limit both achievement and engagement. So saying, where candidates have been allotted the appropriate amount of curriculum hours and suitable teacher expertise, the one year option has proved to be very successful.

Candidates responded well to the change in genre in Paper 1 and the new focus film options for Paper 2 elicited some pleasing responses. Statistical evidence points to minor time management problems across the ability range for both Paper 1 and Paper 2. It is useful to note that questions 2 and 3 in Paper 1 and question 4 in Paper 2 carry a significant amount of marks and candidates should be briefed on how much time to allow for each of these questions.

In terms of facilitating achievement close reference/adherence to the specification is vital. This year a number of centres continued to follow the legacy specification, or allowed candidates to complete controlled assessment tasks that were not offered as an option. It is vital that teachers are fully conversant with the specification content if they are not to disadvantage their candidates.

Overall though, there continues to be ample evidence of outstanding, well-informed, creative responses both within the written papers and the internally assessed work. Technical expertise is certainly improving as demonstrated by the increased number of excellent film sequence submitted this year, many of which exceeded the level expected for GCSE work. This and other superb production pieces clearly reflects some excellent practice within Centres. The new specification seems to be working well in terms of encouraging/facilitating strong personal engagement from candidates across the ability range. Most candidates were able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding according to their ability.
FILM STUDIES
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Unit 1: Exploring Film

Principal: Dave Fairclough

The examination once again did allow candidates the opportunity to demonstrate macro & micro analysis, industry awareness and creativity - the 3 main elements we were looking to assess.

Q.1 This worked reasonably well and as intended on the whole. Points to note:

(a) Although most candidates did identify an aspect of mise-en-scene such as setting or costume it is still advisable practice for the candidates to identify a supporting example from the sequence to be sure.

(b) Importance here could be to the narrative or the effect (intended or otherwise) on the audience rather then merely describing the 1a) example.

(c) Here the quality remains good and continues to improve. However some candidates limited the marks that were awarded by loosing sight of the effect to be analysed; that of creating excitement. Excitement can take many forms but the analysis of the 2 chosen aspects must have this as its theme; some examples used much film language terminology well but did not focus on or indeed in some cases mention 'excitement'. As usual candidates should do 2 aspects if they are to access the full mark range. Guidance as to time management on (c) should still be stressed as the second micro feature was often the weaker of the 2, and on rare occasions omitted entirely.

Q.2 (a) Virtually all candidates were able to pinpoint at least one important costume or prop here, as was intended.

(b) The term 'important' is deliberately wide to enable a wide range of responses. Answers that identified 3 reasons of importance scored well, as did those that discussed individual points to greater depth. Candidates who presented too much description inevitably did not access full marks.

(c) The best candidates here were able to draw on analysis and knowledge of other texts they had studied; the very best were able to make interesting comparisons between Spiderman (2002) and their own texts. Again answers that consisted of lists of descriptions from the focus texts and others could not access the higher marks.
Q.3 Of all the questions on this year’s paper question 3 generated the widest range of responses. The lower mark responses typically listed the methods from the resource material with the addition of a few others. Those in the middle ranges did discuss how some of these worked as marketing methods, detailing audience and the creation of anticipation, interest and ‘buzz’. The higher order responses acknowledged the campaign approach required to sell a tent pole high budget franchise blockbuster; their discussion centred on issues specific to the Superhero movie using both the resource materials and examples of their own.

It should be remembered that this question is the main focus of what the candidates have studied in regard to film industry and their answers are expected to reflect this knowledge and understanding.

Candidates should also try to remain within the boundaries of the question. They may have done work on analysing DVD covers but this is of marginal relevance when discussing the marketing of the movie.

Q.4 Candidates should be reminded of two main things in regard to question 4. Firstly to leave enough time as secondly a major element is creativity and they are required to come up with their own ideas.

(a) This was completed by most candidates and in most cases reflected the knowledge of Superhero codes and conventions.

(b) The answers here were largely confined to how the powers would be used and their narrative impact which was fine; the stronger answers considered more filmic reasons such as the visual impact of the chosen powers.

(c) Here the responses tended to cluster around the higher middle of the mark range. The main issues preventing access to the higher marks fell into three areas; lack of website codes and conventions, unclear knowledge of Superhero codes and conventions and annotation that labelled rather than explained.

(d) Gratifyingly this year many more candidates made good attempts at the final question hopefully addressing issues of time management experienced on previous papers.

Candidates that did well here engaged with the instruction ‘how’ and made an attempt to discuss how their chosen features would engage with audiences both specific and general.
Many centres are now comfortable with the expectations of Paper 2 with a number of candidates showing a very good understanding of texts, particularly Tsotsi, The Devil’s Backbone, Amelie and The Wave. The best answers incorporated references to film language throughout and centres had clearly gone into their chosen texts in real depth.

Some candidates though, still didn’t understand elements explicitly referenced in the specification, such as representation and film language. Texts such as Bend It Like Beckham and The Boy in Striped Pyjamas often did not gain the best responses as candidates found it difficult to discuss culture and political issues in any appropriate depth. Centres should therefore carefully consider the texts they choose to study, to ensure it offers suitable challenge and engagement for their candidates. Though some texts may seem simpler than others, they still need to be thoroughly taught.

Q.1 Most candidates answered Q1 well, showing a good understanding of the importance of place and many could clearly identify themes or issues. Not all candidates could link the themes, or issues, to the place, but many could and these candidates could reference a number of themes relevant to their text and the place they were discussing. Occasionally the place referenced was too large or vague which then made it difficult for the candidate to answer b) and c); for example – Germany in Bend It Like Beckham.

Q.2 Answers for Q2 varied in quality and depth. Some candidates did not attempt d), which is disappointing as representation is such a key aspect of study for this Paper. Occasionally candidates could not name a character or chose characters that were difficult to discuss in the other sections, so candidates should always be advised to read all the questions through before answering them. Character descriptions were generally appropriate for b) but responses to c) were varied as some candidates merely described the narrative rather than focusing on a character’s importance. Those that did though had some good understanding of character. Some candidates’ responses to d) were excellent, discussing 2 or 3 key sequences and how young people were represented through the film language rather than simply focusing on narrative.

Q.3 Response to Q3 were a little disappointing this year as, though many candidates wrote long answers, responses were often quite superficial, focusing on personal response and vague responses to issues and sequences rather than showing their in depth knowledge of the film. Some candidates misinterpreted ‘film language’, and discussed vocabulary or subtitles instead. Candidates did use the guidance provided but many skimmed over what they had learned and just focused on how good they thought the film was and how many stars they would give it etc; whereas what they should be doing is taking the opportunity to show how well they have studied their focus film.
The overall quality of the controlled assessment continues to improve as centres become more familiar and confident with the options and the assessment criteria. In most cases, the changes to the controlled assessment requirements were handled well and this has given scope for candidates to produce more substantial work for the Film Research component. The number of marks available for the research component doubled this year from 5 to 10 which allowed candidates to move beyond the limits of the pro-forma used in previous years and allowed centres to reward the level of research and synthesis that takes place in the best work. The best examples continue to come from candidates who have researched recently released films as material is more readily available, although there was fantastic work produced by candidates electing to study films produced before the advent of the internet (although this obviously requires candidates to be more resourceful). In a small number of cases, centres had not encouraged candidates to produce any more work than they had done for the previous specification and just doubled the marks that they would have given for work in previous years.

The Micro Analysis continues to provide a suitable indicator of the level of understanding of film language and how films communicate with their audiences. The new specification stipulates that candidates should analyse the use of two aspects of film language in a short sequence of the candidates’ choice. The new specification contains a suggested title and this did help some candidates retain the focus of the task. Those attempting to cover more than two elements of film language often failed to include the level of detail expected for levels 3 and 4 or led to work which was considerable over the suggested word limit. The success of the task often depends on the sequence chosen and those candidates who analyse films which are richer in terms of film language, find more to say and move beyond literal interpretations of the text. This is a key area where teachers should offer guidance on what an appropriate text for study might be and although the personal choice of the candidate is important they should be steered away from inappropriate texts – comedy in particular can prove challenging for less able candidates. Centres are also reminded that superhero films or those on the prescribed list for Paper 2 must not be used for the Film Research component.
The quality of work produced for the Pitch continues to improve and candidates’ ideas become increasingly creative. The very best are those where the emphasis is on selling an idea to investors and tapping into the appetite of contemporary cinema audiences. The ability to guide candidates as to what is required can have a real effect on what the candidates should include and the mode of address for this. The difference between a logline and a tag-line continues to provide a challenge for some. As I have stressed in previous years, the candidates are ‘pitching’ an idea for a film that has not been made yet and the purpose of the pitch is to get investors on board. What is being assessed here is the candidates’ ability to propose plausible ideas for new films and demonstrate an understanding of industry and audiences.

Screenplay extracts are emerging as one of the most popular options for the pre-production component although the quality of these is variable. The very best centres are clearly teaching candidates about the form and function of screenplays and the emphasis on cinematic storytelling rather than dialogue. There is no requirement for centres to follow the conventions of a professional screenplay, but it is clear that those who do provide candidates with a framework which forces them to think in cinematic terms (guidance on this is readily available in a number of text books as well as the internet).

The pre-production options can be broadly separated into two categories: which emerge from the study of film language, genre and narrative (screenplay and storyboards) and those emerging from the study of film industries (merchandising campaign and magazine cover/contents). Centres should bear this in mind when assessing the work as the options have been designed as an opportunity for candidates to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of these key areas.

Storyboards remain another popular option and are clearly viewed by some as more accessible for lower ability candidates. The best examples came from candidates who had used a digital camera to photograph their storyboard as this required them to consider camera (angle and distance) and mise-en-scene. The other aspects of film language (camera movement, sound and editing) must be indicated in the candidate’s annotations – although too often this is seen as an inconvenient extra rather than an opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and understanding.

As I commented in last year’s report, the popularity of the merchandising option is diminishing. The best examples of these move beyond templates for generic items like T-shirts and Zippo lighters and show understanding of the ways that contemporary films are marketed, this has included front of house materials for the cinema, plans for viral marketing ‘stunts’ and appropriately customised packaging for popular breakfast cereals featuring the candidates own film artwork/central character. Candidates must be given guidance on what constitute appropriate materials and this will be dependent on the genre and target audience of the film. Whilst there is no requirement to use original images for the pre-production task, the very best candidates continue to do this.

The magazine and contents page continues to provide a challenge for some centres where there is an assumption of what a magazine cover and contents page looks like. Too many do not resemble film magazines and the significance of the candidates’ own film is not always clear. The success of this task depends on candidates showing that they have undertaken some study of film magazines and can demonstrate an understanding of how their film might be positioned in the marketplace.
Recommendations to centres

There was strong evidence of good practice in many centres across both the internal and external assessments and it is clear that experienced centres deal well with the demands of the Specification. However, there are still some areas that either cause some concern or need further development. Teaching the appropriate terminology is now clearly evidenced and film industry has become a greater priority in many centres. The new specification has a greater emphasis on film Industry so it is important that this area continues to be developed and prioritised. Below are specific recommendations designed to consolidate and enhance the good practice already evidenced across many centres.

Recommendations and Comments on Paper 1

- Guidance as to time management. A significant number of good candidates are still failing to complete questions; this is generally because too much time is spent on 1, 2 or 3 mark questions.

- Teaching candidates how to respond to the stimulus should be a skill practiced throughout the course. Particularly in avoiding candidates wasting time describing the stimulus. They should be prepared for questions that test their knowledge and understanding of ‘typicality’, the conventions of this set genre and way in which the ‘micro’ elements of film language relate to it.

- Continual emphasis on vocabulary and analytical terms should enable candidates a better opportunity to score full marks.

- Overall the dissection of how meaning is created remains the watchword for this question which requires an analysis of film language.

- Use the stimulus for Question3 wisely. It is always sufficient to facilitate some marks for every candidate but higher band candidates will also draw in knowledge and understanding gained through the study of Film industry in their centres. The business aspect of the course needs to be explicitly taught.

- Candidates should also have a clear grasp of the relationship between genre, industry and audience. The approach to internally assessed work is designed to reinforce knowledge and understanding of this aspect of the specification.

- Candidates can be encouraged to label/annotate any practice pre-production and production work they produce as a way of preparing for annotating work in an examination.

Recommendations and Comments on Paper 2

- Candidates would clearly benefit from the opportunity to analyse closely several key sequences from their chosen focus film with a direct emphasis on ‘how’ and ‘what’ the film communicates.

- Incorporating the teaching and learning of representations of age, gender, culture, class and ethnicity as they occur within the focus film is recommended. There were some fine analyses of how culture and ethnicity, for example, were represented in Yasmin and Bend it like Beckham. Generally, it was really pleasing to note the breadth of study evidenced across centres with many candidates showing a keen awareness of how their film represented different groups of people, their beliefs and how their societies were organised.
Candidates should be encouraged to use appropriate terminology in their work. Many candidates struggled with understanding and using the term ‘mise-en-scène’. Here the use of stills from the film can be very useful as it encourages candidates to consider the ways in which elements of film language combine to create meaning within the frame and would perhaps help to combat the listing of costume and props without any such consideration.

**Recommendations and Comments on Controlled Assessment**

Recommendations for this unit are incorporated in the Principal Moderator’s report (see above).