GCSE
MEDIA STUDIES

8572/C NEA: Creating a Media Product
Report on the Examination

8572
June 2019

Version: 1.0

Overview

This was the first year of assessment for the new specification. There were major changes between the old and new specifications:

- the NEA is now worth 30% of the overall qualification, instead of 60% for the controlled assessment in the previous specification
- the students submit just one project, rather than three
- the project is created in response to one of five AQA-set briefs, which change each year
- the assessed work comprises only a 300-word statement of intent and the final media production
- the assessment criteria are phrased around understanding and using the theoretical framework, with an emphasis on media language and media representation.

In many ways, the new NEA is far more straightforward than the old controlled assessment, which allowed centres to get to grips with most aspects very well. Moderators saw some impressive work, which would suggest that students have been enthusiastic about and enjoyed the production process. Most errors that occurred were due to centre misinterpretations of the NEA requirements.

Three examples of responses for the sample briefs, marked by levels only and with commentaries, had been available on the AQA website since September 2017. Further examples, assigned individual marks with commentaries, were available on the TOLS (Teacher Online Standardisation) system on e-AQA from March 2019, to assist with teacher marking of this component. Guidance documents were published on the Media Studies section of the AQA website, both for teaching and submitting the NEA work. Teachers were also able to access email advice from an assigned NEA adviser. Details of advisers for each centre can be obtained from mediastudies@aqa.org.uk

It is clear that many centres had accessed at least some of the support available, so most work was submitted within the ethos of the new specification. For approximately half of centres this year, all their sampled marks were within tolerance of the AQA standard. Most of those centres whose marks were not within tolerance showed evidence of working hard to apply the marking criteria, so a further quarter of centres had applied the marking criteria consistently but not quite to the right standard.

Some centres, however, did not show the same consistency, usually for one of two reasons: there were two or more teachers and internal standardisation had not been carried out effectively or students had tackled two or more of the five briefs, and different standards had been applied to different briefs. This had an impact on the rank order submitted by these centres. Hopefully the addition of more work to TOLS in the future will help with marking consistently across the different briefs, with work on TOLS exemplifying AQA standards across print, audio, video and e-media.

The vast majority of students were clearly well prepared by the centres, and were able to respond well. The biggest area for improvement in preparation, however, would be in student research into the chosen media format prior to final production work. The use of codes and conventions sometimes gave the sense that students hadn't analysed similar professional products, for example that students tackling brief two hadn't looked at a real local tabloid newspaper to see how the minimum requirements of the brief fitted with the conventions in use in the newspaper.

The statement of intent

The statement of Intent was the area most likely to be over-rewarded by centres in their marking. The highest level students need to write in a detailed, focused and clear manner whilst remaining within the 300-word limit.

The best statements of intent had a tight focus on what is being created and included: how the product will be constructed using specific examples of media language and why these specific decisions have been made, referring to the representations being created, the brief and the target audience. Having read the best statements of intent, the teacher or moderator should have a good idea of what they will see or hear within the product and why.

Some students had used quite a lot of their word count repeating the wording from the brief without explaining how or why outcomes were going to be achieved. Simply stating the number or media format of the brief at the top of the statement is enough to cover this, leaving the rest of the word count to cover the student's specific intentions. Similarly, some students wasted word count writing about their research. The only relevant (brief) reference to research might be to justify why they intend to include particular elements within the product.

Some statements did not take a balanced approach to the two specified aspects of the theoretical framework, media language and media representations – the one that was most often neglected was representations.

Sometimes centres seemed to have rewarded use of terminology or media theory without any relevant context. Students in these instances had concentrated on cramming theoretical concepts into the statement rather than using media terminology to explain their intentions.

Some statements of intent appeared to have been written as evaluations after products had been completed; the statement should be about *intended* uses of elements of the theoretical framework rather than about how they *were* used. The best timing for writing the statement is after all the planning and possibly some of the recording work has been completed, but before any of the post-production work of editing or layout. At this point, students should know exactly what their intentions are and should be able to write in detail about media language and representations.

The briefs

There are five set briefs each year. Those for work to be assessed in 2019 were released on e-AQA on 1st June 2018. In this first assessment year, a handful of centres submitted work for the sample briefs that had been available on the Media Studies section of the AQA website. Centres were informed of their error, but the work was accepted for moderation this year to avoid penalising students for centre error.

New briefs are released on e-AQA on 1st March each year for assessment in June of the following year. Centres must ensure they use the correct set of NEA briefs with each cohort.

The majority of centres appeared to have allowed students a fair degree of autonomy, with some offering two or three of the five briefs, and a small number submitting responses to all five. Others appeared to have offered only one, usually the print advertising or newspaper brief. A handful of submissions offered only one but also followed standard layout patterns across the centre, particularly for the print adverts, giving students very little independence and autonomy at all. This

almost certainly hampered the ability of higher level students to show what they knew about using media language to create representations and engage an audience.

Some students didn't always fulfil the criteria or the minimum requirements of the briefs. This was most often seen in the website and newspaper briefs. The left-hand column of each brief gives *definitive characteristics* that must be met for example, the absolute number of pages to be submitted or the required length of video or audio work. If work is submitted that is over length, only the required quantity should be assessed – e.g. the first 30-seconds of an over-length video on the vlogger website, or only the front page and one *single* page of a newspaper where a front page and double page spread have been submitted. The right-hand column gives *minimum requirements* which must be at least met but which can be exceeded. For example, if there is a requirement in this column for five original images, then a student could equally well include six or seven original images.

Brief One – three one-minute radio trails for a gaming show

This appeared to be the least popular brief. About 14%, or one in seven, of centres submitted work for this brief within their sample. This was, conversely, one of the most successful briefs since most of those who undertook it had a reasonable understanding of audio techniques.

The best examples had excellent use of background sound and voice recording. Vocals had been recorded in a quiet environment and audio had been mixed to allow an appropriate balance between music, effects and spoken word. Performers presented with an appropriate level of enthusiasm and editing demonstrated understanding of both the conventions of radio trails and the specifics of the brief. The general tone of presentation was fully appropriate for the target audience. The trails were often very well scripted and showed that time had been taken to research and plan.

A few examples were heard which did not resemble radio trails, but were instead a series of straightforward minute-long excerpts from a radio show about gaming. These did not meet the brief and so received low marks for Production: Effectiveness. Some of the speaking in weaker productions was monotone and therefore did not convey adequate representation of the individuals involved in the gaming show. One or two centres did not submit work in an appropriate audio format (e.g. aiff, mp3, wav). Work should be exported to a mainstream format rather than format-specific projects such as GarageBand, and checked before submission.

Brief Two – front page and one other page for a local tabloid newspaper

This was the second most popular brief with just over half of all centres submitting newspaper work. This brief saw perhaps the most inconsistent quality of outcome, partly because students across the ability range submitted work, but also partly because research into the conventions of the media form seemed to be the most limited. Submissions therefore varied from pages which looked almost like real newspaper pages to A4 sheets lacking images or columns ot text.

The best newspaper submissions used relevant conventions very well: a prominent masthead, a strong emphasis on image over text (on the front page at least), stories with a regional bias and other typical conventions such as adverts for small regional businesses. There was also an understanding of the basics of newspaper design – five-column structure, multiple stories on a page, the use of captions, standfirsts and bylines. The best newspapers fully engaged with the notion of community, and both text and pictures added to representations that created a real sense of the locale. Some students wrote very engaging copy, clearly aimed at the target audience.

In some cases the main images, which are a key draw for a regional tabloid, lacked impact due to poor composition, content or contrast. This affected marks for language or representation. Quite a number of submissions failed to meet the minimum requirements, such as including at least four images on the inside page.

Many students, or whole centres, had a misunderstanding of 'hard news' and 'background feature'. The front page story should have been a serious news article of key importance in the local area, with some obvious news values being deployed. The inside page should have contained a related feature offering a wider take on the main issue from the front page, but many students provided a direct continuation of the front page story, or stories that were unrelated. Neither of these could be said to meet the requirements of the brief.

The guidance for submission states that print products should be created in the correct proportions for the media format. This is rarely the same proportions as A4 or A3 paper. It was expected that students would create their work using the correct proportions and then print out onto A3 or A4, perhaps trimming the work as appropriate or delineating the intended edges of the pages. Almost none had done this, making it hard to say they had fully used appropriate conventions.

Brief Three – three print adverts for youth volunteers

This was the most popular brief, with almost two-thirds of centres submitting work for this brief within their sample. On the whole this was done well.

There was some fantastic use of a well-designed house style to create a sense of campaign, along with the use of very good original images that showed a strong understanding of voluntary work and of representation. In these cases the same typeface, font-size and colour palette was used for the copy and slogan, with slight variations in the text itself across each advert to reflect the different narrative situations presented in the dominant images. The dominant and secondary images or composite images very obviously illustrated the narrative and purpose outlined in the copy. Composition and the use of mise-en-scène was sometimes very good indeed.

Less successful submissions often did not meet the brief fully. For example, some students only used one image per advert, and quite a few did not have contrasting examples of voluntary work. Some students misunderstood voluntary work and based their adverts on after-school, club-based activities or charity appeals like giving blood. Some submissions did not follow the conventions of magazine/newspaper advertising, with centres submitting work as posters rather than magazine adverts; there is a slight difference between the two forms and it seemed that there was a slight misreading of the brief in these cases. There were some students who had not really considered the teenage target audience, particularly with over-wordy copy or images of indistinct figures. There seemed to be a high number of students who photographed their subjects from the back, not a particularly effective way of engaging the audience.

The brief called for a minimum of five original images. A surprising number of students stuck to this *minimum* number, even though their chosen house style would have benefited from using six images, two per advert. A high number of entries also contained two equally-sized images, which, as well as not being a usual convention in advertising, also did not meet the brief – this required a dominant image in each advert portraying a narrative situation. The 'other' images could have been smaller insert images highlighting an impact of the campaign, or could have formed part of a composite image. As with newspapers, students would have benefited from looking at professional

adverts that used the minimum requirements within their codes and conventions, to see what was both possible and appropriate.

Brief Four – homepage and one linked page for a vlogger's website (including 30 seconds of video about a place or feature of interest)

Almost a third of centres submitted work for this brief within their sample. While not as consistent as the print advert responses, when the vloggers' websites were good, they were really enjoyable.

The most engaged students bought into the idea of presenting a vlogger's persona as a brand and offering an insight into an aspect of their world. This enabled them to demonstrate deliberate representations of the vlogger on the homepage, using both text and photographs. Some also made effective use of extra video on the homepage, which was not a requirement of the brief – the required video element was part of the linked page - but did add to the vlogger's representation. The best sites had a logical link to the additional "review" page. In some cases the vloggers were focused on travel or regional identity but in others the "review" was presented as just one facet of the vlogger's life, communicated through some effective use of blogging layouts and imagery.

The best linked pages usually put the required 30 second video front and centre with supporting text and images. Some very slick videos were seen, in a range of remarkable locations, although those students who had opted for a slideshow format often achieved some excellent outcomes as well. It should be noted that the majority of professional vloggers present their work in landscape, not portrait, format as this best fills the available space on sites like YouTube.

There were a number of students who misunderstood the focus of the website and the moving image clip, presenting linked pages which had nothing to do with the local area. They may, for example, have written and vlogged about beauty, completely ignoring the sense of location. Although the resulting videos might have helped on the main page as part of the representation of the vlogger, they did not meet the needs of the linked page. In some cases, videos were just single shots of a particular location without any context or review, and quite a few students submitted videos which did not include the voiceover, a minimum requirement. Several students included videos which were far longer than the required 30 seconds. In these instances only the first 30 seconds were assessed, with students often failing to include the minimum requirements within this section.

There were several issues over the required format for submission, but the requirements have changed for next year. The new guidelines for submission are available on the Media Studies pages of the AQA website.

Brief Five – two-minute sequence from a TV sci-fi drama

Work for this brief was submitted by almost a quarter of centres. This tended to be tackled as one of a range of briefs offered by the centre, and was often undertaken by students who really knew what they were doing, so the quality of these submissions tended to be very high.

The most successful students produced videos which were well-shot, effectively acted, impressively edited and appropriate in terms of narrative and casting. Some genuinely tense sequences were produced which relied on well-considered use of location and soundtrack. Weaker pieces tended to use over-long takes, had little editing for meaning, were shot in low light or lacked narrative cohesion.

A number of sequences sampled had been shot on mobile phones. While the image quality can often be good, the sound quality is more often poor, and audio carries some of the intended representations and meanings. If a mobile phone is being used and on-location sound is needed, students could also use a digital audio recorder. Some students shot footage in portrait rather than landscape mode, therefore not meeting the basic conventions of the media form.

Although some sequences demonstrated excellent filming techniques, they did not fully explore the genre stated within the brief. This could have been communicated through narrative, dialogue, captions or costumes. In a few cases, there was some misunderstanding of the task, with students creating sci-fi trailers.

Presentation of work for moderation

Most centres presented their paper-based work (the Candidate Record Forms, any centre mark sheets, statements of intent and any print production work or website print outs) on A4 sheets, held together for each student with treasury tags. This was straightforward and effective.

Digital production files – audio, e-media and video work – were presented on USB memory sticks, which required encryption before submission. The majority of centres effectively completed the new encryption procedures, but the guidelines had been sent to centres relatively late in the NEA process, so it was no surprise that not all centres this year followed this guidance. Most centres clearly labelled the files and folders using student numbers and surnames.

There were a few digital products presented in formats that were difficult or impossible for moderators to access. Centres should check the NEA submission guidelines to ensure they are submitting work in the correct formats.

Candidate Record Forms

Although most centres submitted fully completed Candidate Record Forms (CRFs), there were a small number where these contained limited comments or did not include information about non-assessed participants.

Although group work is not permitted, students can use other non-assessed students as 'cast/models' and 'crew'. These **must** be noted on the CRF, along with comments about how they were directed by the student. Failure to do so places a cap on the mark for Production: Effectiveness at the top of level 2 (8 out of 20 marks). About half of centres failed to complete these properly in this first year. Centres must ensure that these important documents are fully completed in future.

If printed out as blanks, the space on the 2019 CRFs to provide comments was limited, so many centres supplemented them with their own assessment forms, or with annotations on the back of the printed work. This made their marking decisions really clear and was thus very helpful. A few centres had written far too much about each assessment criterion, which must have added to an already heavy workload. Two to three lines for each of the four assessment areas, exemplifying key aspects, are enough. However, some centres did not go into enough detail, with some comments just copied from the assessment criteria without context.

Marking of the production

As a moderation team, we found it most helpful to start with the Effectiveness mark, before moving on to the marks for Language and Representation. There was a principle of not penalising students twice for the same errors, or rewarding them twice for the same aspects of success. Starting with Effectiveness helped with this principle.

- **Effectiveness for an audience**

The major aspects being rewarded here are mode of address used to engage the target audience, using the codes and conventions of the genre and meeting the requirements of the brief.

Some very effective pieces were seen where students had clearly considered both the target audience outlined in the brief and the definitive and minimum requirements. They therefore submitted the correct number or length of products, which were aimed at the specific audience and contained all the required elements in the brief. However, a number of centres placed students in level 4 or 5 despite pieces not being aimed at the target audience, not fulfilling the main requirements of the brief, or not meeting the minimum requirements. It is suggested that centres use a checklist approach in order to confirm that the pieces have met both the definitive and minimum requirements in order to avoid over-generous marking.

Any intentional diversions from accepted codes and conventions of a given format should be explained in the statement of intent; if this is not done, such diversions suggest a misunderstanding of professional practice and standards. This mark is capped at level two (maximum 8) if students have used any found images, sounds or footage (apart from music), or have not listed their non-assessed participants on the CRF.

- **Media Language**

The main aspects being rewarded here are: the specific selection of elements of media language to convey meaning, creating effective narratives and deliberate control of connotations.

The quality of media language varied depending, in part, on how much research students appeared to have done into their chosen media format, and how best to convey meaning within the format's conventions. Some pieces demonstrated an exceptional level of verisimilitude, especially responses to the TV sci-fi and newspaper briefs. In general, marking was accurate for this section, although some centres were very generous, particularly where the poor quality of images or sound hampered the communication of meaning.

- **Media Representations**

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

Some students had clearly thought very carefully about how to represent their subjects through a combination of verbal and non-verbal codes, with a very clear appreciation of stereotype or countertype. The annotations provided by some centres suggested that they were struggling to award high marks to students who had not subverted stereotypes. There is no necessity to counter

stereotypes even at the highest level. The use of deliberately constructed but straightforward stereotypes can be rewarded in the highest bands.

However, some students did not create clear representions. This was particularly evident in print projects where the photographs did not include a clear representation of the character at the centre of the narrative. In general, students seemed to have found consideration of representation more challenging than media language, which reflected the lack of detail over this aspect seen in statements of intent.

Best practice

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

In the best submissions, moderators saw:

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

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.

Use of statistics

Statistics used in this report may be taken from incomplete processing data. However, this data still gives a true account on how students have performed for each question.