



GCSE

Media Studies

8572/2

Report on the examination

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Overview

Many students performed very well in this examination, demonstrating proficiency in the analysis of media products, knowledge and understanding of the theoretical framework and also in the evaluation of those statements that characterise the 20-mark questions. This is a great testimony to the excellent teaching and learning that goes on in GCSE media studies.

Students were able to use the terms and concepts of media studies confidently and appropriately whilst developing their ideas with support from convincing evidence and rational arguments. They also responded well to the stimulus material provided by the extract from *An Unearthly Child* and the inside pages of the *Daily Mirror*.

None of this is to say that the Media Two paper is anything other than a serious and demanding challenge. It tests the most demanding of the assessment objectives in the specification; those that deal with understanding of the theoretical framework and the formation of judgements and conclusions.

It must be acknowledged that this year's exam was particularly tough. Some of the questions dealt with areas of the specification that have not featured prominently in past recent series of the exam and others invited students to make association between areas of the theoretical framework that may not have been linked in quite the same way as in previous exams. Of course, the most able and best prepared students responded magnificently to this challenge, producing answers that clearly relished the opportunity to be stretched as well as challenged. On the other hand, there were those that found marks rather more difficult to come by, perhaps because the questions did not fulfil expectations in terms of topic or focus. It was certainly the case that more answers than usual addressed questions that their authors *hoped* would feature rather than those that *actually did* feature in the exam. Also, there was a worrying increase in the number of questions that were not attempted, including 1.3% of the entry for which not a single question in the entire paper was attempted.

Examiners always mark positively, and they are certainly respectful of students' rights to pursue their own distinctive, or even idiosyncratic, agendas in response to the question. However, there is only so much scope for leeway in the case of an answer that focuses exclusively on, say, gender in response to a question about class and ethnicity. The mark schemes for high tariff questions include sections on deciding on a level. These sections provide guidance for examiners on how to mark answers that misconstrue a question or that deal only partially with the requirements of the question. It may be helpful to draw these examiner guidelines to the attention of students, just to reinforce the importance of focusing very carefully on the exact wording of the question and the consequences of not doing so.

Having risen in each of the last two summers, the mean mark in 8572/2 fell this year from 42 to about 36. Teachers should be reassured, though, that this does not mean that fewer students achieved higher grades in this paper or across the subject as a whole. In every series of the examination, the grade boundaries for each component are adjusted to take into account the relative ease or difficulty in obtaining marks in comparison to previous years.

Section A

Q1.1 (1 mark)

Briefly define the term 'indirect address'

The term 'direct address' has been used in previous exams without causing any problems, but it seems that fewer students are familiar with 'indirect address', only one in four answers securing the one mark available. Many answers tried to invert a definition of indirect by saying, for example, 'This is when characters talk to each without looking at each other'. Although attempted definitions like this were in the right general territory, they missed the key point, i.e. that indirect address is contained within the 'world of the characters' (the diegesis) so that it is *the audience* rather than other characters that is not addressed directly.

Mean mark approximately 0.3.

(note: all marks given here are approximations because some marked scripts remain unprocessed at the time of writing)

Q1.2 (1 mark)

Give **one** example of indirect address in the extract.

Any example of communication between characters in the extract was acceptable here, so many students gained a mark for a valid example although their definition was inaccurate.

Mean mark approximately 0.6

Q1.3 (8 marks)

How are the following codes and conventions used to create meanings in the extract?

- diegetic sound (such as dialogue)
- non-diegetic sound

This was a well-answered question with a mean mark of approximately 4. Marks in Level 4 (7-8 marks) were achieved by around 15% of responses and at Level 3+ by around 45% of responses. It appears that the idea of diegesis and hence the meaning of these two terms is familiar to a clear majority of students. The best answers were able to describe non-diegetic sounds in the extract (moody, atmospheric, quickening beat, etc) and attribute meanings (mysterious, associated with SF genre, unsettling, etc). With the help of the handhold in the question ('such as dialogue'), these answers were able to identify diegetic sounds as those perceived by the characters in the story, describe their location in the extract and attribute meanings to them, whether very specific such as 'This meant that Susan knew about decimal currency' or more general 'Moving the plot along', 'Revealing Susan's character'.

The best answers were very specific about positions in the extract ('In the flashbacks', 'When Ian and Barbara were talking in the car') as well as very clear about the distinction between the two uses of sound in the question.

Some common mistakes were:

- Recognising diegetic and non-diegetic sound, but getting them the wrong way round

- Misidentifying sound effects (car engine, creaking door) as non-diegetic
- Losing question focus by straying into discussion of e.g. camera use, mis-en-scène' lighting
- Dealing with the question too generally, e.g. 'Both types of sound increased tension'.

Q1.4 (12 marks)

'Television dramas in the 1960s did not challenge traditional views of gender.'

How far does an analysis of the extract show this to be true?

Another well-answered question demonstrating that students enjoy writing about gender and have a very good understanding of the television CSPs. The distribution of marks was very similar to that in Q1.3, with around 44% achieving L3 and above and 14% achieving L4. The mean mark was approximately 6.

Many answers demonstrated the sort of detailed, competent analytical skills that could only come from classroom practice and a strong familiarity with the media studies issues raised by the CSP. It is always important to set analysis in context and many students responded to the cue in the question by setting out just what those 'traditional views of gender' were, before going on to discuss how they may or may not have been challenged by 1960s TV drama.

Although some answers offered very firm pro or anti arguments with respect to the statement, many took nuanced views, recognising that all three characters exhibited evidence that could be used on either side of the example. Susan, for example is frighteningly prescient, intelligent and challenging to authority, but also submissive and apologetic when demurring to Ian. Many answers utilised Propp's character types in their analyses, but this approach was only really successful when convincing links were made to 'traditional views of gender'.

Some common mistakes were:

- Straying beyond the extract, for example with references to Doctor Who himself
- Lengthy digressions on the topic of gender in *His Dark Materials*
- Simple descriptions and or assertions unsupported by evidence from the extract
- Writing about gender or (less frequently) age representations with limited or no acknowledgement of the statement's focus
- Neglecting the 'audience interpretations' aspect of the question.

Q2 (20 marks)

'Audience interpretations of television dramas are always affected by the class and ethnicity of the characters.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

Answer with reference to:

- *Doctor Who*, '*An Unearthly Child*' (1963) and *His Dark Materials*, '*The City of Magpies*' (2020) (Close Study Products)
- the social and historical contexts of these products.

Clearly, students were less familiar with the territory explored in this question than with the topics and issues raised by previous A2 questions. The mean mark fell from approximately 11 in 2024 to approximately 8 in 2025, while the percentage of answers scoring marks in Level 3 and above fell from 57% to around 44%.

Despite this, there were still excellent responses to this question that were able to deal effectively with class and ethnicity and audience interpretation in relation to the two CSPs and their contexts. Of the two areas of representation, ethnicity was more fully grasped than class. Nearly all the answers that engaged seriously with the statement were able to offer at least a basic comparison between the absence of diversity in *An Unearthly Child* and the proactive approach of HDM (evident in *City of Magpies*) including colour blind casting.

Class is less well understood and simplistic assertions abounded such as, 'The entire cast of *An Unearthly Child* is upper class' or 'Class is not present in *City of Magpies*'. Really good answers recognised the representation of class antagonisms in the two CSP's, for example between the middle-class teachers and the Doctor (aloof, patrician, condescending and superior) in AUC. In HDM similar elitist attributes are found in the Magisterium and Mrs Coulter's character, but in this case, they are clearly identified as the villains. Will and Lyra, middle class dropouts, are the heroes.

Section B

Q3 (2 marks)

Newspapers often show political bias.

Give **two** different examples of how newspapers show political bias.

Most responses showed at least some familiarity with 'bias' as a concept, but not all were able to convert this into full marks. The mean mark was just under one mark with around 28% scoring 2 marks and 33% scoring 1 mark. Many examples of acceptable (and non-acceptable) answers are to be found in the Mark Scheme, so I won't reiterate them here.

There were several reasons for low marks:

- Vagueness ('colours', 'pictures', 'biased words')
- Neglecting to acknowledge that the question was about *pollical* bias ('Saying bad things about people you don't like')
- Examples that are too similar ('The Times is right-leaning', 'The Times supports the Conservatives')

Q4 (20 marks)

'Newspapers are constructed to make sure the audience agrees with the newspaper's preferred reading.'

How far does an analysis of the inside pages of the *Daily Mirror* (Close Study Product) (**Figure 1**) show this statement to be true?

As with Q1.3 and 1.4, responses to Q4 showed that the analysis of media products is a real area of strength for most GCSE media students. The majority had no difficulty in dealing with the technical terms in the question ('construction', 'preferred reading') and were able to recognise many convincing examples of evidence in the Daily Mirror's story to support the view that the paper was pursuing its own agenda.

In common with the television CSPs of Section A, the responses here showed impressive background knowledge of the newspaper CSPs, providing useful contextual information about ownership, readership and political orientation. The best answers drew on contrasting elements of construction including typography, anchorage, the selection of images and the phraseology used in the copy. This sort of wide spectrum of approach saw around 41% of answers attain Level 3 or above with 11% at level 4. This was the best performance in the 20 mark questions with a mean mark of approximately 9. It was also good to see that marks were well distributed across the whole range from 0-20 showing that the question performed well in discriminating between levels of ability.

Some common mistakes in answering this question were:

- Focusing on the targeting of a specific audience rather than preferred reading
- Too much descriptive detail at the expense of analysis
- Unfamiliarity with the CSP and/or misinterpretation of the inside page story.

Q5 (20 marks)

'Media products such as newspapers must change how they are funded if they are to survive.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

The generally solid performance in the preceding newspaper question was not repeated in this synoptic question. The mean mark here was approximately 7 with around 29% achieving Level 3 or above. Also, approximately 8% of students did not attempt this question.

Often, answers started quite promisingly by setting out the reasons why print sales of newspapers have declined dramatically in the face of digital technology. Some were able to develop this by contrasting the response of The Times with its paywall-based approach and integration with other media such as Times Radio, to that of the Mirror with its freely available Mirror Online as well as range of subscription offers for the digital and print versions of the paper.

Relatively few answers demonstrated much familiarity with the funding of newspapers or, in those that broadened the discussion, other media products. Advertising was infrequently mentioned and only a very small number discussed the fundamental threat to news organisations presented by the widespread refusal of social media platforms to pay for news content.

Those answers that included synoptic content usually obtained the highest marks, often making valid references to, for example, Black Widow, the television licence fee, television streaming services, Kiss and Blackpink. Some were able to meet the synopticity requirement by exploring other areas of the theoretical framework rather than other CSP's; for example,

by discussing the political context of the media or regulation with reference to the statement in the question.

Some common mistakes in answering this question included:

- Confusion over funding, for example the assertion that newspapers are paid for by the government
- No attempt to include synoptic content
- Little or no recognition that newspapers *have* changed how they are funded. Answers often suggested alternative methods of funding that have been in place for many years.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results Statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.